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This National Boating Education Standard, as overseen by the National Boating Standards Panel (BSP), is the product of voluntary consensus of representatives of federal and state government, industry, nonprofit organizations, and public sectors. It is intended as a guide to aid the boating community in the design and implementation of boating courses and boater education.

BSP will review this standard at least every five years, at which time it may be reaffirmed, revised, or withdrawn. BSP welcomes written comments on the Standard during open public comment periods using the [EZ-BSP](#) tool. Requests for interpretation may be submitted at any time via standardspanel@nasbla.org.

American National Standard

ANSI/NASBLA 1200-2026 K-12 Personal Flotation Device (PFD) Education Standard



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The list above represents the Panel membership at the time the standard drafting process began in 2023.

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The list above represents the Panel membership at the time the draft standard was presented for consensus ballot in 2024.

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The list above represents the workgroup of subject matter experts charged by the Panel with developing the content of the Standard.

NOTE: Membership on a panel or committee shall not in and of itself constitute an endorsement of the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) or any document developed by the panel or committee on which the member serves.

This standard was developed under procedures of essential requirements for the American National Standards Institute. The Panel that approved the standard was balanced based on interest categories to ensure that individuals representing those with material interests in the standard had an opportunity to participate.

This standard, which is the result of extended and careful consideration of available knowledge and experience on the subject, is intended to provide minimum performance requirements.

National Boating Standards Panel meetings are open to the public. All contact regarding standards activity, interpretations, or meeting attendance should be directed to NASBLA BSP staff at standardspanel@nasbla.org.

REQUEST FOR INTERPRETATIONS

Upon written request, the National Boating Standards Panel (BSP) will render an interpretation of any requirement of the standard. The request for interpretation should be clear and unambiguous. Requests should be presented to the BSP in a manner in which they may be answered in a “yes” or “no” fashion.

The Panel reserves the right to reconsider any interpretation when or if additional information which might affect it becomes available to the BSP. Persons aggrieved by an interpretation may appeal to the Panel for reinterpretation.

REQUEST FOR APPEALS

Any directly and materially affected interest who believe they have been or will be adversely affected by a Standard, or by the lack thereof, shall have the right to appeal substantive or procedural actions or inactions of the National Boating Standards Panel per Part XII of the Panel Rules (latest version) posted at www.nasbla.org under Advocacy > National Boating Standards Panel. As stated in the Rules, prior to the filing of a formal appeal, communication of the alleged actions or inactions, with mutual effort to informally resolve the dissatisfaction, shall be attempted and documented.

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FOREWORD

This Standard defines general, entry-level knowledge developed for a Kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) audience about the importance of Personal Flotation Device (PFD) use in, on, or around water. It has been prepared to provide guidance on the application of PFDs for persons engaged in water-related activities. PFDs selected and maintained according to this Standard should give a reasonable assurance of safety from drowning to a person who is immersed in water.

This consensus-based standard is designed to support educators and raise the overall level of knowledge, skills, and competencies of the K-12 audience. It is recommended that this Standard be used in conjunction with in-water activities outlined in the accompanying Technical Report.

Although there are notable and important technical differences between "personal flotation devices" (PFD) and "life jackets," for the purposes of this document, the general term PFD will be used for simplicity to describe flotation devices. When it is essential to identify the important technical differences between the devices, the correct technical terms will be used.

This Standard addresses:

- How a PFD Works
- Selection of a PFD
- Use of a PFD
- Attitudes, Values, and Risk Mitigation

REFERENCES

The following is a listing of references providing content to supplement this Standard. Per ANSI Essential Requirements, identification of products or services is not an endorsement of those products or services or their suppliers.

Source: *Essential eligibility criteria*. ACA. (2023, May 18). <https://americancanoe.org/eec/>.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, January 2). *Drowning facts*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/facts/index.html>.

Source: World Health Organization. (2023). *Drowning*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/drowning>.

Source: World Health Organization. (2017). *Preventing drowning: an implementation guide*. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/preventing-drowning-an-implementation-guide>.

Source: *NWSAP*. Water Safety USA. (n.d.). <https://www.watersafetyusa.org/nwsap.html>.

Source: Stallman R.K., Moran K., Quan L., & Langendorfer S. (2017). From swimming skill to water competence: Towards a more inclusive drowning prevention future. *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education*, 10(2) Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.25035/ijare.10.02.03>.

Source: Moran K. (2019) Can you float? Part 2 - Perceptions and practice of lifejacket use among young adults. *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education*, 11(3) Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.25035/ijare.11.03.04>.

Source: Cox K.L., Bhaumik S., Gupta M., & Jagnoor J. (2022). Facilitators and barriers of life jacket use for drowning prevention: Qualitative evidence synthesis. *Journal of Safety Research*, Feb (80), 135-147. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsr.2021.11.01> Source: Bennett, E., Cummings, P., Quan, L., & Lewis, F. M. (1999). Evaluation of a drowning prevention campaign in King County, Washington. *Injury Prevention*, 5(2), 109–113. <https://doi.org/10.1136/ip.5.2.109>

Source: Wallis, B. A., Watt, K., Franklin, R. C., Taylor, M., Nixon, J. W., & Kimble, R. M. (2014). Interventions associated with drowning prevention in children and adolescents: Systematic literature review. *Injury Prevention*, 21(3), 195–204. <https://doi.org/10.1136/injuryprev-2014-041216>.

Source: Ramos, W., Beale, A., Chambers, P., Dalke, S., Fielding, R., Kublick, L., Langendorfer, S., Lees, T., Quan, L., & Wernicki, P. (2015). Primary and secondary drowning interventions: The American Red Cross Circle of Drowning Prevention and Chain of Drowning Survival. *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.25035/ijare.09.01.08>.

Source: Quan, L. (2013). Personal flotation devices. *Drowning*, 225–229. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-04253-9_33.

Source: Quan L, & Gilchrist J The epidemiology and prevention of drowning. Boulton M.L., & Wallace R.B.(Eds.), [publicationyear2]

Maxcy-Rosenau-Last Public Health & Preventive Medicine, 16e. McGraw Hill. <https://accessmedicine.mhmedical.com/content.aspx?bookid=3078§ionid=257531213>.

Source: Quan, L., Bennett, E., Cummings, P., Trusty, M. N., & Treser, C. D. (1998). Are life vests worn? A multiregional observational study of personal flotation device use in small boats. *Injury Prevention*, 4(3), 203–205. <https://doi.org/10.1136/ip.4.3.203>.

Source: Stempski, S., Schiff, M., Bennett, E., & Quan, L. (2014). A case–control study of boat-related injuries and fatalities in Washington State. *Injury Prevention*, 20(4), 232–237. <https://doi.org/10.1136/injuryprev-2013-041022>.

Source: McKnight, A. J., Becker, W. W., Pettit, A. J., & McKnight, A. S. (2007). Human error in recreational boating. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 39(2), 398–405. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aap.2006.09.004> Source: Moran, K., Quan, L., Franklin, R., & Bennett, E. (2011). Where the evidence and expert opinion meet: A review of open-water recreational

safety messages. *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education*, 5(3).
<https://doi.org/10.25035/ijare.05.03.05>.

Source: Outdoor Foundation. (2019). https://americancanoe.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/sei-education_al_resources/2019_special_report_on_paddl.pdf.

DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this document, the following definitions apply. Definitions may be the product of subject matter expertise of the National Boating Standards Panel and the K-12 PFD Education Workgroup, unless otherwise noted. All definitions implemented from outside sources will be designated.

ULSE INC. granted NASBLA permission to incorporate the following terms and definitions in this K-12 PFD Education Standard: buoyancy aid, hybrid PFD, life jacket, and wearable PFD. The definitions for these terms are set forth in UL 12402-5. The permission granted is exclusively for the educational purpose of this Standard. Individuals or groups seeking to use the UL 12402-5 definition for their own purposes should seek separate permission from ULSE INC.

- **Active Supervision** - An adult or trained personnel within arm's length of infants, toddlers, and children who lack water competency whenever they are in or near water, providing "touch supervision." Flotation devices are NOT a substitute for active and effective supervision.
Source: Supervision. NDPA. (2023b, November 20). <https://ndpa.org/supervision/>.
- **Additional Layers of Protection** – Layers of protection, in addition to PFDs, include water competency, emergency preparation, learning to swim, water safety education, boating safety courses, preventing unauthorized entry to water, throwable devices, learning CPR and rescue techniques, and having an emergency plan.
Source: Layers of protection. NDPA. (2023, December 6). <https://ndpa.org/layers/>.
- **Adjustment Point** – A system, device, or process that allows for modifications or fine-tuning to be made to achieve the desired fit and performance.
- **Boat (n)** – A small vessel for travel on water; includes every description of watercraft used or capable of being used as a means of transportation on water by oars, sails, or an engine. This includes but is not limited to power boats, sailboats, personal watercraft (PWCs), and paddlecraft.
- **Boat (v)** – To place in or bring into a boat, to go by boat.
- **Buoyancy** - Buoyancy is the upward force exerted on anything in the water that is less dense than the water it displaces. It is the ability or tendency to float in the water or another fluid.
- **Buoyancy Aid** - A subset of Personal Flotation Devices (PFD) that, when worn correctly, will provide support without significant face-up turning ability, except for infant devices, and therefore may require action by the user to position the face clear of the water. A buoyancy aid provides suitable performance in sheltered waters, and at higher levels of support, may be suitable for use in other waters.

Source: UL. Personal Flotation Devices – Part 5: Buoyancy Aids (Level 50) – Safety Requirements (2023).

- **Designated Swim Areas** - Areas in natural waters designed and operated for swimming and playing.
Source: NWSAP. Water Safety USA. (n.d.). <https://www.watersafetyusa.org/nwsap.html>.
- **Drowning (fatal and non-fatal)** - Drowning is the process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion or immersion in liquid. Drowning happens when a person's nose and mouth are under water for too long, making it impossible to breathe. Drowning is not always fatal. Fatal drowning happens when the drowning results in death. Nonfatal drowning happens when a person survives a drowning incident. Nonfatal drowning has a range of outcomes or results, from no injuries to very serious injuries such as brain damage or permanent disability.
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Drowning facts. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/data-research/facts/index.html>.
- **Fit Test** – The multi-step process used to determine if a PFD is the proper size and fit for the intended wearer.
- **Hybrid PFD** – The buoyant material is a combination of inherent and inflatable.
Source: UL. Personal Flotation Devices – Part 5: Buoyancy Aids (Level 50) – Safety Requirements (2023).
- **Inflatable PFD** - The buoyant material is a gas, supplied by the user (mouth inflation), or compressed gas (usually CO₂). The gas “inflates” a bladder and provides the buoyant force required to support a user in the water.
- **Inherently Buoyant PFD** - Refers to a type of buoyant material (cork, balsa, kapok, or foam) used in PFDs and means that the material (and the device) is permanently less dense than water, so no transformation of the device is required to support a user in the water.
- **Life Jacket** – A subset of Personal Flotation Devices (PFD) that, when worn correctly, will maintain the user in a face-up flotation position, without additional action, with various levels of performance suitable for open waters. A life jacket has a buoyancy distribution sufficient to turn most users wearing swimming attire to a position where the mouth is clear of water even when exhausted.
Source: UL. Personal Flotation Devices – Part 5: Buoyancy Aids (Level 50) – Safety Requirements (2023).
- **Natural Water** – Body of untreated water sourced through the hydrologic cycle (rainfall, snowmelt, runoff, springs, etc.) and bounded primarily by geologic features rather than manufactured structures. Includes natural springs, cenotes, streams, rivers, lakes, oceans, and flooded areas as well as engineered enclosures such as canals, ponds, reservoirs, and quarries. Does not include waters in manufactured containers such as buckets, barrels, water troughs, swimming pools, spas, or bathtubs.
Source: NWSAP. Water Safety USA. (n.d.). <https://www.watersafetyusa.org/nwsap.html>.
- **Open Water** - An unobstructed expanse in a large body of natural water, such as lakes, rivers, or ocean.
Source: NWSAP. Water Safety USA. (n.d.). <https://www.watersafetyusa.org/nwsap.html>.
- **Serviceable Condition** – PFDs are free of defects, such as missing or waterlogged flotation material or broken zippers, buckles, or straps. Fabric must be without rips, holes,

or weather damage and fabric seams tight. Weak, torn, or threadbare PFDs (becoming thin and weak from weather or sun exposure) should be destroyed and replaced. Special attention should be given to inflatable devices, which should be inspected and maintained routinely per manufacturer recommendations.

Source: § 175.23 Serviceable condition., 33 C.F.R. § 175.23.

- **U.S. Coast Guard** - The maritime security, safety, search and rescue, and law enforcement service branch of the United States Armed Forces and one of the country's eight uniformed services. The service is a maritime, military, multi-mission service unique among the United States military branches for having a maritime law enforcement mission with jurisdiction in both domestic and international waters and a federal regulatory agency mission as part of its duties.
- **U.S. Coast Guard Approved PFD** - A device approved by the U.S. Coast Guard or its authorized agencies to assist its wearer to stay afloat and face up in water. May be inherently buoyant, inflatable, or a hybrid of the two.
Source: NWSAP. Water Safety USA. (n.d.). <https://www.watersafetyusa.org/nwsap.html>.
- **Water Competency** - Being able to anticipate, avoid, and survive common drowning situations, as well as being able to recognize and provide assistance to those in need. Includes water safety awareness, basic swimming skills, and helping others.
Source: NWSAP. Water Safety USA. (n.d.). <https://www.watersafetyusa.org/nwsap.html>.
- **Wearable PFD** – Garment or device which, when correctly worn and used in water, will provide the user with a specific amount of buoyancy which will increase the likelihood of survival.
Source: UL. Personal Flotation Devices – Part 5: Buoyancy Aids (Level 50) – Safety Requirements (2023).

Scope

This K-12 Standard establishes the essential knowledge to properly understand, select, fit, and use wearable PFDs to mitigate risk factors and prevent drowning.

PFD references that are applicable to boats or boating are adopted by reference from the ANSI/NASBLA 100-2022 Basic Boating Knowledge – Core Standard or the latest equivalent version.

All courses should be delivered in a safe environment. The use of any PFD does not replace the need for active supervision.

For the purpose of this Standard, the term PFD is used. There are notable industry-based differences between PFDs, life jackets, and buoyancy aids.

1.0 How a PFD Works

1.1 Describe the concept of buoyancy.

- 1.2 Describe PFD features that affect buoyancy (styles, sizes, and flotation materials).
- 1.3 Describe how a PFD works.
- 1.4 Describe how the design impacts buoyancy and performance.
- 1.5 Explain what turning ability means and apply that concept to PFDs.
- 1.6 Explain how some PFDs are designed for certain activities (such as towed water sports or personal watercraft operation).
- 1.7 Describe and demonstrate how the PFD's adjustment points enhance the fit of the PFD for different body shapes.
- 1.8 Explain how the design of a PFD may change the ability to use traditional swimming strokes.
- 1.9 Demonstrate the in-water performance of various styles of PFDs. 1.10 Explain the benefits of wearing a PFD while signaling for help. Demonstrate the universal sign for help.

2.0 Selection of a PFD

- 2.1 Describe how to determine if the PFD is U.S. Coast Guard approved.
- 2.2 Describe different styles of PFDs.
- 2.3 Explain how PFDs are designed in different ways for the performance and intended activity.
- 2.4 Explain how to select the appropriate PFD features for the relevant activity and location by reading the label on the PFD and placard(s) provided with the PFD at the Point of Sale, and the owner's manual, if available.
- 2.5 Explain that there are local, state, and federal requirements and resources for PFD wear.

3.0 Use of a PFD

- 3.1 Describe how to correctly fit a PFD for a person to wear. Considerations include:
 - 3.1.1 Check the size on the label.
 - 3.1.2 Check the label to ensure the PFD is approved for the intended activity or situational use.
 - 3.1.3 Try on the PFD.
 - 3.1.3.1 Conduct a fit test on land.
 - 3.1.3.2 Demonstrate a fit test in water.
- 3.2 Demonstrate how to inspect a PFD for optimal performance, including:
 - 3.2.1 All zippers and/or buckles on the PFD fasten and work properly (in serviceable condition).

4.0 Attitudes, Values, and Risk Mitigation

- 4.1 Identify common risk factors when in, on, or around water.
- 4.2 Explain how the water environment impacts safety.
- 4.3 Establish the need for and methods of conducting a risk assessment.
- 4.4 Describe factors, other than swimming ability, that should be considered when in, on, or around water, including:
 - 4.4.1 Clothing
 - 4.4.2 Peer pressure
 - 4.4.3 Confidence level
 - 4.4.4 Preexisting medical conditions
 - 4.4.5 Food/water
 - 4.4.6 Air and water temperatures
 - 4.4.7 Type of water
 - 4.4.8 Water conditions
 - 4.4.9 Changing weather
 - 4.4.10 Ability to access and put on a PFD
 - 4.4.11 External distractions
- 4.5 Describe the difference between sudden and unexpected emergencies versus slow and controlled immersions as it relates to the importance of wearing a PFD in all instances.
- 4.6 Explain the value of and the need to wear a PFD.
- 4.7 Explain that without wearing a PFD, it is more difficult and could be hazardous when attempting to help others in an emergency.
- 4.8 Explain how a PFD is not a replacement for active supervision when in, on, or around water.
- 4.9 Explain additional layers of protection do not replace wearing a PFD. Examples of additional layers of protection include, but are not limited to:
 - 4.9.1 Water competency
 - 4.9.2 Emergency preparation
 - 4.9.3 Learning to swim
 - 4.9.4 Water safety education

- 4.9.5 Boating safety courses
- 4.9.6 Preventing unauthorized entry to water
- 4.9.7 Throwable devices
- 4.9.8 Learning CPR and rescue techniques
- 4.9.9 Having an emergency action plan
- 4.10 Explain why other improvised items that may float, such as coolers, air trapped in clothing, paddles, oars, or inflatable toys, are not a substitute for wearing a PFD.
- 4.11 Emphasizes the importance of PFD wear when in, on, or around natural/open water, regardless of legal requirements, age, and swimming ability.

This Standard represents, as of the date of publication, the consensus of knowledgeable persons, active in the field of boating safety. The National Boating Standards Panel assumes no responsibility whatsoever for the use of, or failure to use, standards or technical information reports promulgated by it, their adaption to any processes of a user, or any consequences flowing therefrom.

Prospective users of the standards and technical information reports are responsible for protecting themselves against liability. The National Boating Education Standards are guides to achieving a level of knowledge that are not intended to preclude attainment of desired results by other means.