



The Special Olympics
Unified Champion Schools® Program
**High School
Playbook**



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**

Acknowledgments

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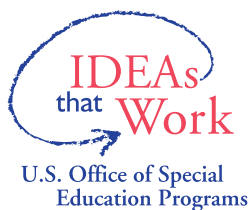
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All resources within this playbook can be found at:

resources.specialolympics.org/community-building/youth-and-school/ucs-playbook-resources



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Overview

Why Do We Need Schools to be Socially Inclusive?

Creating an educational atmosphere that prepares every student for college, career, and civic life is a complex proposition. Accomplishing this requires intentional planning and implementation, strong collaborations and initiatives that provide equitable and quality opportunities for all.

Successfully meeting the needs of all students hinges largely on the climate of the school, which affects every aspect of students' school experiences – from their social and emotional well-being to the overall quality of the educational experience. A positive school climate creates the necessary conditions where diversity is valued, equity is demanded, and every student is a contributing member.

An effective school climate provides students with intellectual disabilities the opportunities to learn and play alongside their peers without disabilities in the life experiences of school. The sense of belonging and connectedness within the school is particularly important for students with intellectual disabilities and is associated with several important educational outcomes, including regular school attendance.¹

Yet, even students with intellectual disabilities who attend schools that provide an inclusive academic experience are often disengaged from school-based social opportunities. It is perhaps not surprising that students with disabilities participate less in school-sponsored teams, clubs, and organizations than their peers without disabilities.² Overall, students with intellectual disabilities are more likely to experience social isolation within the school setting. Consider the following:

- Bullying and other mean-spirited actions can have violent and tragic outcomes. 71% of young people say they have seen bullying in their schools.³
Students with disabilities are at greater risk of being victimized.^{4, 5}
- Students with intellectual disabilities do not routinely experience a school environment that addresses their academic needs and also their social needs to make friends. **While 67% of all students with disabilities spend more than 80% of the school day among their general education peers, for students with intellectual disabilities that rate falls to 19%.**⁶





A Vision of Social Inclusion



Imagine a school where no student is excluded because of their disability or the services required to meet their needs. All students are meaningfully engaged in a variety of experiences that build on individual strengths and respect diversity.

As you walk through the hallways, you see posters, flyers, and artwork representing all kinds of clubs, teams, and students. The clubs are inclusive, and there are teams and extracurricular opportunities for all.

You see students from the football team high-fiving students from special education classrooms. It is a place of respect where differences are accepted and appreciated. It is a school where the voices of all students are heard, and all students have the chance to be leaders.

Every student is given an opportunity to meaningfully contribute and participate. They are noticed for their similarities and strengths rather than disabilities. All around you is evidence that students feel a sense of belonging and value.

What is the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Strategy?

Since its founding, Special Olympics has provided quality sports opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities across the globe. Today, **Special Olympics serves as a driving force for social inclusion**, with the vision to create a world where “people with intellectual disabilities of all abilities are welcomed in their communities and join with others to learn, work, compete, and play with the same rights and opportunities as others.”

Integral to this work is a focus on youth. Special Olympics views youth as powerful and effective advocates open-minded to new things, and as having the courage of conviction to step up and defend their beliefs. For this reason, Special Olympics finds that young people are some of the most powerful and effective advocates on behalf of acceptance.

Since 2008, Special Olympics has been actively engaged in the development and implementation of a school-based strategy supported and endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education for promoting and increasing the social inclusion of youth with intellectual disabilities in schools and in their communities across the country.

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program is a strategy for schools Pre-K through university that intentionally promotes meaningful social inclusion by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities. It utilizes 3 interconnected components: **Special Olympics Unified Sports®**, **inclusive youth leadership**, and **whole school engagement**. At its core, this strategy is about unifying all students – with and without intellectual disabilities – using sports as a catalyst for social inclusion and attitude and behavioral change.



Sports as the Foundation for Inclusion

With sports as the foundation, the Special Olympics Unified Champion School program offers proven programs and activities that equip young people with tools and training to create sports, classroom, and community experiences that improve attitudes and behaviors among all young people, both with and without intellectual disabilities. These work to:

- **Reduce bullying and exclusion.**
- **Promote healthy activities and interactions.**
- **Overturn stereotypes and negative attitudes.**
- **Eliminate hurtful language in schools and elsewhere.**
- **Engage young people as leaders of a new, positive social movement.**

With the Unified Champion Schools Model:

- Students with and without intellectual disabilities are provided opportunities for physical activity and for building positive peer relationships across the school setting – in hallways and lunchrooms, in classrooms and gymnasiums, and on athletic fields of play.
- Students with and without intellectual disabilities are provided opportunities to interact with their peers and to personally learn and grow.

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools strategy is not just about *including* students with disabilities, but rather: *unifying* all students, student and teacher collaboration where students learn to be leaders, and sports as a catalyst for social inclusion and change.



Helpful Resources

More information on how schools can promote social inclusion can be found in the one-pager [Characteristics of Socially Inclusive Schools \(PDF\)](#) available at the Outreach and Messaging webpage.



Special Olympics
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How Does the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Strategy Support Current Education Initiatives?

The Unified Champion Schools strategy supports a number of key educational priorities in important and relevant ways. The efforts below are frequently a part of school improvement plans and activities as school staff seek to increase student success. If your school is already focusing on any of these initiatives, the Unified Champion Schools strategy will amplify and enhance your existing emphasis.

A Positive, Caring, Equitable School Climate

Context matters. There is growing research that demonstrates students perform better academically, socially, and emotionally when they are meaningfully engaged and contributing members of a school with a **positive, caring, equitable school climate**. Schools implementing this programming that expect, encourage, and support inclusive practices establish equitable learning environments for all students.



Multi-Tiered System of Supports

Currently implemented in thousands of schools, a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is a proactive and preventative framework used to support students' academic, social, and behavioral success. The Unified Champion Schools strategy supports MTSS by providing meaningful opportunities for students to learn, work, and play together across the school setting. It engages all students in a learning and social environment which is caring, equitable and inclusive. Culturally responsive strategies, differentiated instruction, and positive behavioral supports are embedded in UCS activities and establish inclusion as a core value across school settings.

School Connectedness

School connectedness is an important factor in student success and well-being. Students who feel they belong and are valued contributors to the community are more likely to attend school, have higher grades and test scores, and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors and harmful activities such as bullying.⁷ Practices that **promote school connectedness** are incorporated in the Unified Champion Schools strategy by providing opportunities for all students to engage in meaningful school-based activities.

Physical Health and Emotional Well-Being

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services suggests that regular physical activity has a number of benefits to **overall physical health as well as the emotional well-being of adolescents** such as the reduction of anxiety and stress and improvements in self-esteem.⁸ Unified Sports extends the opportunities for all students to be actively engaged in a variety of sports and physical activities which provide both physical and socio-emotional benefits.

Why is the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Program Needed?

"...Now that it's year after year, the freshmen that are coming into it, they're seeing it, so it's becoming a part of the school's culture."

– Teacher

"We've moved beyond thinking about students without disabilities 'helping' those with disabilities. Now we understand that this is about real friendships in and out of school."

– Administrator

"We're capable of doing anything, because we're special education coming together with students not in special education."

– Student with a disability

"I noticed that things have changed around the school, kids became more considerate, they watch what they say, and are accepting of kids with ID. They sit at their tables and talk to them."

– Student without a disability

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools strategy promotes a socially inclusive school climate where acceptance, respect, and human dignity for all students is the norm. As the data below demonstrates, a Unified Champion School equitably supports students with and without intellectual disabilities and fosters meaningful opportunities for every student to contribute.

With Unified Champion Schools programming, students without disabilities hold more positive attitudes toward their peers with intellectual disabilities, are more tolerant, and realize the impact their words and actions have on others.^{9, 10, 11}

Socially inclusive school and classroom climates are more evident where students with disabilities feel welcome, are routinely included in and feel they are a valued part of all activities, opportunities, and functions.¹²

Extensive evaluation of the Unified Champion Schools strategy has revealed the following positive impacts: ^{9, 10, 11}

84%

of students generally regard participation in the program as a positive turning point in their lives.

97%

of high school seniors say that Unified Champion Schools activities are changing their school for the better.

71%

of students with and without intellectual disabilities remained in contact with students with disabilities who they met through their school's inclusive programming after graduation.

87%

of students report learning that standing up for something they believe in is the right thing to do.

85%

of students report learning how their emotions and attitudes can affect others.

For the most recent data for Unified Champion Schools, visit Special Olympics [Outreach & Messaging webpage](#).

Evaluations conducted by the Center for Social Development and Education University of Massachusetts Boston, 2021

How Does the Special Olympics Unified Champion School® Strategy Work?

The strategy is designed to be woven into the fabric of the school, enhancing current efforts and providing rich opportunities that lead to meaningful change in creating a socially inclusive school that supports and engages all learners. What a Unified Champion School “looks like” can vary greatly from school to school, based on the needs, goals, schedules and other factors unique to each school; but the basic building blocks remain the same.

A Unified Champion School program implements **3 specific components**, all of which are intertwined with the others in a cohesive effort to increase social inclusion throughout the school. Those components are:



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1 Special Olympics Unified Sports®:

Fully inclusive sports and fitness activities that bring together people with intellectual disabilities and those without intellectual disabilities for training and competition. Examples include: Interscholastic Unified Sports, Unified Physical Education, or Unified Fitness. These activities occur throughout the school year with the support of a trained adult coach and include opportunities for competition or exhibition.

2 Inclusive Youth Leadership: Students with and without intellectual disabilities work together to lead awareness, advocacy, inclusion, and other Special Olympics activities throughout the school year. Examples include: Unified Clubs and inclusive student organizations and groups like Student Council. The clubs are supported by a trained adult liaison and offer leadership opportunities and training.

3 Whole School Engagement: Awareness and education activities that promote inclusion and reach the majority of the school population. Examples include: Spread the Word campaigns, Fans in the Stands for Unified teams, and student fundraising. Students with and without intellectual disabilities plan and lead the events with the support of adults in the school.



Inclusion Tip

In working toward becoming a socially inclusive school, it is important for the entire school community to remember that all students are peers first. The subgroups to which they belong are secondary to their status as peers, deserving of an equitably welcoming, nurturing and accepting school environment.

Words of wisdom often shared by youth leaders engaged in Special Olympics are, *“Nothing about us without us.”*

By offering a combination of Unified Sports, inclusive youth leadership opportunities, and a variety of activities that engage students throughout the school, Unified Champion Schools model build a socially inclusive school community.

We know that effective change does not happen unless it is done with intentionality, adheres to a shared vision for the process and outcomes, and is guided by a team of leaders who strategically move the school community forward in changing the policies and practices necessary to support the work. Therefore, rather than a strictly

prescriptive approach, we envision the direction and implementation of the strategy to be determined by the school.

An intergenerational Unified Champion Schools programming leadership team should be in place to ensure efforts are thoughtfully planned, guided by shared goals, collaboratively led, and intentionally implemented to support the priorities of the school. This team creates school-wide change by engaging adults and students with and without intellectual disabilities to share their perspectives, interpretations, and strengths.

Creating a socially inclusive school is a process of building a school culture that encourages, supports, and expects social inclusion. Not every activity will incorporate all three components, and not every activity will engage all students. However, implementing all three components in combination and individually, and offering students multiple opportunities to participate, creates the conditions for greatest impact.

The graphic below provides an example of how the 3 components can be woven together in becoming a Unified Champion School program.



Example of the 3 components within a fitness club:

Students with and without intellectual disabilities organize a Unified fitness club. The club meets weekly to complete health and fitness activities together (Unified Sports.) The members of the club plan and lead (inclusive youth leadership) quarterly fitness challenges for the whole school (whole school engagement), including competitions between grade levels to see which grade's students get the most steps and stations during the school's inclusive field day.

Picture of a Special Olympics Unified Champion School®



As you enter the campus, you can tell there is something special about this school. The sign outside welcomes everyone and highlights the successes of all students:

**CONGRATULATIONS to
our Unified Basketball Team
for winning the
District Unified Basketball
Tournament!**

As you walk through the front door of the school, the positive atmosphere speaks volumes. Students and adults are greeting each other and chatting, welcoming visitors to the school with a smile. The walls and bulletin boards are filled with diverse student work and posters highlighting inclusive clubs and activities, and a banner stating, “Special Olympics Unified Champion School,” has an honored place in the entry hall. The trophy case includes pictures, trophies, ribbons, newspaper articles, and school letters celebrating a wide variety of sports opportunities, including Unified Sports and

student participation in inclusive state competitions, Special Olympics competitions, intramurals, and interscholastic sports achievements.

All visitors are escorted around the school by an inclusive pair—one student with a disability and one without. It is obvious that these students are proud of their school and the way that everyone is engaged. They walk you through the hallways and explain how the Unified Club functions. With great pride, they explain that this has become the most popular club in the school; so popular, in fact, that they had to create a second club so that everyone had the opportunity to be actively engaged.

They shared that this year, the Unified Club worked with the school’s cheerleaders to ensure there are pep rallies for every sport, including Unified Sports,



Picture of a Special Olympics Unified Champion School®

and a cheering section at all school competitions. The Unified Club and cheerleaders also created a “Wall of Fame” to recognize Special Olympics athletes participating in regional or state competitions.

The members of the Unified Club focused on making the lunchroom a welcoming place by ensuring the walls are filled with a diverse collection of art and announcements of inclusive activities. They also organized activities to get students interacting (including a very competitive bocce tournament), have students volunteer to welcome students and visitors as they enter the cafeteria, and to be in charge of seating options to make sure that everyone has a place to sit and someone to talk with.

Student opportunities for inclusion are not limited to Unified Sports and the Unified Club. Last year, the members of the Student Council approached the principal and their teacher-sponsor to revise the selection process and membership guidelines so that the Student Council accurately reflects the entire student body. They also worked with members of the Unified teams and the Unified Club to plan a welcome program for 9th graders which focused on inclusion at the high school.

As you continue your tour through the school, you see a small, inclusive group of students in a language arts classroom collaborating on an op-ed for the local newspaper about inclusion in the community. Your tour guides point out the ongoing Unified bocce competition in the cafeteria during lunch and share that they both compete on the Unified Track team.

Before you leave the school, the principal invites you to the School Improvement team meeting where they will be discussing the upcoming school wide Spread the Word campaign. The students on the

team present the themes and the agenda for the week along with a draft communication to teachers about what to expect. Later the PTA Booster Club representative shares fundraising news that includes new uniforms for several teams including the Unified basketball team. Finally, the team reviews the most recent results from their use of the Social Inclusion Scale assessment to gain a better understanding of student perceptions of inclusion in the school. A small group which includes one of the Unified pairs



on the team takes on the task of sharing the results with the school community, and the whole team discusses how the results inform their next steps to improve school climate.

As you exit the school, you leave with a smile on your face and many stories to share with others. It is clear that this is a school that fully embraces social inclusion and is creating a school environment where all students are engaged and successful. It is truly a Unified Champion School! ■

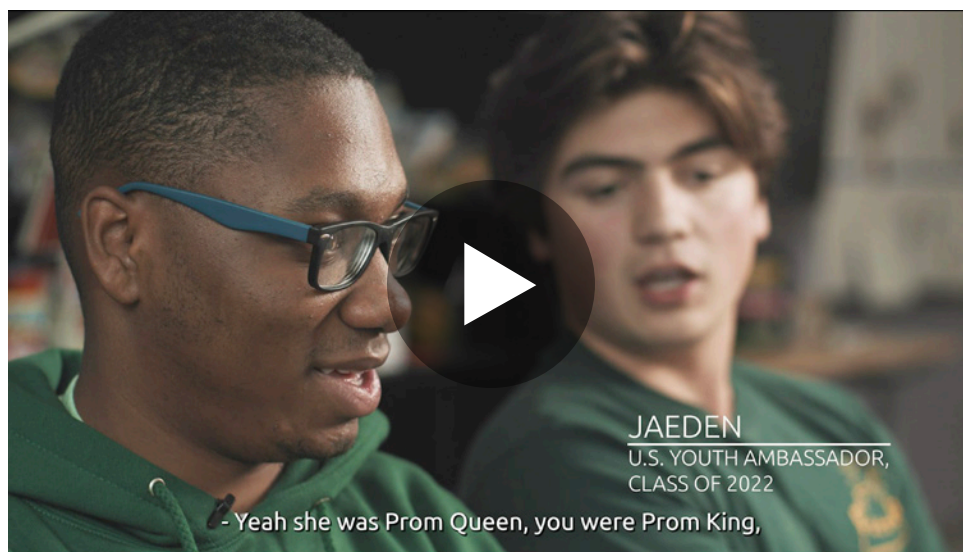
Learn More about the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Program

Unified Champion Schools Success Stories

Each of the videos featured here profiles how students and adults in high schools across the country have implemented the Unified Champion Schools strategy. Each looks a little different, but each is a committed, socially inclusive school.

You have read about the components that make up a Unified Champion School. One important characteristic of the strategy is that the components, and activities that make up each component, can be configured in a variety of ways to reflect the characteristics of the school and specific needs and ideas of the students. In other areas of the Playbook, possible activities or structures have been identified to assist with the initial implementation of supporting strategies.

However, the implementation of the Unified Champion Schools strategy can vary from school to school, and will likely expand and change over time as a school strives to meet its strategic goals of social inclusion. The longer the students and adults work to create a tolerant, supportive, and respectful school climate, the more ideas they will identify to make their school more inclusive. So, a hundred or a thousand schools can be designated Unified Champion Schools, but each can look slightly different as staff and students work to meet the specific needs of the school and students.



Service High School, Alaska

“Something is different here.”

There’s a strong feeling of community when you walk the halls of Service High School in Anchorage, Alaska, a Unified Champion City School. The students, educators, and parents embrace a culture of inclusivity. That culture is felt in programs like Partners Club, a social inclusion group for students with and without intellectual disabilities. As one teacher puts it, “Schools are a microcosm of the real world.” Because of their inclusive environment, students at Service are equipped to thrive—in high school and well beyond.

Learn More about the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Program

Taylor Alderdice High School, Pennsylvania

The Unified Champion Schools strategy is improving school climate and strengthening community in city schools nationwide. Journey to Taylor Alderdice High School in Pittsburgh, PA and meet the wonderful educators, supportive coaches, and exceptional students bringing inclusion to the halls and classrooms.



“Being a Unified Champion School, each year we see kids develop relationships with other peers that they would not have had.”

– Jennifer, Teacher

Learn More about the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Program



UNIFIED BEGINNING Hendrickson High School, Texas

Hendrickson High School in Texas is a 2019 ESPN Top 5 Special Olympics Unified Champion School, which is an impressive title to achieve. This school is filled with support from students and school administration. In this video, hear from the Hendrickson community. They share why Unified has become an integral part of their culture.

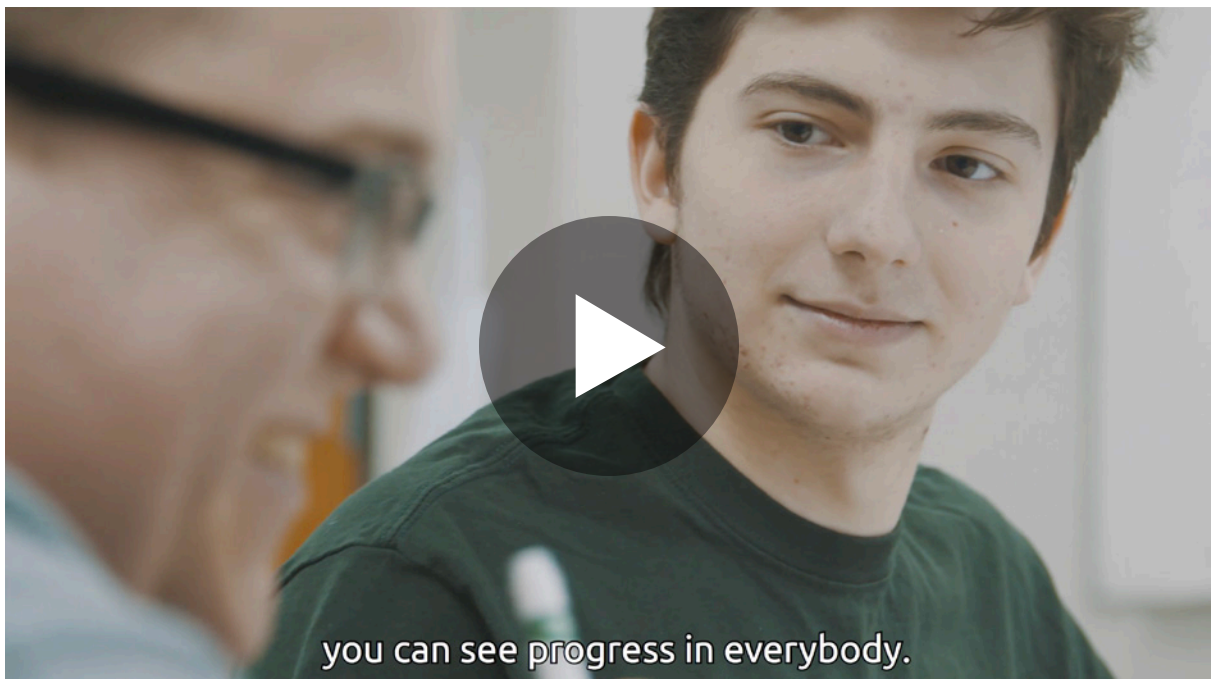
**“Look at what young people can do
when you get out of their way.”**

– Daniel, Principal

Learn More about the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Program

Ponaganset High School, Rhode Island

It takes a lot of work to be a Special Olympics national banner school. To do this, a school must meet the 10 standards of excellence. A great example is Ponaganset High School in Rhode Island, which created the Inclusion Pledge during the 50th anniversary of Special Olympics. Since then, the pledge has been taken around the world by supporters.



“ It has definitely changed my outlook on how I view everyone. It’s made me more accepting to everyone I meet.”

– Rylee, Student

Learn More about the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Program



Mead High School, Colorado

Mead High in Longmont, Colorado implements the Unified Champion Schools model. The school has grown exponentially over the decade since it opened. With that growth came more Unified programming. The film centers on Noah, a student with intellectual disabilities who has been able to find his place through sports, friendships, and an improved school climate.

**“You know for the first time,
I feel like my kid is actually
part of a school, and this is
because of Unified Sports.”**

– Michelle, Parent

Getting Started with Your Leadership Team

Research has reinforced the power of a leadership team, identifying that schools with inclusive leadership teams more actively implement the Unified Champion Schools strategy.

According to annual evaluations by the Center for Social Development and Education at the University of Massachusetts Boston, schools that had an inclusive leadership team:

- Were able to implement more robust programming.
- Reported more community involvement.
- Provided increased opportunities for general and special education teachers to work together.
- Tended to be more confident in the sustainability of their program.

Intergenerational Leadership

The Unified Champion Schools program leadership team should be **intergenerational**.

The goal of the intergenerational approach to leadership is for young people and adults to share in and benefit from each other's experiences and perspectives, and be open to learning from each other.

It is important for adults to provide space for young people to lead, **as at this age, students are just beginning to perceive themselves as leaders and express their need for freedom in certain areas of decision making.**

Leadership teams are responsible for:

- Establishing the vision and goals for the school.
- Guiding stages of implementation.
- Ensuring fidelity to quality through consistent monitoring.

Adults as Allies for Young Adolescents

Students are not simply the recipients of programming, but rather the architects of lasting change.



Adult allies modeling the way:

- Understand their personal leadership styles to model the attitudes, skills, and effort required for effective leadership.
- Create and provide opportunities to empower and engage youth, based on individual strengths.

Adult allies changing the process:

- Ask probing questions that allow young people to generate their own ideas.
- Utilize a variety of group protocols.
- Model how groups work together equitably.

Adult allies encouraging the heart:

- Facilitate reflection in a safe environment.
- Take time to celebrate success.

Adult allies inspiring a shared vision:

- Support difficult conversations.
- Build meaningful relationships with others to advance accessibility.
- Ask questions to seek clarity.
- Understand how youth communicate.
- Help youth identify how body language, tone, and other elements play into communication.

Adult allies inspiring others:

- Identify and promote skills of each student.
- Make adjustments so students of all learning styles can engage.
- Ask other adults to participate.
- Assess their own professional development.

6 Steps to Get Your Leadership Team Started

Step 1 RECRUIT TEAM MEMBERS

The leadership team responsible for Unified Champion Schools® programming should strive to include all of the following:

- Students with and without intellectual disabilities (3-4 students depending on the size of the school).
- Students from different social and academic groups including those who may not typically be selected to be a leader.
- Teachers (both special and general education).
- Parents of students with and without intellectual disabilities, who preferably are not also a teacher.
- At least 1 administrator or additional staff member with the ability to commit time and resources to the work.

Step 2 BUILD THE TEAM'S CAPACITY

Make a plan and take the time you need to make sure everyone understands why the team has been created, why it is intergenerational, and what each member can contribute. Spend time learning about the Unified Champion Schools strategy and discuss how it can improve your school. Consider what you hope to accomplish through intergenerational leadership.

To create a true collaboration between young people and adults, the following questions need to be answered at the beginning:

- What resources need to be shifted?
- How will skills be developed?
- How do adults integrate and support youth across the full range of work rather than in isolated programs or committee settings?

Step 3 ANALYZE THE LANDSCAPE

Before starting the work, take time to reflect and consider how implementing Unified Champion Schools programming will be received by others in

the school. This can help you plan accordingly. Think about or discuss:

- Who in the school is already a supporter of this?
- Who is unsure of this programming?
- Who may oppose this programming?

Reflecting on others' perceptions can help determine future partners or potential barriers.

Additionally, it's a good idea to brainstorm what resources are available and could support your work. Make sure you decide:

- Where will you meet as a team?
- What will your meetings look like and how will they run?

These small and large questions are important to address early on so your meetings will run smoothly.

REACHING THE ATYPICAL LEADER

Intentionally recruit students who may not immediately come to mind as leaders, such as students with disabilities or a disengaged learner. This is a critical step in assembling an effective leadership team that understands the school experience from multiple perspectives. It can be difficult to reach the atypical leader, so use a variety of strategies to identify students to participate:

- Give a short presentation about social inclusion to each grade level to spark interest.
- Invite students to nominate themselves or others.
- Ask someone who has a relationship with the individual to extend a personal invitation.
- Intentionally identify students who are not currently involved in school activities.

Step 4 FIND YOUR STARTING POINT

Before you can plan and prepare for implementation of the Unified Champion Schools strategy, it is important for the leadership team to consider how socially inclusive the school is currently. This will help the team prioritize goals and first steps, and serve as a baseline for measuring progress. This playbook offers 2 ways to gather baseline data:

- A) Complete the **Characteristics of Socially Inclusive School (CSIS) Assessment** and/or
- B) Survey the school community using the **Social Inclusion Scale**

A. Characteristics of Socially Inclusive Schools (CSIS) Assessment

The CSIS Assessment is based on 7 key elements of socially inclusive learning environments. Each element (or characteristic) has equal importance to the success of efforts to promote social inclusion.

The **7 elements (or characteristics)** are categorized into broad functions as **Core Processes** and **Operational Processes**. (See chart below.)

Members of the leadership team complete the **CSIS Assessment** (downloadable at the [High School Playbook webpage](#)) individually based on their own experiences. Then the team comes

together to discuss the items and work to come to a consensus on the current status of that item specifically, and social inclusion overall in the school. This tool can be particularly useful in identifying differences in the perspectives of various members of the team. Be sure to honor those differences and use them to identify when, how, and where social inclusion happens or not.

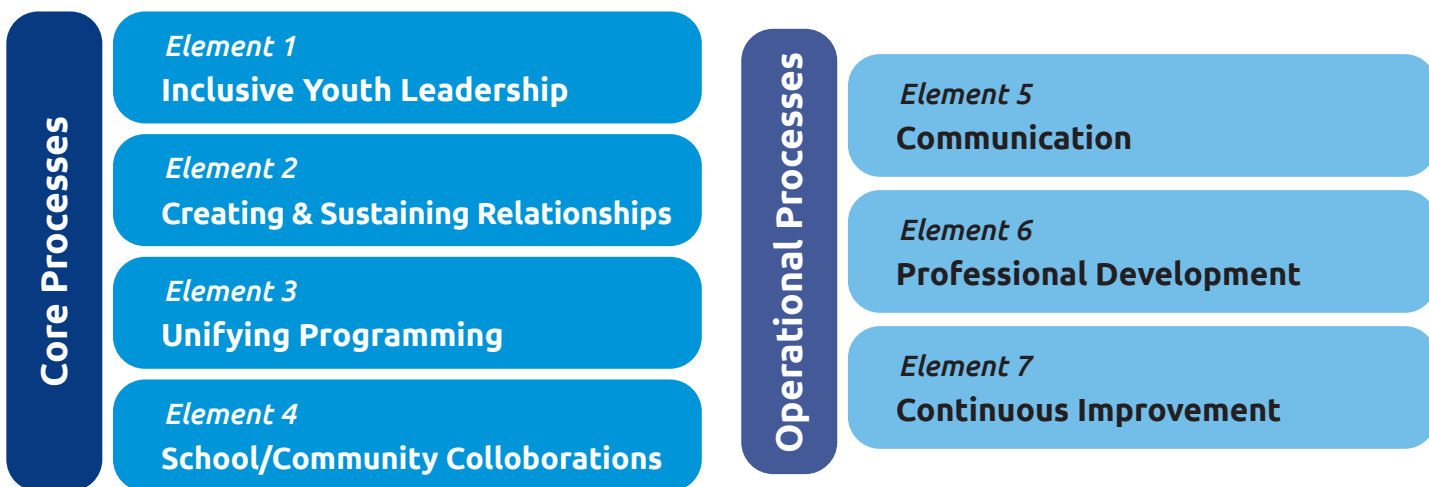
B. Social Inclusion Scale

The leadership team may want to gather additional data from the wider student body, parents, teachers, staff, and administrators. The **Social Inclusion Scale** may be used for this purpose and can be downloaded at the [High School Playbook webpage](#).

Although you do not have to gather data from every member of the school community, it is essential to gather a random sample of students with and without intellectual disabilities, parents of students with and without intellectual disabilities, general and special educators, all across different grade levels.

Once the leadership team has gathered the results, take time to cross check the perceptions of team members with those of the wider community.

7 Key Elements of Socially Inclusive Learning Environments



Step 5 ESTABLISH A PLAN AND TAKE ACTION

Based on what you discover in your assessments, work as a team to develop a strategic plan. The plan will identify priorities, strategies and outcomes to guide the leadership team and others toward your vision. Map out your goals and make sure they work with and support each other and school priorities overall. Develop action steps that lead toward your intended outcomes. A framework for creating a **Strategic Action Plan** for your Unified Champion Schools programming can be downloaded at the [High School Playbook webpage](#).

Step 6 CONDUCT PROGRESS MONITORING AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

As the leadership team engages others and facilitates implementation of the 3 components (Unified Sports, inclusive youth leadership, and whole school engagement), great things are sure to happen in your school. Collect data and stories to measure progress and identify areas for continuous improvement. The **Social Inclusion Rubric**, included with the **CSIS Assessment** found at the [High School Playbook webpage](#), can help you identify the data points you want to track.

The rubric provides a picture of a school's social inclusiveness. This information can be used to expand and enhance implementation of the three components. It can also help schools identify new and exciting strategies for improvement.



Download these resources to get started by going to the [High School Playbook webpage](#)

- CSIS Assessment
- Social Inclusion Scale
- Social Inclusion Rubric

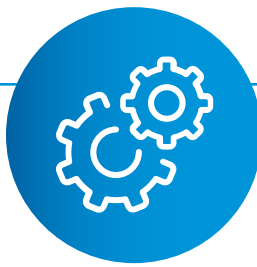


Youth Leadership Tip

It is important to remember to adequately prepare youth for an active role on the leadership team.

Be sure to intentionally develop their leadership skills through:

- Ensuring they understand each task the team encounters.
- Meaningfully engaging them in ongoing discussions.
- Providing them with opportunities to take leadership in carrying out appropriate tasks.
- Nurturing progress within each student.



An Introduction to Intergenerational Work



Intergenerational work is neither about young people nor adults, and it is not about the balance between the generations. Rather, it is a change strategy focused on the belief that different generations bring critical perspectives, skills, and relationships to the work of any group. It is the belief that to achieve common goals, we all need to work together.

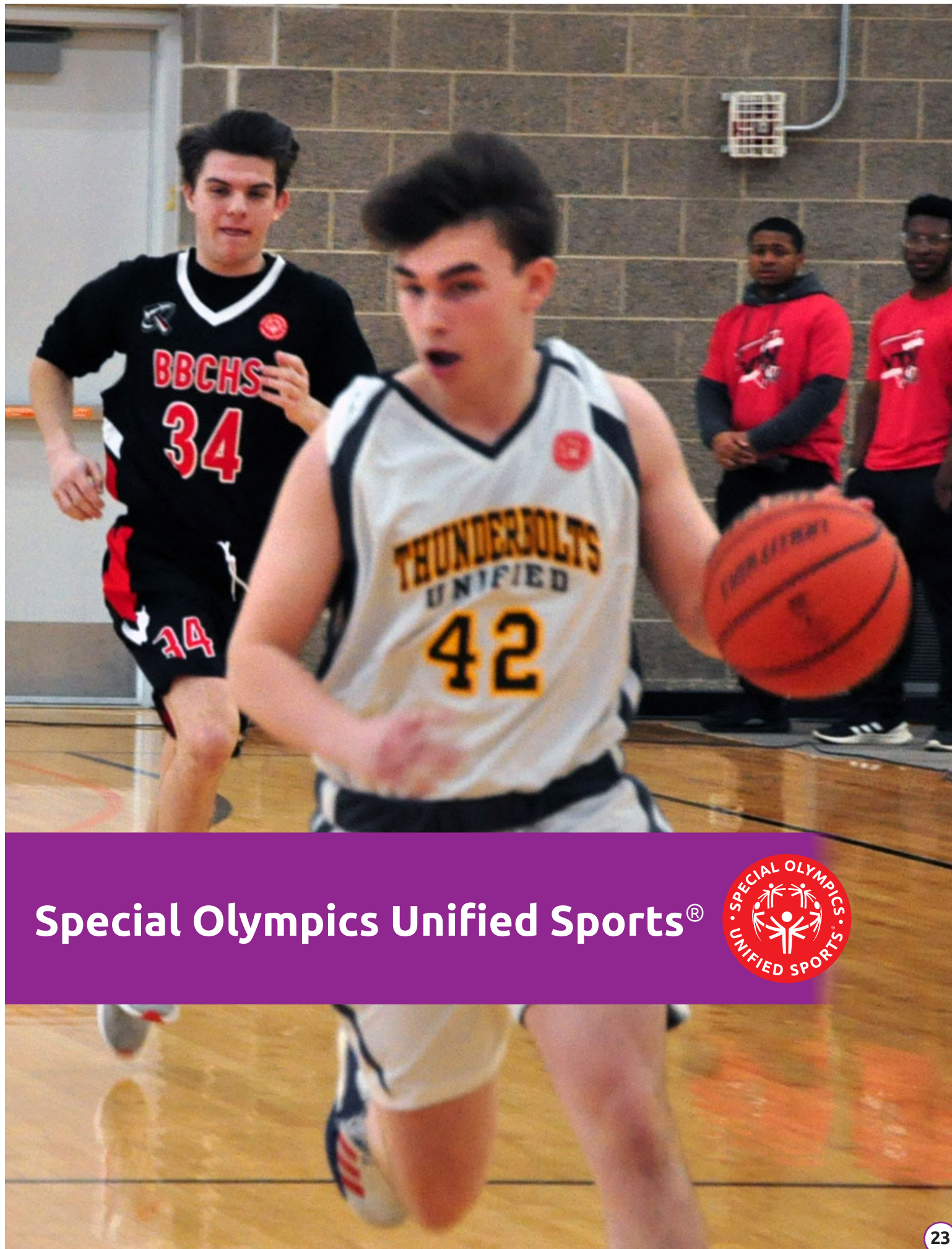
Keys to Intergenerational Work

- A goal is identified that neither adults nor young people can achieve on their own.
- Nurturing the development of effective, empowered young people is a strategy for achieving goals.
- Effective, empowered adults share decision-making authority, and they support and create space for young people to lead (because it is a good strategy to achieve goals, not because it is a nice thing to do).
- Youth and adults form a team with differing and complementary skills, networks, perspectives and opportunities to lead.
- Both youth and adults share responsibility and accountability for the work and achieving.



Helpful Resources

More information on how adults can effectively nurture inclusive youth leadership can be found in the **Inclusive Youth Leadership Guide** at the [Playbook Resources webpage](#)



Special Olympics Unified Sports®





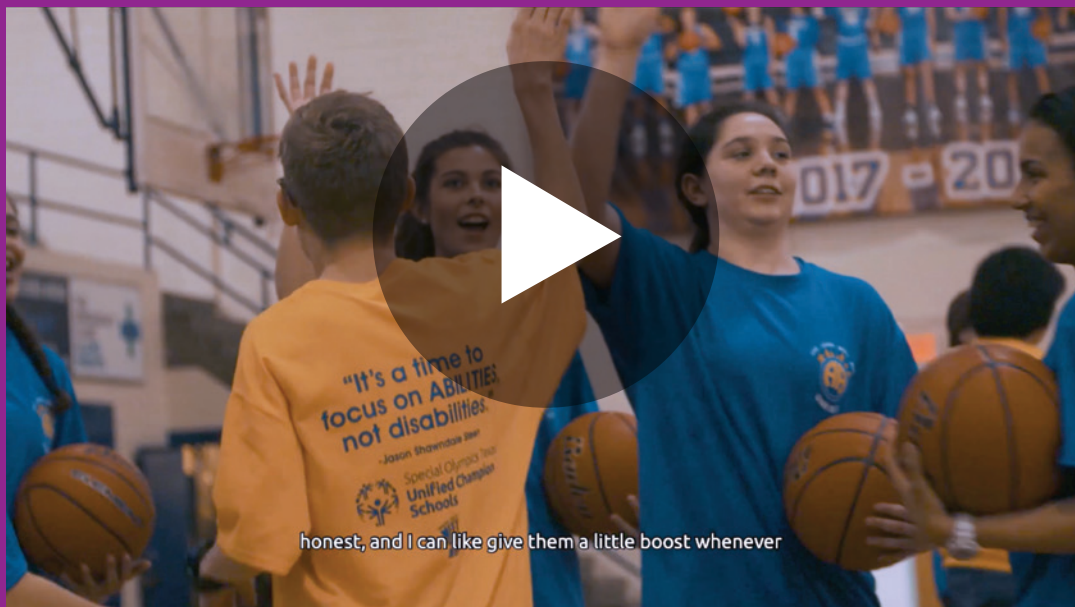
An Introduction to Special Olympics Unified Sports®

Special Olympics Unified Sports provide students with and without intellectual disabilities opportunities to meaningfully participate in sports activities together.

Unified Sports is an important component because it:

- **Provides valuable social inclusion** opportunities for all teammates to build friendships, on and off the playing field.
- **Integrates athletes with and without intellectual disabilities** in a setting where all are encouraged to improve their skills and become physically fit.
- **Prepares students for participation** in other school activities or community sports programs.
- **Strengthens self-esteem and confidence** as students take on leadership roles and activities.
- **Models genuine inclusion** for the entire school community.
- **Increases community awareness** of the spirit and skills of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Learn more by watching this Inclusion Weekly mini-series video:





Goals of Unified Sports

- **Friendship and Socialization**
Participation in Unified Sports provides a forum for positive social interaction between teammates and often leads to long-lasting friendships.
- **Meaningful Inclusion**
All teammates play important, meaningful, and valued roles on the team.
- **Sport Skills Development**
Students develop sports skills to enable them to compete with greater proficiency and develop physical fitness.
- **Competition Experience**
Students with and without intellectual disabilities benefit from physical and mental challenges by participating in a variety of competitive and non-competitive environments.

What is the Principle of Meaningful Involvement?

The principle of meaningful involvement is the most important foundational philosophy when developing inclusive school sports and activities. Students are provided a sports environment that ensures every player is given multiple opportunities throughout the school year to develop and demonstrate their unique skills and qualities.

Indicators of Meaningful Involvement:

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

Meaningful Involvement is *not* achieved when some team members:

- Display superior sports skills without involving their teammates.
- 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.



Unified Sports Styles of Play



There are 3 basic styles of play of Special Olympics Unified Sports. It is up to each school to choose which style or combination of styles will be most beneficial for their students. These models provide a framework for guiding implementation within each school, offering a variety of Unified Sports options for students:

Competitive

- Students with and without intellectual disabilities train and compete on the same team.
- All teammates should be of similar age and ability levels.
- Teams adhere to training, competition, and team composition requirements.
- School-based teams often compete within an interscholastic athletic league, an intramural setting, or through Special Olympics tournaments.
- Teams compete without rules modifications.

Player Development

- Students of higher abilities serve as mentors, assisting teammates of lower abilities in developing sport-specific skills and tactics.
- All teammates should be of similar age.
- There is a non-competitive, cooperative team environment.

Recreation

- This is the most flexible styles of play because it does not follow any prescribed training or team composition requirements.
- Recreational sports opportunities are offered within a non-competitive realm.
- Recreation typically takes place solely on school property and does not advance into competitions.
- Examples of Unified Recreation activities in schools include Unified PE, Unified Fitness, and Unified Field Day.

Why Do Schools Need Unified Sports?

In January 2013, "...Office for Civil Rights issues guidance detailing school districts' legal obligations to provide students with disabilities equal access to athletics activities. The guidance letter clarifies existing law and encourages school districts to improve and expand upon athletic opportunities for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities have the right, under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, to equal opportunity to participate in their schools' extracurricular activities. ..."



U.S. Office of Special
Education Programs





Track & Field



Basketball



Bocce



Skiing



Bowling



Softball



Flag Football



Soccer



Floor Hockey



Handball



Golf

Types of Unified Sports

As you can see from this figure, there is a wide variety of sports that can be implemented at a middle school. Each State Special Olympics Program offers different sports depending on geographic locations (e.g., snowshoeing), age appropriateness, and interest levels. Some will be easier to implement within your middle school than others, but many will be appropriate for your intramural programs and some will fit into an interscholastic program if you have Unified Sports competitions with other middle schools. If your school wants to include a Unified Sports team under the competitive style of play, check with your State Special Olympics Program to determine which sports are supported in your state.

Implementing Special Olympics Unified Sports®

The 1st step to starting a Unified Sports opportunity in your school typically is to have a planning meeting with your school's Unified Champion Schools® program leadership team and/or your Unified Club. You may also want to invite a Special Olympics staff member to the meeting.



As you work through the implementation of Unified Sports in your school, be sure students are engaged as co-leaders throughout the process. Each step in answering the questions and completing the checklists found below will be completed by youth, youth and adults working together, or adults as appropriate for your particular school environment.

Topics to discuss with the Unified Champion Schools Program Leadership Team

- Which Unified Sports style(s) of play (Competitive, Player Development, or Recreation) is most appropriate for the students in our school?
- Which sports are of greatest interest to the students with and without intellectual disabilities?
- Which school-based Unified Sports are offered by our State Special Olympics Program?
- Which sport(s) will allow for the most meaningful participation opportunities for students? Are there any existing clubs, teams, classes, or school groups that might be interested in planning and leading a Unified Sports opportunity? The sport(s) we select will determine which students can participate and how many.
- What types of Unified Sports activities does our school need/want to incorporate?
- How will we work with our State Special Olympics Program?
- Where do we already have formal and informal opportunities for students to understand and begin to incorporate social inclusion?
- How will our coaches be trained?
- How does the principle of meaningful involvement impact the type of sports activities that are implemented and how they are presented?
- Who will be the adult advisor/coordinator for various activities?
- Other things to consider:
 - Which sports facilities will we be able to use and when?
 - What paperwork is required for participants?
 - How will transportation be arranged, if needed?

Enhancing Special Olympics Unified Sports®

Social inclusion efforts like Unified Sports will have a greater impact and be more sustainable when they are connected to other initiatives and goals of the school. Other strategies for enhancing the impact of the Unified Sports experience and increasing positive impacts throughout the school include:

- Recognizing Unified Sports teams (both intramural and interscholastic) in the same ways as other teams in the school (e.g., pep rallies, morning announcements).
- Encouraging Unified Sports teammates to wear their jerseys, team T-shirts, or other team attire before or after a competition so they can be seen and acknowledged by all classmates during the school day.
- Holding inclusive post-game celebrations to build team cohesion and deeper social connections.
- Holding a fun, inclusive sport activity such as a kickball game, yoga, or inclusive walking as part of Unified Sports Recreation opportunities for other members of the school to experience Unified Sports.
- Considering some type of culminating competition, celebration, or recognition within each season.

Integration of the 3 Components Through the Lens of Special Olympics Unified Sports®

Through the styles of play described earlier (Competitive, Player Development, Recreation), schools are able to provide important Unified Sports experiences that work in tandem with whole school engagement and inclusive youth leadership. Examples of this integration include young adolescents working together to initiate a Unified Sports day for the whole school, or working with the physical education teacher to create inclusive sport and recreation opportunities within the school day (e.g., a bocce tournament). The following are examples of how the 3 components can be integrated with an **emphasis on Unified Sports**.



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**



EXAMPLE ACTIVITY	Unified Sports	Inclusive Youth Leadership	Whole School Engagement
The Unified bocce team hosts a series of instructional sessions during lunch to offer students an opportunity to learn how to play.	✓	✓	✓
After the intramural flag football season ends, the Unified Sports teams join together to host a celebration and awards banquet to honor everyone who supported the teams.	✓	✓	
Students with and without intellectual disabilities on the Unified Sports intramural ski team organize and speak at an assembly about student collaboration to enhance each other's skills.	✓	✓	✓
Members of the Unified soccer team lead a week long sports camp for elementary students with and without intellectual disabilities to develop soccer skills.	✓	✓	
The fall homecoming pep rally includes teammates from the varsity, junior varsity and Unified teams.	✓		✓
The Unified PE classes work together to host a Unified Sports Day focused on one of the sports they've studied each quarter.	✓	✓	✓



Tips for Success: Special Olympics Unified Sports®

- Integrate Unified Sports into the physical education curriculum.
- Ensure Unified Sports is recognized as an official school sport, activity, and club on campus.
- Reduce costs by using the same uniforms across sports and grade levels, where appropriate. Purchase a single set of uniforms that can be used for multiple sports year after year, and share school equipment for Unified Sports teams when possible.
- Work with the Unified Club and/or Athletics Boosters to raise funds for the Unified Sports program.
- Get key Unified Sports expenses, such as transportation or coach stipends, included within the annual school budget.
- Mentor younger students in leadership roles to help ensure the program will continue after older students graduate.
- Start Fans in the Stands to share the excitement of Unified Sports with the entire school and local community.



Unified Sports Coach Guidelines

- Have the necessary knowledge.
- Complete Unified Sports coach's training.
- Select the team members at the appropriate age and ability level to ensure full participation.
- Be a non-playing head coach.
- Commit to regular practice sessions.
- Coach everyone using individualized approaches.
- Nurture and expect teamwork from all players.



↓ Download these Unified Sports Checklists
to help get you started:

[High School Playbook Resources](#)

- Unified Sports Action Plan
- Checklist for Unified Sports Competitive & Player Development Styles
- Checklist for Unified Sports Recreation Style
- Checklist for Unified Sports Day or Unified Sports Festival



Inclusion Tip

Certain Unified Sports (e.g., track and field, bocce, bowling) do not require ability matching, which allows students of any ability level to participate. Schools should note, however, that data has shown **individual** sports provide **less** inclusive personal relationship building than team sports.



Inclusive Youth Leadership

SPREAD
THE WORD
INCLUSION



An Introduction to Inclusive Youth Leadership



The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® strategy offers opportunities for young people of all abilities to be leaders in designing and implementing classroom and extracurricular activities that promote equality and acceptance and, ultimately, create socially inclusive school climates. The inclusive youth leadership component intentionally blends opportunities for students with and without intellectual disabilities across the whole school engagement and Unified Sports components to advance social inclusion in the school.

Inclusive youth leadership is a unique and important component because it:

- Recognizes the leadership assets and values that all students possess and can use to contribute meaningfully to the school community.
- Provides students with and without intellectual disabilities the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to take on leadership roles in their school, creating an environment in which socially inclusive opportunities can thrive.
- Offers opportunities for all students to become leaders, developing an understanding that students of varying abilities and backgrounds can lead.
- Encourages intergenerational leadership opportunities that promote a deeper understanding of the strengths, gifts, and skills of all students as co-leaders with adults.
- Guides administrators and teachers in incorporating the vision and insight of youth as they step into leadership positions and create inclusive environments in their schools.
- Offers teachers a greater understanding and appreciation for the viability and value of increased social inclusion in their classrooms leading to greater opportunities for students with different abilities to collaborate on classroom and academic projects.



Opportunities to nurture youth leadership

abound in any high school. Ensuring that various leadership roles are inclusive and accessible to all students with a variety of skills, abilities, and perspectives will greatly enhance efforts to create and sustain change. Possibilities might include a student-led effort to form a Unified Sports team, initiating a Unified Club comprised of students with and without intellectual disabilities, working to intentionally include a diverse group of students within existing clubs, or engaging non-traditional leaders in school and classroom decision-making.

Inclusive youth leadership offers opportunities for young people of all abilities to be leaders in their schools and communities by promoting equity and acceptance. These leadership activities help students find their voices by teaching them to become change agents, striving for respect and inclusion. Social inclusion is best fostered when activities for classrooms, for the whole school, and within extracurricular and community contexts are designed and implemented by a diverse group of students within a school.



Helpful Resources

Guidance and activities for youth to develop inclusive leadership skills can be found in the **Inclusive Youth Leadership Activities** downloadable at [Playbook Resources webpage](#)



Goals of Inclusive Youth Leadership

- Young people representing the diversity of the student body are engaged in leadership positions, and school staff members identify youth leadership as a priority for the school.
- Youth with and without intellectual disabilities become co-leaders in their schools, serving as catalysts for change. This is imperative in moving beyond having some students identified as the “helpers” while students with intellectual disabilities are considered the “helped”. Co-leadership is a strengths-based model where all students have equitable opportunities to contribute to their school community in meaningful ways.
- Administrators and teachers actively support the vision and insight of youth as they step into leadership positions and create inclusive environments in their schools.
- Teachers gain a greater appreciation of the ability of a wide range of students to take leadership roles and for the viability and value of providing opportunities for students with different learning abilities to collaborate on classroom and academic projects.
- Youth with and without intellectual disabilities develop inclusive mindsets and behaviors. They become advocates for themselves and their peers.
- Policymakers and education leaders develop policies and support quality practices to encourage inclusive school climates that are safe and nurturing learning environments for all students.

What is the Principle of Meaningful Involvement in Inclusive Youth Leadership?

The principle of meaningful involvement provides an important foundation for students with and without intellectual disabilities to have leadership opportunities through Unified Champion Schools® activities.

Indicators of Meaningful Involvement:

- All students have the ability and opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the success and well-being of the school community.
- Students with and without intellectual disabilities are intentionally engaged in inclusive leadership roles in formal and informal settings.
- Youth and adults work collaboratively to enhance the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of each individual.

Meaningful involvement is *not* achieved when:

- Some students serve as “helpers” while others are always the “helped.”
- Peers with and without intellectual disabilities are not involved in equitable ways.
- Students without intellectual disabilities take control of most decisions and leadership activities.
- Only students without intellectual disabilities receive leadership training.



Youth Leadership Tip

Watch for both formal and informal opportunities for students with and without intellectual disabilities to take an active leadership role. Sometimes adults take control of decisions simply because it's faster and easier.

Practice the guideline:

Always be looking for times adults can step back and let young people lead.

Implementing Inclusive Youth Leadership

The 1st step to starting inclusive youth leadership in your school is typically to have a planning meeting with your school's Unified Champion Schools® program leadership team.



Topics to discuss with the Unified Champion Schools Program Leadership Team

- What types of inclusive youth leadership opportunities do we need/want to offer?
- Where do we already have formal and informal leadership opportunities for students? Are these inclusive opportunities involving typical and atypical leaders?
- Which inclusive youth leadership opportunities are valued by students with and without intellectual disabilities?
- How do we nurture student partnerships to support students with and without intellectual disabilities serving in co-leadership capacities?
- How will we structure youth leadership? Will we incorporate it into existing groups, clubs, or classes, like advisory? Start a Unified Club? Create more intergenerational opportunities?
- Who will be the adult advisor or coordinator for various activities?



Youth Leadership Tip

Be on the lookout for opportunities to turn over decision-making and leadership to young people across all three components.

Engage your intergenerational leadership team in each step in answering the questions and completing the checklists linked below. Some activities will be planned and led by youth alone; others by youth and adults working together; and, only rarely, by adults with youth input.

Integration of the 3 Components Through the Lens of Inclusive Youth Leadership



EXAMPLE ACTIVITY

	Unified Sports	Inclusive Youth Leadership	Whole School Engagement
Students advocate and obtain administrative support for starting a Unified bocce team. They help organize practices and competitions, as well as manage uniforms.	✓	✓	
Students lead exercises and activities in the Unified PE class.	✓	✓	
Students with and without intellectual disabilities serve as co-captains on the Unified flag football team.	✓	✓	
The Unified Club and Student Council work with the school board to change how athletic letters are awarded to include Unified Sports teams.		✓	✓
Students and a faculty advisor work together to initiate a Unified Club in their school to work on promoting social inclusion.		✓	
Students in the National Honor Society work with faculty to revise their by-laws to ensure students with and without disabilities have equitable opportunities to be members.		✓	
The school's Student Advisory Committee works with the principal to re-envision the group as an intergenerational leadership committee comprised of students with and without disabilities and adults.		✓	
A language arts class organizes and conducts an essay contest in partnership with the local Kiwanis Club, asking students to share their vision for a socially inclusive school.		✓	✓
The Drama Club works with the Creative Writing Club to revise the script for the play, <i>It's Our School, Too!</i> , to reflect current issues in their school and put on a performance for the entire school.		✓	✓
Students start a mentoring program pairing high school students with and without intellectual disabilities with middle or elementary school students.		✓	✓



Tips for Success: Inclusive Youth Leadership

- Ensure adults are adequately prepared to foster inclusive youth leadership.
- Be intentional about developing the leadership skills of all students.
- Co-create the values, norms and processes that groups will use to guide their work.
- Be explicit about what inclusive youth leadership means, including the commitment to inclusiveness and expectations for all stakeholders (youth and adults).
- Support all students contributing in meaningful ways. Guard against some students being the “leaders” with other students being the “helpers.”
- Help students learn to model social inclusion throughout their daily interactions at school.
- Be sure to cultivate youth leadership beyond the typical leader, spreading leadership opportunities to a wide range of students.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for students and adults to reflect on and refine their leadership skills.
- Guide students in providing frequent communications with staff, administrators, and other students to keep them informed of their progress and activities, while increasing the numbers of people within the school who are committed to the work of social inclusion.
- Share photos, videos, and stories of social inclusion activities and events using the school’s website or social media.



Download these Inclusive Youth Leadership Checklists
to help you get started:

[High School Playbook Resources](#)

- Inclusive Youth Leadership Action Plan
- Checklist for Unified Sports Competitive & Player Development Styles
- Checklist for Unified Sports Recreation Style
- Checklist for Unified Sports Day or Unified Sports Festival

Whole School Engagement





An Introduction to Whole School Engagement



The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® provide opportunities for all students to learn and practice social inclusion through sustained engagement whether in the classroom, during an assembly, as part of a sports experience, or through engagement in planned activities that reach the whole school. Through whole school engagement, opportunities embedded within and between the inclusive youth leadership and Unified Sports components, the school becomes a powerful community that represents new ways of thinking and acting.

Whole school engagement is a unique and important component because it:

- Engages the entire staff and student body in building awareness and understanding of the benefits to all when the assets and contributions of each individual are recognized, honored, and supported.
- Creates a socially inclusive school climate and expands ownership of the efforts beyond a passionate few, creating a ripple effect of actions and advocacy.
- Enhances the school climate by nurturing development, learning, and achievement through engaging environments where students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members feel connected, safe, and successful.
- Creates communities of acceptance where students with disabilities feel welcome and valued as meaningful participants in school activities, classroom learning, and leadership opportunities.
- Models to the larger community that inclusivity can and does have positive outcomes for all members of the school or community.

Goals of Whole School Engagement



- Students with and without intellectual disabilities will interact socially and develop mutually beneficial friendships.
- Students with and without disabilities will hold more positive attitudes toward, and demonstrate a greater understanding and acceptance of, each other.
- Schools will become communities of acceptance where students with and without intellectual disabilities feel welcome and contribute meaningfully to all school activities, opportunities, and functions.
- The school climate will be enhanced by nurturing development, learning and achievement through engaging environments where students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members feel connected, safe, and successful.



An important feature of creating a socially inclusive school climate is engaging the entire school community in the process. Whole school engagement activities advance the inclusive mindsets and behaviors of students, teachers, staff, administrators, and families in school and beyond.

School-wide opportunities which demonstrate and focus on social inclusion raise awareness and create a learning environment where respect and acceptance are the norm and all students feel included and engaged. This welcoming community cultivates a positive school climate and enhances other school-wide efforts such as multi-tiered systems of support. Whole school engagement activities also demonstrate the power of young people to positively impact their school community by promoting social inclusion. Activities such as [Spread the Word campaigns](#), Fans in the Stands, Unified Field Day, and the play, *It's Our School, Too!*, provide opportunities to integrate Unified Sports and inclusive youth leadership efforts throughout the school.



Helpful Resources

Be sure to check out the **Unified Classroom lesson resources** available to use school wide. The relevant and adaptable packages help introduce inclusive skills and concepts to students of all ages.

www.generationunified.org/unified-classroom

What is the Principle of Meaningful Involvement in Whole School Engagement?

The principle of meaningful involvement provides an important foundation for students with and without intellectual disabilities to be engaged as valued members of the school community. A socially inclusive school ensures every student is given an opportunity to contribute to the success of his or her school because of the unique skills and qualities they bring to the work.

Indicators of Meaningful Involvement

- All students have the ability and opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the success and well-being of the school community.
- Students with and without intellectual disabilities are intentionally engaged in whole school activities in formal and informal settings.
- Young people and adults work collaboratively to expect, nurture, and support acceptance and respectful behavior in fostering a socially inclusive school climate.



Implementing Whole School Engagement

The 1st step to engaging your whole school in advancing social inclusion is typically to have a planning meeting with your school's Unified Leadership Team. As you work to become a Unified



Champion School, be sure students are engaged as co-leaders throughout the process.

Remember to always be on the lookout for opportunities to hand over decision-making and leadership to young people. The roles that each of you play will vary from school to school.

The questions and checklists found below will be answered and completed by youth, youth and adults working together, or adults as appropriate for your particular school environment.

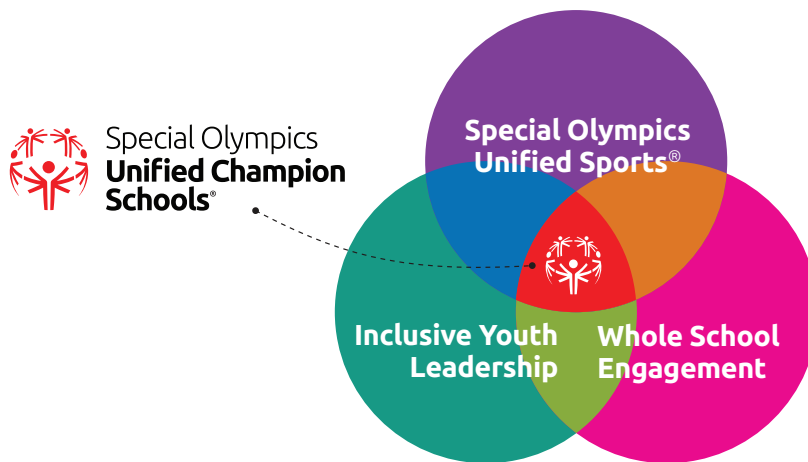
Topics to discuss with the Unified Champion Schools Program Leadership Team

- What types of whole school activities does our school need/want to incorporate?
- Where do we already have formal and informal opportunities for students to understand and begin to incorporate social inclusion?
- What types of whole school activities (e.g., pep rallies, assemblies, speakers, contests) do we already do in our school? Can/do any of these activities already support social inclusion? If not, how can they be revised to support the social inclusion of all students?
- What types of whole school activities are valued by students with and without intellectual disabilities at the school?
- Are there any existing clubs, teams, classes, or school groups that might be interested in planning and leading a whole school activity?
- How does the principle of meaningful involvement impact the type of whole school activities that are implemented and how they are presented?
- Who will be the adult advisor/coordinator for various activities?

Enhancing Whole School Engagement

- Include school administration early in the process. Engage administrators in active ways at both school and district levels.
- Be intentional about incorporating social inclusion into curriculum development, school-wide MTSS efforts, school climate improvement, and wellness activities.
- Share your goals for whole school engagement. Be clear about the importance you place on social inclusion across the school.
- Start from where you are and start small. Select and plan an initial activity that is manageable, energizing and appeals to the whole school.
- Build on current activities that are already being offered with an intentional focus on having it become a socially inclusive activity.
- Develop a process for engaging all students in social inclusion efforts, ensuring the development of socially inclusive attitudes, values, knowledge, skills, and actions.
- Provide opportunities in structured and unstructured settings to build awareness, nurture inclusive relationships, and reinforce expectations for social inclusion.
- Provide consistent opportunities to engage a broad range of stakeholders throughout the school and wider community in developing, implementing, and sustaining a wide range of inclusive activities.
- Connect with your state Special Olympics program for support and sharing successes.
- Share photos, videos, and stories of social inclusion activities and events using the school's website or social media.

Integration of the 3 Components Through the Lens of Whole School Engagement



EXAMPLE ACTIVITY	Unified Sports	Inclusive Youth Leadership	Whole School Engagement
A campaign to engage the whole school as Fans in the Stands is initiated at the start of the Unified basketball season.	✓		✓
The Unified PE class hosts a Unified Sports festival to promote wellness and the importance of physical activity for all students.	✓	✓	✓
The intramural and interscholastic Unified Sports teams provide demonstrations during half-time of the varsity sports throughout the year.	✓		✓
Pep rallies are held for all interscholastic sports teams, including Unified Sports and varsity teams.	✓		✓
The Student Council, which includes students with and without disabilities, hosts a series of assemblies once a quarter to increase awareness of social inclusion and foster respect among all students.	✓	✓	✓
The junior prom committee seeks nominations for diverse students to be on the prom court and engages students with and without intellectual disabilities in planning and decorating for the prom.		✓	✓
The Unified Club works with the MTSS Tier 1 team to include social inclusion as part of the school-wide expectations for student behavior.		✓	✓
The required civics class incorporates lessons on social inclusion into the unit on human rights to ensure all students increase their knowledge and skills.			✓
The Student Council works with the Unified Club to coordinate a Spread the Word campaign. It raises awareness across the school and community about the power of inclusion.		✓	✓
The Art Department holds a poster contest inviting students to design posters for the school halls, advocating for social inclusion and creating a welcoming school climate.		✓	✓



Tips for Success: Whole School Engagement

- Include school administration early in the process. Engage administrators in active ways at both school and district levels.
- Be intentional about incorporating social inclusion into curriculum development, school-wide MTSS efforts, school climate improvement, and wellness activities.
- Share your goals for whole school engagement. Be clear about the importance you place on social inclusion across the school.
- Start from where you are and start small. Select and plan an initial activity that is manageable, energizing, and appeals to the whole school.
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- Connect with your state Special Olympics program for support and sharing successes.
- Share photos, videos, and stories of social inclusion activities and events using the school's website or social media.



Download these Whole School Engagement Checklists by going to the

[High School Playbook Resources](#)

- Whole School Engagement Action Plan
- Getting Started Checklist for School Assemblies
- Getting Started Checklist for *It's Our School, Too!* Play
- Getting Started Checklist for Spread the Word Campaign
- Getting Started Checklist for Fans in the Stands
- Getting Started Checklist for Unified Sports Day or Unified Sports Festival

↓ Downloadable Resources

These PDFs are available to download at the [resources webpage: High School Playbook](#).

..... **Unified Champion Schools® Getting Started Resources:**

- 3 Component Action Plans
- Characteristics of Socially Inclusive Schools Assessment
- Social Inclusion Scale (student, family, and staff versions)

..... **Unified Sports Checklists:**

- Unified Sports Action Plan
- Checklist for Unified Sports Competitive & Player Development Styles
- Checklist for Unified Sports Recreation Style
- Checklist for Unified Sports Day or Festival
- Unified Sports Unified Classroom

..... **Inclusive Youth Leadership Checklists:**

- Inclusive Youth Leadership Action Plan
- Getting Started with Inclusive Youth Leadership
- Checklist for Unified Clubs
- Checklist for Making Existing Clubs Inclusive
- Inclusive Youth Leadership Unified Classroom

..... **Whole School Engagement Checklists:**

- Whole School Engagement Action Plan
- Getting Started with Whole School Engagement
- Checklist for Whole School Assemblies
- Checklist for *It's Our School, Too!* Play
- Checklist for Spread the Word Campaign
- Checklist for Fans in the Stands
- Checklist for Unified Sports Day or Festival
- Whole School Engagement Unified Classroom

Glossary

Co-leaders/Co-leadership

2 or more people who communicate and collaborate to achieve a shared goal. In Special Olympics, co-leadership can take many forms. 1 example is when 2 people decide to start a Unified Club together. While the 2 people may have different responsibilities within the club, they both work toward the same goal of leading a successful club. With Unified Champion Schools® programming, the goal is for 1 co-leader to be a student with an intellectual disability and the other to be a student without an intellectual disability.

Fans in the Stands

A formal way of encouraging students to support and cheer on students with and without intellectual disabilities at Unified Sports or Special Olympics events.

Inclusive Youth Leadership

Students with and without intellectual disabilities working together to lead and plan advocacy, awareness, and other Special Olympics-related inclusive activities throughout the school year. Examples include such things as Unified Clubs or a similar type of inclusive student group. The clubs are supported by an adult liaison and offer leadership opportunities and/or training for students with and without disabilities.

Intergenerational Leadership

Youth and adults work together to implement the Unified Champion Schools® strategy through shared goals that are owned collectively.

Special Olympics Activities & Lessons Educational Resources

A number of lessons, activities, and resources that teach students of all ages about respect and acceptance of differences, while providing them with the tools to serve as active agents for change in not only their school, but also the community.

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools model is a comprehensive program of the Unified Schools strategy that combines Unified Sports, inclusive youth leadership, and whole school engagement to create the greatest impact. This model is implemented in the United States.

Special Olympics Unified Sports®

A fully-inclusive sports or fitness program that combines an approximately equal number of students with and without intellectual disabilities. Examples include such things as interscholastic Unified Sports, Unified PE, or Unified intramurals. These activities occur throughout the school year with the support of an adult coach, and include opportunities for competition.

Spread the Word Campaign

A set of resources and tools to help students eradicate the hurtful and harmful use of language that demeans and diminishes others, and encourages pledging acts of inclusion.

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Program Leadership Team

A group that takes responsibility to design, implement and sustain socially inclusive strategies in the school. It is generally comprised of at least 1 special education student and 1 general education student; at least 1 special education teacher and 1 general education teacher; at least 1 school staff member/counselor/social worker; and the principal, assistant principal, or other school-level administrator.

Whole School Engagement

Awareness and education activities that promote inclusion and reach the majority of the school population. Examples include Spread the Word Campaigns, pep rallies or Fans in the Stands for Unified Sports teams, Respect Campaigns, and student fundraising. Ideally, students with and without disabilities are involved in planning and leading awareness events with the support of an adult in the school.

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