

# SPECIAL OLYMPICS

## UNIFIED SPORTS<sup>®</sup> *a student's guide*

**HOW  
TO START**  
a Unified Sports  
Program at  
*your school*

**10** *easy  
steps*

Feature:

What can  
Unified Sports  
do for *your school*?



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools**



## Special Olympics' Mission Statement:

To provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.



## Hello fellow student!

Just like you, I am passionate about acceptance for all people, regardless of their abilities. Growing up I was bullied often. I didn't want anyone else in my school to feel the same isolation and hurt feelings that I did in elementary school and junior high. I knew I wanted to make a difference, and you can too!

If you are reading this guide, that probably means you want to see your school be more accepting of people's differences. Great job, you've taken the first step needed to be an agent of change!

Throughout this guide, you will find step-by-step instructions to start a Special Olympics Unified Sports® Program at your school. You will also find helpful tips, and inspirational stories to help you along your journey. You will soon see how beneficial this program will be to you and your friends, with and without disabilities.

Now, go out there and make a difference in your school and community! I know you can do it!

In Friendship,



—Austin Rector

*Special Olympics Arizona*

*Youth Activation Committee Member*

## 4 Steps to Starting Special Olympics Unified Sports®:

Hit the ground running with 10 easy-to-follow steps to guide you. Use the convenient checklist on the next page to track your progress as you build a program for *your* school.

## ALSO INSIDE:

### 24 FEATURE:

### What can Unified Sports do for *your* school?

A collection of inspiring stories from real students and participants in the program.

### 27 Common Roadblocks

### 28 Frequently Asked Questions

### 31 Resources

COVER PHOTO: Rod Mar



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
Schools

## Steps to Starting Special Olympics Unified Sports®:

- 1. Get the Unified Sports Knowledge 8
- 2. Find Your Adult Allies 10
- 3. Develop and Share Your Plan 11
- 4. Find Your Student Leadership Team 12
- 5. Work With Your Adult Allies 13
- 6. Recruit Your Teammates 16
- 7. Enjoy Your Unified Sports Program 20
- 8. Explore Unified Champion Schools 21
- 9. Make it Sustainable 22
- 10. Your Next Step in Special Olympics 23





In this guide you will find specific tips to help you.  
Here is the key for these tips:



**Inclusion Tip**

Idea to assist you with including all students in a meaningful way



**Adult Allies Tip**

Idea to assist you in working with adults along the way



**Education Tip**

Idea to help educate others and spread awareness for Unified Sports



**Funding Tip**

Idea to assist you in getting your program started and to ensure it will be there to stay for years to come

**did you know?**

Keep an eye out for the **did you know?** talk bubble throughout this magazine to learn about events that led to the founding of Special Olympics and the exciting history of the organization. If you're interested in learning more, go to [www.specialolympics.org/history](http://www.specialolympics.org/history).



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion Schools**

## Using the Guide

It is recommended that you read through this entire guide before getting started so you can obtain the best foundation of knowledge and resources to start a successful program. Also, keep in mind that the sequence of steps may be different when you start your program, but all steps outlined in this guide are relevant and important keys to follow.



*"Be the change you wish to see in the world"*

*—Ghandi*

## What is Special Olympics Unified Sports®?

Special Olympics Unified Sports® is an inclusive program which combines individuals with intellectual disabilities (athletes) and individuals without intellectual disabilities (partners) on sports teams for training and competition. Athletes and partners compete alongside one another, each in a meaningful and integral role on the Unified Sports team.

### **Why School-Based Unified Sports?**

Special Olympics Unified Sports creates unique teammate bonds through sports experiences just like any other sports team. These experiences create a culture of inclusion and foster understanding in schools and communities.

Participation in Unified Sports leads to new friendships, improved self-esteem and positive changes in attitude, behavior and performance for all students involved. The program creates a lasting impact on all those participating and is a great addition to any education environment.

## Why should I help start a Unified Sports program at my school?

The answer is simple! Young people all across the world can be agents of change in their communities! Starting a Unified Sports program in your school will help create a better school experience for your classmates with and without disabilities. The experience can be life changing for everyone involved...*including you!*

## How would I start a Unified Sports program? It sounds like a lot of work!

Starting a Unified Sports program is easy! All you need to do is follow a few simple steps and you will be on your way to helping create a fun, inclusive environment for you and your peers. This guide will break it down into simple steps! You will not be alone in this process; we will discuss finding “adult allies” who are teachers, staff and other adult volunteers. Additionally, you will work with other student leaders with and without intellectual disabilities, who will support you along the way. Your leadership skills will be critical to identifying key people to help you. *Now let's get started!*



### Inclusion Tip

Unified Sports brings new opportunities for students to be involved and recognized in their schools. In some schools, Unified Sports participants can earn the opportunity to “letter” in their sport. “Lettering” is when the school recognizes a student’s athletic and/or student activities achievements by awarding them a “letter” to display on a school “letter jacket”.

### did you know?

From a backyard summer camp for people with intellectual disabilities to a global movement, Special Olympics has been changing lives and attitudes for 45 years.

### How It All Began

It all began in the 1950s and early 1960s, when Eunice Kennedy Shriver saw how unjustly and unfairly people with intellectual disabilities were treated.

1950s  
to early  
1960s

She also saw that many children with intellectual disabilities didn't even have a place to play. She decided to take action.

Soon, her vision began to take shape, as she held a summer day camp for young people with intellectual disabilities in her own backyard. The goal was to learn what these children could do in sports and other activities – and not dwell on what they could not do.

Throughout the 1960s, Eunice Kennedy Shriver continued her pioneering work -- both as the driving force behind President John F. Kennedy's White House panel on people with intellectual disabilities and as the director of the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation. Her vision and drive for justice eventually grew into the Special Olympics movement.



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
Schools

# step 1

## Get the Unified Sports Knowledge

The more educated you, your fellow students and adult allies become about Unified Sports, the more success you will achieve. Special Olympics has teamed up with the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) to bring you a 90-minute interactive online training at no cost!

- Simply log-on to [www.NFHSLearn.com](http://www.NFHSLearn.com) to take this course. You can complete this all at one time, or start and stop at your convenience.

### The Foundation of Unified Sports

#### *The Principle of Meaningful Involvement*

This is the most important concept of Unified Sports that the coach and all of the players must understand and implement. Fundamentally, the principle of meaningful involvement ensures that every player is given an opportunity to contribute to the success of his or her team through their unique skills and qualities.

#### Indicators of Meaningful Involvement

- Teammates compete without causing undue risk of injury to themselves or others.
- Teammates participate according to the rules of competition.
- Teammates have the ability and opportunity to contribute to the performance of the team.



#### Meaningful involvement is not achieved when certain team members:

- Display superior sports skills without involving their teammates.
- Serve predominantly as on-field coaches rather than teammates or mentors.
- Control most aspects of the game, especially during the most critical periods.
- Do not train or practice regularly and only show up on the day of competition.
- Lower their level of ability dramatically so that they do not hurt others or control the entire game.





## The Three Unified Sports Models

Everyone who is involved in organizing your school's Unified Sports team should understand that there are three Unified Sports Models- Competitive, Player Development and Recreation.

### The Competitive Model

*of Unified Sports has the following criteria:*

- Approximately equal number of athletes and partners
- Similar sports ability and age of athletes and partners
- All teammates expected to put forth their full effort
- Teammates have the necessary sports skills and understanding of the rules
- No modifications are made to the sports rules
- Scheduled training & competition season (typically 8-12 weeks)
- Certified adult coach for all teams

### The Player Development Model

*of Unified Sports has the following criteria:*

- Approximately equal number of athletes and partners
- Similar age of all teammates; however they are not required to have similar sports ability
- Teammates of higher ability serve as mentors to assist players of lower ability
- Lower ability teammates may not have the necessary sports skills and understanding of the rules
- Rules modifications are may be made to define player's roles and prevent

higher ability players from dominating the game

- Scheduled training & competition season (typically 8-12 weeks)
- Certified adult coach for all teams

### The Recreation Model

*of Unified Sports is characterized by:*

- Flexible team composition, which should be at least 25% athletes or partners
- Does not require teammates to be of similar age or ability
- Participation should be regularly scheduled, but it is not required
- Recreation teams are not eligible to advance to state competitions

It is important to note that **Competitive Model** teams should never be matched against **Player Development** teams in competition. This would not be fair to either team and could pose a safety risk.

You will also find informative Unified Sports "one-pagers" at the end of this guide in the "resources section".

Additional Unified Sports information, documents and research can be found on the [Special Olympics International Resources Page](#).



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
Schools

step  
2

## Find Your Adult Allies

What is the difference between your vision and your action plan? Your vision is simply your original thoughts on how your school's Unified Sports program will look. Once you read through this guide, you will work with your adult allies and fellow student leaders to come up with a detailed step-by-step plan to follow through with your vision.

**Schedule a meeting or phone call with Special Olympics staff in your state** to discuss your vision and discover what local resources are available to support your new Unified Sports program. They can help you identify adult coaches if you cannot find someone at your school. To find the contact information for your State, go to the [Program Locator](#).



**Schedule a meeting with school administration to share your vision.**

The administration typically has their own meetings; try to schedule a time slot to get in front of as many people as possible. If one administrator is hesitant, then another one might be willing to jump on board and help you. If possible, try to include a Special Olympics Staff member and/or a key adult who has been involved with Special Olympics in your area or within your school district.

Now that you have administration approval, it's time to really get started building your Unified Sports program!



### Funding & Sustainability Tip

You want to ensure all your bases are covered when it comes to funding and costs, as that may be a concern of school administration. Your new Special Olympics allies will be able to help you prepare for this conversation. Talk with them about possible fundraising opportunities or seed money available to start your program. It will be important to get the school supporting Unified Sports as much as possible from the start, which may include: uniforms, transportation, facilities and coach stipends as necessary.



### Education Tip

When sharing your vision, focus on the impact it will have on school climate/culture. For example, Unified Sports will include students with disabilities in new meaningful ways, it will educate general education students on people with disabilities through interactions and education tools. It will help with anti-bullying initiatives!



step  
3

## Develop and Share Your Plan

Now that you have the knowledge, it's time to combine that with your creativity to develop an action plan for your Special Olympics Unified Sports program. As you learned more about Unified Sports, and read through this guide, you probably thought about how this would work at your school. It's now time to inspire others to help you achieve this vision by sharing it with them.

### Begin with the end in mind!

*Create an action plan of what type of Unified Sports program you want for your school.*

#### **Be a leader, but realize that you will need help along the way!**

You will need a team of people to help you reach your goal of having a Unified Sports program in your school. In the next two steps you will share your action plan with key student leaders, teachers, and administrators, then recruit the ones who are passionate about making this happen to help you.



#### **Sustainability Tip**

Along the way ask your team of supporters to help expand on your action plan. This will further enhance their "buy-in" and will ultimately help you achieve your goals.



*"Winners never quit and quitters never win."*

*—Vince Lombardi*



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools**

step  
4

# Find Your Student Leadership Team

## Where do I find student leaders to help?

**1 Team up with an existing inclusive club in your school,** such as a Unified Club. A Unified Club includes students of all abilities through sports activities and/or social and recreational opportunities and is officially recognized by school administration.

**2 Create your own Youth Activation Committee (YAC)** or club with the help of your adult allies. A YAC is students with and without disabilities working together to lead Special Olympics and plan inclusive activities. A YAC could be its own club, or a committee within an existing leadership group. Youth Activation is about mobilizing youth to promote school communities where all young people are agents of change – fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities.

**3 Look for student leaders** that are involved in other clubs on campus and are looking for acceptance themselves.

**4 Partner with your Student Council.**

**5 Ask your friends to join in!**



### Inclusion Tip

Pair up students with and without disabilities, delegate certain responsibilities to the pairs based on your plan.



### Sustainability Tip

Keep in mind that not everyone is passionate about the same things. Just because someone is a student leader, it doesn't mean they will be interested in Special Olympics.

For more information on inclusive student clubs and creating a YAC, check out the [Youth Leadership Guide!](#)





step  
5

## Work With Your Adult Allies

Work with school administration to schedule a meeting with key adult allies to start planning the Unified Sports program. For example, this could include your Athletic Director, Special Education Director, and a Special Olympics staff member. It is important that representatives from Athletics/Physical Education and Special Education are working together from the start. Encourage them to view the online Unified Sports Course and/or other Unified Sports resources prior to your meeting.

Here is a sample agenda of items to address during this meeting:

### Who will be the Unified Sports adult advisor?

Each school's Unified Sports program must have an identified adult leader who is responsible for communication with Special Olympics. The advisor will be responsible for ensuring the program is meeting all standards/rules.

### When will Unified Sports take place?

- After school as an extracurricular or interscholastic team?
- During an existing PE class?
- As a new Unified Sports PE class?

### What does the Principle of Meaningful Involvement mean?

This is the most important concept of Unified Sports—the coach, school administrators, and all of the players must understand it.

### Which Unified Sports Model(s) will you conduct?

- Competitive, Player Development or Recreation: This will primarily depend on the ability level of the students with disabilities at your school. See "Resources" section on page 32 for an overview of these models.
- Schools should strive for Competitive or Player Development models as they involve structured ongoing training and competition. This however is not always possible, which is why Unified Sports Recreation is in place. Details about the Recreation Model are available in the "Resources" Section on page 33.



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
Schools

## Which sport(s) will the school participate in?

- The sport(s) you select will determine which students can participate and how many. This is a very important decision.
- Which Unified Sports does your State Special Olympics Program offer for schools? Flag football, basketball, tennis, golf, track & field, and cheerleading are a few examples that some states offer.
- What are the ability levels of the potential participants?
- What types of disabilities do the potential participants have? (For example, can someone in a wheelchair experience meaningful sports involvement?)
- Which sports facilities will you be able to use and when?
- Which sports are students interested in?



### Inclusion Tip

Certain Unified Sports do not require ability matching, which allow students of any ability level to participate. Examples include: track & field, bocce, and bowling.

**Important Note:** If composing competitive Unified Sports teams, athletes and partners must be closely matched in ability in order to achieve meaningful involvement for all teammates and so there are no significant safety risks.

## Who will be the qualified coach?

- An adult from your school or community (such as a parent or teacher) who is knowledgeable in coaching, can become the Unified Sports Coach.
- Your coach will need to commit to the requirements established by your State Special Olympics Program and the school. The coach will need to complete the online training prior to the first practice.



### Adult Allies Tip

Successful Unified Sports programs include adult coaches and volunteers who have sport, and disability knowledge.



### Education Tip

In-depth Special Olympics Coaching Guides are available at [www.SpecialOlympics.org](http://www.SpecialOlympics.org).

Sport-specific coaches training can be found at [www.NFHSLearn.com](http://www.NFHSLearn.com).

Note: The rules on this site are not Special Olympics rules

## What paperwork is required for the participants?

Special Olympics and School Staff will be able to answer this. This will usually include a sports physical and parent consent form.



## How will transportation be arranged after school and to competitions?

Transportation requests often need to be made well in advance so it will be important to plan ahead based on your schedule.

If transportation is not available, you can still start Unified Sports and focus on training at the school, or possibly host at competition against a neighboring school.



### Funding Tip

Your school may already have the sports equipment and uniforms available for your Unified Sports team to use.



### Sustainability Tip

One option is involving a Unified Sports team with an existing school team training, such as track & field. This would take advantage of structures that are already established such as the school's track & field coaches, facilities and equipment.

Develop a schedule of when the sport season will take place looking at practice times and competitions. You want to start Unified Sports today, but be patient as the better planning that takes place, the better the experience will be for your team participants!

## did you know?

On July 19–20, 1968, the 1st International Special Olympics

Summer Games were held at Soldier Field in Chicago, Illinois, USA. 1,000 people with intellectual disabilities from 26 U.S. states and Canada competed in track and field and swimming.

The U.S. Olympic Committee gives Special Olympics official approval as one of only two organizations authorized

**December 1971** to use the name "Olympics" in the United States.



Sargent Shriver was more than Eunice Kennedy Shriver's husband. As a team, they steered Special Olympics in new directions. A new biography of Sargent Shriver written by his son Mark provides insights about the man and his long history of public service.

**February 5-11, 1977** Steamboat Springs, Colorado, USA hosts the 1st International Special Olympics

Winter Games. More than 500 athletes compete in skiing and skating events. CBS, ABC and NBC television networks cover the Games.

**June 1981** Wichita, Kansas (USA) Police Chief Richard LaMunyon launches a Special Olympics awareness campaign that becomes the Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics. The Torch Run grows into the movement's largest grassroots fundraiser, raising \$30 million each year.



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
Schools

step  
6

## Recruit Your Teammates

Work with your student leadership team and adult allies to create a one-page overview of your school's Unified Sports program based on your plan. This will be used to educate students, parents and teachers. Keep it simple and answer the basic questions: What?, Who?, When?, Where?, How?. It will be important to address required paperwork, projected schedules and transportation. Your adult allies will be able to assist you with distributing this information sheet to the parents of prospective teammates.

### What is a Unified partner?

A Unified partner is a student without an intellectual disability, who actively participates with the athletes in a fun and meaningful way for training and competition.

If you are conducting competitive team sports, Unified partners should match as closely as possible to the Special Olympics athlete's age and ability. For example, Varsity football players would typically not be a good match as Unified partners on a Flag Football team. Plus, if you recruit students who are not involved in high school sports, this gives them their chance!

*“Unified Sports teams should never be composed solely of people with disabilities.”*

*– Tim Shriver, Chairman and CEO, Special Olympics*



### Education Tip

Getting students to return the required paperwork often takes longer than expected. It is important to start the education process with potential teammates and their parents as soon as you can. One idea is organizing a “parent night” to discuss the program and answer their questions.





A valuable outcome of Unified Sports is that people with disabilities are given the chance to interact with their peers who do not have a disability. Unified Sports does however allow students with other types of disabilities (such as a physical or learning disability) to participate as Unified partners as long as it does not pose a health or safety risk.

already have a friendship with the athletes. But don't stop there!

### Who is a Special Olympics athlete?

Athletes are the heart of Special Olympics Unified Sports! A Special Olympics athlete can be a student or a member of the community.



### Remember...Think outside the box

Just because a student is interested in Student Council or is on their school's sport team, it doesn't necessarily mean they are interested in being super involved in disability awareness or Special Olympics.

**How do I recruit athletes?** Work with your Special Olympics advisor to identify students who would qualify as a Special Olympics athlete. Plan a presentation with your student leadership team (students with and without disabilities) to these potential athletes.

### Where to find Unified partners?

A great place to find partners is recruiting those who are already working with students with disabilities, such as a Unified Club or buddies club or student aids in the Special Education Department. This is one method to help ensure your partners are in it for the right reasons and

*Never give up, even if it seems like no one is listening. All of your hard work will pay off, and because of YOU, hundreds of athletes will be more accepted and included in their school and community!*



### Inclusion Tip

If your school does not have a Unified Club or buddies club, try to find clubs/students at your school that are fighting for acceptance and inclusion themselves. Check Facebook and Twitter, pictures and posts can tell a thousand words. Look for younger students who will be in it for the long haul...it takes time to make a difference and earn respect from teachers and peers.



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
Schools

## Commitment and Education of Teammates

**1 Have all Unified Sports participants and their parents/guardians sign a commitment letter** outlining the expectations of being on a Unified Sports team (see example letter in “resources section”)

**2 Hold a Unified partner orientation prior to the first practice.** Have a Special Olympics athlete help educate partners on people first language (“people with disabilities”, not “disabled people”. “I have autism”, not “I’m autistic”.)



Use the [Examples of People First Language](#) guide as a resource.

Recruit a teacher or specialist who is knowledgeable about working with students with disabilities to discuss proper ways to communicate and interact with Special Olympics athletes. Interactive learning lessons are available using “Get Into It” (details in Step 8).

**3 Ensure that all teammates and parents know the sports schedule.**

**4 Encourage teammates to take the online coaching course.**

**5 Educate partners about their role based on the team structure** (will they be completely interacting in the competitive model, or facilitators in the player development model). Regardless of the model, Unified partners are there to be teammates and friends. They are not there to “serve” Special Olympics athletes. This is a critical concept for the partners to understand in order for true friendships to be made between teammates. Note: You may not know the Unified Sports model that best fits your school until after the first practice.



***This story highlights the importance of recruiting the right Unified partners and creating an atmosphere of friendship and teamwork:***

I have been involved with Special Olympics and my school's Best Buddies program for a while, and I've formed so many amazing friendships.

I realized at an early age that we were all more alike than different, and regardless of our differences we all want the same thing...to be accepted for who we are.

After being bullied for many years, I started to grow taller instead of wider. I finally fit in and didn't get called names or pushed around anymore. I knew what it felt like to be picked last on the playground, and I knew what it felt like to be not good enough. I wanted to make a change. I wanted my peers to realize that everyone has something to offer the community, and everyone deserves to be treated with respect.

When my school started Unified Sports, it was very important to me that everyone involved realized that we were a team. I didn't want to recruit my peers that thought of Unified Sports as "charity" or "community service". I made sure I recruited students that were interested in being part of a "team". The Unified partners on my school's team came to every practice and every game. Our team hung out after practice and on the weekends. We became friends on and off the field/court. We worked hard and we played hard.

Not only did we become a "team", we became friends, and that made all the difference. Being a partner for my school's Unified Sports team was life changing, and helped me have an incredible high school experience!

— *Arizona YAC Member*

*Remember...we are all more alike than different!*



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools**



step  
7

## Enjoy Your Unified Sports Program

Remember...Things don't happen overnight. Great things like this take time. You may only have a few students involved at first and that's okay, before you know it your program will grow!

### Your First Practice:

The first training session should include "get to know each other activities" and "ice-breakers" so all teammates start feeling comfortable with each other. Additionally, all teammates should take "Skills Assessment Tests" (SATs) if your school has decided to participate in "team" sports such as basketball, soccer or flag football. These assessments will be scored by the coach(es) to ensure that all teammates have the appropriate skill level to participate on the team. SATs are listed in the Sports Rules and Coaches Guides for each sport at [www.SpecialOlympics.org](http://www.SpecialOlympics.org).



An in-depth resource titled "Assessing Players and Forming Unified Teams" is available to assist you with this process on the [Unified Sports Resources](#) page.

### 7 Criteria for Success

Special Olympics adopted Unified Sports in 1989 to expand sports opportunities for athletes seeking new challenges while dramatically increasing their inclusion in the community. Extensive field-testing has shown that Unified Sports teams are most likely to accomplish the goals of the program when the following 7 criteria are met.

It is important to incorporate all seven (7) of the criteria. If you do only some of them, chances for success are greatly reduced. Use this as your final checklist to ensure you have all your bases covered. A detailed description of each of these seven criteria can be found in the "Resources" section.

- 1 Principle of Meaningful Involvement**
- 2 Selection of Appropriate Sport**
- 3 Qualified Coaches Lead the Program**
- 4 Selection of Appropriate Teammates**
- 5 Quality Training and Frequent Competition Leads to a Culminating Event**
- 6 Unified Sports Rules are Followed**
- 7 Commitment of Support**  
(From State Special Olympics, school, coaches and fans)



step  
8

## Explore Unified Champion Schools

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools is an education and sports based program started by Special Olympics designed to build an inclusive environment among youth with and without intellectual disabilities, as well as empower them to become youth leaders and speak up for change in their community.

Through Unified Champion Schools, Unified Sports is offered to schools around the country and it is the main vehicle through which sports teams are started.

### Unified Champion Schools includes:

#### Unified Sports

Takes the great thrill of competition that has fueled Special Olympics for many years, and allows student athletes with and without disabilities to compete on the same field together.

#### Inclusive Youth Leadership

Students can become leaders by joining Unified Clubs, joining a Youth Activation Committee, and attending Youth Summits to share with others what they have done and learn new ways to make their program stronger.

#### Whole School Engagement

Uses lessons and resources from SO Get Into It, R-Word campaigns and Youth Rallies.

**Unified Champion Schools is all about acceptance and the collaboration of all abilities working to create an inclusive environment.**

**EDUCATE! MOTIVATE!  
ACTIVATE!**

For more information about Unified Champion Schools visit the Unified Champion Schools web page. There are many great resources on how to get Unified Champion Schools into your school, or better an existing program.

**Also check out...** “Get Into It Active” that can be integrated into your Unified Sports practice or inclusive club. Use “Get Into It Active” on-the-go with the free App! Simply search for “Get Into It” in the App Store.



#### Education Tip:

Register as a student on the [Get Into It](#)® website. Special Olympics Get Into It® program consists of online resources that include lessons, activities, videos, athlete stories and supplemental materials. This is a great way to educate the entire school or specific classes about Special Olympics and disability.



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools**

step  
9

## Make it Sustainable

Work with your adult allies to contact other schools in your district and ask them to jump on board with Unified Sports! For example, you can present about Unified Sports to the middle schools and/or elementary schools in your district to help start Special Olympics Unified Sports.

Getting younger students involved in leadership roles ensures the program will be around for many years. It is important to pass along knowledge and responsibilities to these younger students well in advance of the current leaders graduating.

- **Find fun and innovative ways** to fundraise for Special Olympics, invite other students and clubs to participate
- **Start “Fans in the Stands”** at your school by gathering a group of friends, design big posters, and cheer like crazy for your school’s Unified Sports team! As Unified Sports positively impacts more and more students, it will become part of the school culture, which increases sustainability.
- **Be an advocate** by asking your administrator to include Unified Sports in your school assemblies and pep rallies. Hold Unified Sports games or exhibitions in front of large school crowds so everyone can see the talents of the teammates.



### Sustainability Tip

The more integrated Unified Sports is into the school through student clubs, by-laws, budgets and curriculum, the more sustainable it will become.



### Funding Tip

Work with your Special Olympics contact to explore student fundraising options.



## step 10

# Your Next Step in Special Olympics

### What Happens when I Graduate from Middle School?

Hopefully, your new high school will already have a Special Olympics program established for you to join. You will be able to find out by contacting the Athletic Director and/or the administration of your future high school.

If your future school does not yet have Special Olympics, you can help start it by utilizing your leadership skills and this guide. One strategy to assist you with this process is working with your middle school's Special Olympics advisor

to set up a meeting with the administration and/or teachers at your future high school. They will be able to help you communicate the importance of the program and discuss how it can work.

### What Happens when I Graduate from High School?

Every state offers community Special Olympics programs that you can be a part of through your city or local disability service providers! If you enjoyed being a Unified partner in high school, you can participate in the same type of programs at the community level. You can also become a coach with traditional Special Olympics or adult Unified Sports teams. If you enjoyed being a Unified Sports athlete in high school, get out there and join the Special Olympics sports teams in your community! If you plan on attending college, keep reading this section... The possibilities are endless!

Have you loved your experience with Unified Sports in high school? Are you continuing your education within a community college or university? Do you want to continue your involvement with Unified Sports all while creating a college campus of acceptance and inclusion? Then you should start a SO College chapter!

SO College is a program that incorporates all three components of Unified Champion Schools:

- Unified Sports
- Inclusive Youth Leadership
- Whole-school Engagement

This program works to empower students to create a campus and community where all people are valued and accepted for their abilities.

To find out if your future college has a SO College chapter already, please visit [www.specialolympics.org/socollege](http://www.specialolympics.org/socollege). If you are interested in starting a SO College chapter, please email [socollege@specialolympics.org](mailto:socollege@specialolympics.org) to gain more information and useful resources! If you are a Special Olympics athlete that would like to participate in a Unified Sports team on a college campus, please contact your local or state Special Olympics office.



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools**

# What can Unified Sports do for *your* school?

Unified Sports allows all students, regardless of ability level, the opportunity to share their skills and talents with the school and community. On the court the partners and athletes learn the value of teamwork and the importance of inclusion in all aspects of life. Off the court, the students build friendships and lasting relationships that will impact their overall school experience. These feature stories highlight real-life examples of the impact of Unified Sports on all participants!

## What can Unified Sports do for students with intellectual disabilities?

Unified Sports gives students with intellectual disabilities an opportunity to have a “typical” school experience. The program helps build confidence and important social skills while giving students with intellectual disabilities a chance to create new friendships.

**Joseph did not know where to fit in;** he did not fit in with general education or special education. He began to cause problems and continuously got in trouble. You could say he was in and out of the principal’s office. When Unified Sports started at Joseph’s school, he was so excited because his dream was to play a sport for his High School! Joseph was a senior when the program launched and he got the opportunity to play basketball. He realized that in order to represent his school and to be able to play each game, he needed to get his act together. His behavior became 100 times better and he started learning very good leadership skills because of Unified Sports. When the season came to the end, Joseph realized he was graduating and would not be able to participate in the Unified Sports program any longer. It brought this tough student to tears because he “finally felt important at his school.”

—*Special Olympics Unified Sports athlete*





**Jordan the YAClete!** You might look at the title and ask “What’s a YAClete?” I call myself that because I’m proud to be a member of a Youth Activation Committee for Unified Champion Schools, and I’m proud of all of all my athletic accomplishments in Special Olympics. On the Special Olympics medal, there are four words: Skill, Courage, Sharing, and Joy. They all go in the order of importance. For skill, it’s always a nice thing to have, but that alone won’t get you to the top. Courage is next because in the Special Olympics Athlete Oath, it says to be brave no matter whether you win or lose. Sharing means you’re unselfish, you support your teammates and even your opponents. Lastly, the most important one is Joy, meaning to always have a positive attitude and to be excited. I’ve competed in soccer and softball, but all my biggest accomplishments have come in basketball. My 10 years being involved in Special Olympics has been the best time of my life. Special Olympics has given me the ability to maintain a positive outlook and succeed in sports and in life. During these last ten years, I have competed in 3 sports, won 20 medals, and help pioneer a strong Unified Sports program in two states. I have experienced Special Olympics at the State level, National level, and Global level, and have enjoyed every moment of it. I’m proud of all my athletic accomplishments.

*-Jordan Schubert, Special Olympics YAC member*



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools**



Photo: Rod Mar

## What can Unified Sports do for Unified partners?

Unified Sports gives students an opportunity to be agents of change in their communities. It helps partners realize that everyone is more alike than different and encourages students to be accepting of others. It also allows Unified partners an opportunity to fit in to something at school, feel acceptance, be active and most importantly have fun!

**I used to be a bully.** I used to be the person that discouraged others and made them feel like they were “different”. I was the kid at school that thought I was somehow better than others. My Junior year I somehow got put into the special education class as an aide. Honestly, I wasn’t too happy about it. During my class period we helped in the adaptive PE class. There was this kid in the class, I later found out he was the Unified Sports representative for my school, and he kept trying to get me involved with my peers with disabilities. His enthusiasm was incredible, and he was relentless in trying to get me involved in the class. I finally gave in and started participating more and more. Before I knew it, I was having fun, and I was making so many new friends. I wanted to get involved in Unified Sports, and it ended up being a life-changing experience! I no longer see people as being “different”, and I accept people for who they are. I see people for their abilities now and I am no longer a bully. I am an encouraging friend and I am a kid that other students can look up to!

— Unified partner



# Common Roadblocks

## Finding good quality partners and students that care

### *Solution:*

To ensure students are serious and ready to make the commitment to Unified Sports, you may consider using an application and interview process as well as the Unified Sports Teammate Agreement.

## Funding for sports teams

### *Solution:*

Fundraise!

- 1 Check with your Special Olympics contact on fundraisers that already exist which you can get your school involved in.
- 2 Miracle Minute-School fundraiser where the school as a whole has one minute to see how much each class can raise to support Special Olympics Unified Sports. It's simple, hand out envelopes to every teacher and have each class put in as many donations as they can in one minute. This could be done during morning announcements.
- 3 Sell concessions at a Varsity or Unified Sports Game.
- 4 Host a "Restaurant Night" where local businesses offer a percentage of sales to go back to your program.

Be sure to delegate fundraising responsibilities to a highly motivated student, and check with Special Olympics to clarify fundraising policies.

## Lack of Administration Support

### *Solution:*

- 1 Approach teachers and administrators with a specific plan to implement Unified Sports, and provide examples of how Unified Sports will benefit your school.
- 2 Invite Special Olympics staff and/or a Special Olympics athlete to present to them.
- 3 You need to show why this is important for the school culture, and that it's not just a "nice" thing to do.
- 4 Invite administration to a Special Olympics event or to view another school's Unified Sports program.

Tip: You will find most administrators will love the idea of Unified Sports. Just make sure you approach them with an organized plan of action!

## Lack of facilities/transportation

### *Solution:*

Look to your Unified Sports advisor/coach to pre-plan for transportation and to set up for games. If the facilities are not available when you need them, get creative! One possibility might be sharing the space with another school team, or incorporating Unified Sports into your school intramural program.



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
Schools

## Finding volunteers

### Solution:

- Ask friends at school that can't make the time commitment to be a partner, but still want to be involved.
- Ask parents to support and help.
- Mention Unified Sports to your teachers, some of them may want to get involved in this great program.
- Work with groups on campus such as the National Honor Society, Leos, Student Council, Key Club or Junior ROTC.

## Lack of overall school support

### Solution:

- Hang up flyers around school prior to game day.
- Make an announcement about upcoming events and games during your school's morning announcements.
- Talk to teachers and ask them to encourage students to come out and be fans in the stands.
- Tell your friends about how great Unified Sports is and have them tell their friends too.
- Ask the school newspaper to write an article about Unified Sports.
- Contact your school's media crew to cover games.
- Hold a rally or assembly to spread awareness and build excitement

### did you know?

The United Nations launches the International Year of Special Olympics in September 1986. The theme is "Special Olympics—Uniting the World."

**October 1987** "A Very Special Christmas," a benefit album

featuring holiday music by top rock 'n' roll performers, is released worldwide. It is produced by Jimmy and Vicki Lovine of A&M Records and Bobby Shriver, with all earnings going to Special Olympics. More than 2 million records, compact discs and cassette tapes are sold.

**February 1988** The International Olympic Committee

(IOC) signs a historic agreement with Sargent and Eunice Kennedy Shriver officially endorsing and recognizing Special Olympics.

**July 1988** Special Olympics Unified Sports® is launched at the annual Special Olympics Conference in Reno, Nevada, and Lake Tahoe, California. Bowling, volleyball and softball are the first sports included.

**March 20-27, 1993** The 5th Special Olympics World Winter Games are hosted in Salzburg and Schladming, Austria. These are the first World Games held outside North America.

**July 1-9, 1995** Several new initiatives make their debut at the 9th Special Olympics World Summer Games. These include the Host Town Program, Healthy Athletes®, and Research and Policy Symposia. In addition, for the first time, people with intellectual disabilities serve as certified officials.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## What is Special Olympics?

Special Olympics is an international organization that changes lives by promoting understanding, acceptance and inclusion between people with and without intellectual disabilities. Through year-round sports training and athletic competition and other related programming for more than 3.7 million children and adults with intellectual disabilities in more than 170 countries, Special Olympics has created a model community that celebrates people's diverse gifts. Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Special Olympics provides people with intellectual disabilities continuing opportunities to realize their potential, develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage and experience joy and friendship.

## How do I raise publicity?

Spread the word about how great Unified Sports is every chance you get! Reach out to your school's student council, yearbook staff, newspaper, and your school's media crew. They can all be valuable resources.



## Who is eligible to participate in Special Olympics Unified Sports?

Both students with and without intellectual disabilities are able to participate in Unified Sports. There are several ways to participate, either by being an athlete, partner, or volunteer! Students with other types of disabilities, such as physical disabilities are eligible to participate as Unified partners as long as everyone can experience meaningful involvement without health or safety risks. Unified Sports teams should never be comprised solely of people with disabilities.

## Who can become a Unified partner?

Students without intellectual disabilities who are highly motivated and wanting to promote acceptance and inclusion for all people regardless of their abilities. Remember, in competitive team sports, the Unified partner's ability level must be closely matched with the skills of the Special Olympics athletes.



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools**

## How do I find a coach?

Finding a coach is easy! Ask Special Education teachers or aides, parents, and general education teachers who are knowledgeable in sports and willing to help. You can also ask your Athletic Director at school for some recommendations.

## What if my administrator says “No”?

If administration says no to a Unified Sports program, ask them what you could do to change their minds—then create a plan to address their concerns. Ask an adult ally to help work through roadblocks at your

school, as well as explain all the benefits of offering the program. Your administrators will likely jump on board once they realize the benefits, and your dedication to getting the program started.

## What is an “adult ally”?

An adult Ally is an adult that helps you plan and organize your school’s Unified Sports teams. It could be a special education teacher, a mainstream education teacher, a parent, or an advisor! You can have several adult allies to help you along your journey.

### did you know?

In January 1997 Healthy Athletes becomes an official Special Olympics initiative, providing health-care services to Special Olympics athletes worldwide. The program includes free vision, hearing and dental screening, injury prevention clinics and nutrition education.

**July 20, 1998** Special Olympics celebrates its 30th anniversary with the introduction of the first Sargent Shriver International Global Messengers. These 12 remarkable men and women travel the world as spokespeople for the movement over a two-year term.

U.S. President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton host “A Very Special Christmas from Washington, D.C.” It’s

**December 17, 1998** the first time the White

House hosts a Special Olympics gala and the first time that artists from “A Very Special Christmas” album series gather together to perform. In 2000, President and Mrs. Clinton host “A Very Special Christmas” for the second time.

The “Campaign for Special Olympics” sets unprecedented goals to increase athlete participation by 1 million and to raise more than \$120 million over a five-year period. This global campaign changes the face of the Special Olympics movement.

**May 18-22, 2000** As part of the “Campaign for Special Olympics,” actor Arnold Schwarzenegger joins Special Olympics athletes to light the Flame of Hope at the Great Wall of China. They launch the Special Olympics China Millennium March and begin the most ambitious growth campaign in the movement’s history. China pledges to increase its number of athletes from 50,000 to 500,000 by 2005.

## Want to learn more?

The history of the Special Olympics is so rich, we just couldn’t fit it all here. Learn the rest of the story at [www.specialolympics.org/history](http://www.specialolympics.org/history).



## Unified Sports Teammate Agreement

This agreement signed on the \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_,

between \_\_\_\_\_

*(Unified Sports Coach)*

and \_\_\_\_\_

*(Unified Sports Teammate)*

who agree as follows:

1. Have a positive and accepting attitude at all times, on and off the court.
2. Attend and participate in all practices, games, and events.
3. Assist in training new Unified partners and athletes.
4. Behave appropriately at practices, games, and events.
5. Follow my school's athletic and sportsmanship policies.
6. Treat all teammates as my equal peers.
7. Support my fellow teammates as needed and be a team player.
8. Be a good role model on and off the court.

I understand if I do not meet my commitment for my Unified Sports team, I will be asked to step down from my position on this team.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teammate

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Coach

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



### Unified Sports Competitive

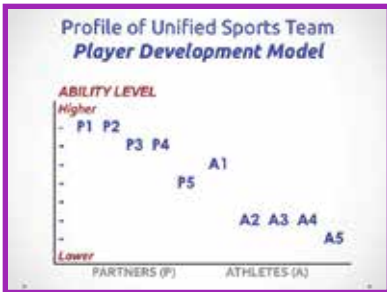
- Inclusive sports program
- Approximately equal number of athletes and partners train and compete
- Similar **ability** and age of athletes and partners



- Training and competition scheduled for a season or class
- Never comprised solely of individuals with disabilities
- Awards based on place of finish within divisions

### Unified Sports Player Development

- Inclusive sports program
- Approximately equal number of athletes and partners train and compete
- Similar age of athletes and partners



- Training and competition scheduled for a season or class
- Never comprised solely of individuals with disabilities
- Program has choice of providing awards based on finish or participation (same award for all)

### Unified Sports Recreation

- Inclusive recreational sports program
- Composition of teams should be at least 25% athletes or partners
- Does not require athletes and partners to be of similar age and ability
- Preferably, participation is regularly scheduled; demonstration, fundraising and featured events applied as a catalyst for ongoing activity
- Never comprised solely of individuals with disabilities
- No awards are provided; however, recognition can be provided on a Program-by-Program basis

### What is the difference between these models?

- Have attained sufficient & necessary sport-specific skills and tactics
- No modifications of Official Special Olympics Sports Rules
- Eligible to advance to higher levels of play beyond the Program level (such as Regional and World Games)

- Not required to be of similar ability; teammates of higher ability serve as mentors to assist players of lower abilities
- Rules modifications define players' roles, ensure meaningful involvement and prevent player dominance
- No advancement beyond the Program level

- Does not follow any prescribed training, competition and/or team composition requirements established by Special Olympics
- No advancement beyond the Local level



# Unified Sports Recreation Guidelines

## Unified Sports Recreation

- Does not require teams to be composed of athletes and partners of similar age and ability.
- May include training (like physical education class) or competition (like intramural sports) opportunities in which athletes and partners take part together over the course of a season or a semester.
- Includes sports and other physical activities ranging from basketball to yoga. Activities must be physical. Preferably, these activities should take place over a period of time.
- Is not offered as an official competition at state, national and world games, but is an approved exhibition or demonstration at Special Olympics events
- Fulfills the Project UNIFY criteria for inclusive sports in schools
- Awards and recognition are determined by the Special Olympics State Program



## Criteria for Unified Sports Recreation Success

**1 Partners and athletes must meaningfully participate**, that is, athletes must be engaged in the sport or activity as a participant, not as a mascot or manager.

**2 The selected activity must be a physical activity** involving movement, coordination and basic athleticism.

**3 Unified Sports Recreation must be supervised by a coach or leader** who understands the Special Olympics and Unified Sports philosophy as set forth in the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules and training.

**4 Participants may be of varying ability levels**; however, they must be engaged together on the same team in the activity and in a meaningful and appropriate manner. While the social inclusion objective of Unified Sports is best met when athletes and partners are of similar ability, similar ability is not required in the Unified Sports Recreation model.

**5 The composition of teams need not conform to standard Unified Sports guidelines/ratios**; however, the social inclusion objective of Unified Sports Recreation is met when at least 25% of the team members are athletes or partners. Thus, in Unified Sports Recreation, Special Olympics Programs may adjust percentages to meet their needs as long as every participant is meaningfully involved.

**6 Unified Sports Recreation should occur in a consistent framework** where participation is regularly scheduled. Even though the activity is less structured, the opportunities should still be of high quality.



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
Schools

# Seven (7) Criteria for Special Olympics Unified Sports Success

Special Olympics adopted Unified Sports in 1989 to expand sports opportunities for athletes seeking new challenges while dramatically increasing their inclusion in the community. Extensive field-testing has shown that Unified Sports teams are most likely to accomplish the goals of the program when the following 7 criteria are met.

It is important to incorporate all seven (7) of the criteria. If you do only some of them, chances for success are greatly reduced.

**1** Principle of Meaningful Involvement – This is the most critical determinant of success and the coach and all of the players must follow it. Fundamentally, the principle of meaningful involvement ensures that every player is given an opportunity to contribute to the success of his or her team through their unique skills and qualities. This means that every teammate: (a) demonstrates sufficient sport-specific skills and game understanding; (b) plays a valued role on the team that emphasizes his or her personal talents; and (c) has an opportunity to play without a heightened risk of injury.

**2** Selection of appropriate sport – A variety of factors influence the determination of which sport is chosen for Unified Sports training and competition. Some of these factors include athlete and partner interest, age and ability levels of potential athletes and partners, available facilities and equipment, availability of qualified coaches, finances and opportunities for competition.

**3** Qualified coaches lead the program – Unified Sports teams should be organized under the guidance of a trained coach who understands and adopts the principles of Special Olympics and Unified Sports, and has knowledge of the rules, techniques, strategies and training regimens of the selected sport.

**4** Selection of appropriate teammates – It is fundamental to the Special Olympics experience that each participant on a team has the ability and opportunity to contribute to the team's success and embraces the principle of meaningful involvement. Team members should have the necessary skills to participate on a Unified Sports team without causing undue risk of injury to themselves or others. Additionally, team members should be matched by age and ability as specifically defined by the sport. All players on a Unified Sports team make the commitment to attend every practice, support each other as equal teammates, and demonstrate respect and sportsmanship.



**5** Quality training and frequent competition leads to a culminating event – Unified Sports teams shall have a minimum of ten weeks of training and competition (practices, scrimmages and league competition) before the culminating championship event.

**6** Unified Sports rules are followed – All Unified Sports competitions should be conducted according to Official Special Olympics Sports Rules, including placement of Unified Sports teams in appropriate age and ability divisions.

**7** Commitment of support – Four levels of support are critical to start and sustain the Unified Sports program.

- a** The Special Olympics Program (state, province or country) provides funding, training of coaches and competition management and a culminating event.
- b** The Local Special Olympics Program (school or community) is responsible for training athletes and partners, conducting local competition and securing facilities, equipment and uniforms.
- c** Coaches are responsible for gaining knowledge, training and coaching athletes and partners and ensuring that they have frequent opportunities to compete.
- d** Lastly, the spectator provides acknowledgment, engagement and acceptance – having cheering fans in the stands can be crucial to the motivation of a team, especially a Unified Sports team.

## Additional Resources



### Special Olympics:

[www.specialolympics.org](http://www.specialolympics.org)



### State Special Olympics Program Contacts:

[www.specialolympics.org/program\\_locator.aspx](http://www.specialolympics.org/program_locator.aspx)



### Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools:

[www.specialolympics.org/projectunify](http://www.specialolympics.org/projectunify)



### Spread the Word to End the Word:

[www.r-word.org](http://www.r-word.org)



### Get Into It

[getintoit.specialolympics.org](http://getintoit.specialolympics.org)



### SO College

[www.specialolympics.org/socollege](http://www.specialolympics.org/socollege)



### NFHS Learning Center:

[www.NFHSLearn.com](http://www.NFHSLearn.com)



Office of Special Education Programs  
U.S. Department of Education

The U.S. Department of Education, through the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, is a major funding source for Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is dedicated to improving results for infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities ages birth through 21.



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
Schools



## Play Unified. Live Unified.

For 30 years, **ESPN** has been proud to work with **Special Olympics** to support competition for people with intellectual disabilities. Please join us in an exciting new future where people with and without intellectual disabilities come together as teammates, fostering communities of acceptance and inclusion for all.

[SpecialOlympics.org](http://SpecialOlympics.org)



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools**