



# Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Language Guidelines

**Special Olympics**





# Preface

In 2016, Special Olympics rolled out a new Global Strategic Plan for the next five years. One of the main goals of this plan is to “improve athlete performance.” A major way that Special Olympics will work towards achieving this goal is to “expand Unified Sports and Young Athletes to increase inclusion, particularly in schools.”

This increased focus on school programming has led to the rebranding of Special Olympics Unified Schools as an overall strategy for our global movement. Specifically, United States-based schools (Grades K-12) will be known as Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools.

All Unified Champion Schools have three components: Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership and Whole School Engagement. Research from the past eight years has shown us that these three factors are essential for schools in the United States to promote positive attitudes about people with intellectual disabilities (ID) and promote social inclusion.

These language guidelines will help Programs learn the new terminology for Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools. It also serves as a refresher about terms that are used throughout our movement. Resources also have been added, which can be used when talking to current and prospective Unified Champion Schools, or to other supporters or stakeholders.

## Quick Tips:

1. When referring to Special Olympics programs or activities, always include Special Olympics on the first reference.  
Example: Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools bring together students with and without intellectual disabilities within the school setting.
2. Use “the” before Special Olympics when referring to programs, initiatives, and models within Special Olympics.  
Example: The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools model will be used nation-wide.  
Example: With sports as the foundation, the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program will lead to a more inclusive culture.
3. Do not use “the” before Special Olympics when referring to the organization or program solely by name.  
Example: Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools is the comprehensive model of the Unified Schools strategy that is implemented in the United States.”  
Example: My child’s school is a Special Olympics Unified Champion School.



# Terms

## **Special Olympics Unified Sports®**

On first reference, refer to as Special Olympics Unified Sports®. Unified Sports on second reference is fine. Always capitalize when referring to the program that brings together people with intellectual disabilities (athletes) and those without intellectual disabilities (partners) on sports teams for training and competition.

## **Special Olympics Unified Schools**

Special Olympics Unified Schools refers to the larger global schools strategy to engage youth. It is the strategy for promoting social inclusion among youth with and without intellectual disabilities (ID,) reaching out to youth where they spend the majority of their time – schools.

## **Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools**

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools 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. After first reference, it can be referred to as Unified Champion Schools.

**Note: The term Project UNIFY or Project UNIFY schools is no longer in use.**

Example:

- **Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools** promote social inclusion through planned and implemented activities affecting systems-wide change.

## **inclusive 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. Special Olympics Unified Sports and Special Olympics Young Athletes are examples of inclusive sports.

## **Inclusive Youth Leadership**

Students with and without intellectual disabilities working together to lead and plan advocacy, awareness, and other Special Olympics and related inclusive activities throughout the school year. Examples include such things as: Unified Clubs or a similar type of inclusive student group.

## **Whole School Engagement**

Awareness and education activities that promote inclusion and reach the majority of the school population. Examples include such things as Spread the Word to End the Word (R-Word) Campaigns, Pep Rallies or “Fans in the Stands” for Unified Sports teams, Respect Campaigns or student fundraising.



### **Emerging Unified Champion Schools (formerly called Category 2 schools):**

Emerging Unified Champion Schools are those just beginning to implement the Unified Schools strategy, or those that have been actively implementing the program up to now only at a minimal level. Each Emerging Unified Champion School is expected to conduct two out of three of the components (Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership and Advocacy, and Whole School Engagement). Unified Sports must be one of the two components.

### **Get Into It**

A K-12 school curriculum developed by Special Olympics and distributed to educational institutions that teach students of all ages about respect and acceptance of differences and similarities in people with and without intellectual disabilities, while providing them with the tools to serve as active agents for change in not only their school, but the community as well. Formerly known as SO Get Into It.

### **Spread the Word to End the Word®**

Capitalized. The campaign for mutual respect and dignity that has spread across the United States and around the globe, involving people of all ages – from high schools to college campuses and corporate offices. The goal of Spread the Word to End the Word is for people to think about the hurtful and disparaging uses of the word “retard” and pledge to stop using it.

**Note: For more information go to: <http://www.r-word.org>**

### **Unified Club**

A Unified Club is a non-academic, school-based club that brings students with and without ID together for planning and participating in Special Olympics activities including Unified Sports, social and community activities that foster understanding and acceptance, and that promote leadership and collaborative skill building.

**Note: The term Partner’s Clubs is no longer in use.**

Example:

- The Eunice Kennedy Shriver Elementary School **Unified Club** is organizing an R-word campaign this month.

### **Unified Sports Experience**

These are exhibition games that team people with and without intellectual disabilities on the field of play. These games often involve celebrities. Unified Sports Experience events create an opportunity to spotlight the importance of friendship, sportsmanship and inclusion.

**Note: The term Unity Sports is no longer in use.**

### **Young Athletes™**

Athletes is plural. The Young Athletes program was created to reach out to children with and without intellectual disabilities ages 2 to 7 and introduce them to the world of sport, with the goal of preparing them for Special Olympics training and competition. It is conducted as an inclusive program, and is often part of a Unified Champion School at the elementary or preschool level.

**Note: Please do not abbreviate as YAP.**



### **R-word**

Note hyphen and capital "R." Refers to the words "retard" or "retarded." Derogatory use of these words can hurt millions of people with intellectual disabilities, their families and friends.

### **Unified**

The U in Unified is capitalized when used as an adjective.

Examples:

- This is Jennifer's first year as a **Unified** athlete.
- Keith coaches **Unified** floor hockey.

### **partner**

Not capitalized. Refers to half of a Unified pair.

Example:

- The Unified Sports tennis match included an athlete and a **partner** from Eunice Kennedy Shriver High School. .
- I spend time with my partner Pat on and off the field.

### **teammate**

Not capitalized. Refers to individuals without intellectual disabilities who participate in Special Olympics Unified Sports®.

Example:

- The Unified Sports tennis match included an athlete and a **teammate** from Eunice Kennedy Shriver High School.
- I spend time with my teammate Pat on and off the field.

### **Youth Activation Committee**

A Youth Activation Committee (YAC) is made up of young people who work together to promote school communities where all young people are agents of change. A YAC can be district-based, state-based, national or regional.





# Social Media Guidance

Our overall recommendation for sharing events and news related to Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools is to use your existing state Program handle. This way Special Olympics North America as well as Special Olympics International can easily spot great stories to share with the rest of our movement. Our main hashtags for this program are **#SOUnified** or **#PlayUnified**. These recommendations can also be applied to schools if they have their own social media activation separate from a Special Olympics Program.

If you (or the school) **do not** have a Project UNIFY/ Unified Champion School specific profile:

- We recommend you **DO NOT** start one. Please utilize your state Program's profile for posts regarding Unified Champion Schools and differentiate these posts by including the tag, #SOUnified.

If you (or the school) have a Project UNIFY/ Unified Champion School specific profile but **do not actively** use it:

- We recommend that you discontinue it. Here is how you can do this:
  - On the current social media profile **write a post** that the handle will no longer be used: "We're officially #SOUnified! This page will be discont'd & all information on Unified Champion Schools can be found here: LINK or @ProgramHandle"
- From this point on, only the state Program's handle should be used to promote information relating to Unified Champion Schools. All Unified Champion School posts should use #SOUnified to differentiate them from others on the page.

If you (or the school) have a Project UNIFY/ Unified Champion School specific profile that you **actively use**:

- Change your handle name to @SOUnified\_XX (two letter State postal abbreviation)/@ SOUnified\_schoolname/abbreviation (space permitting)
  - Provide a more specific description in your profile bio

If the Unified Champion School is using its general school handle:

- Have them utilize the main hashtags for this program **#SOUnified** or **#PlayUnified**.
- Also have them tag the specific SO Program handle being used.



# In Context

## Quick statements for students to use:

Previously:

- I'm in Project UNIFY.
- Brighton Middle School is part of Project UNIFY.

New:

- I go to a Special Olympics Unified Champion School.
- My school is a Unified Champion School.
- I'm part of the Brighton Bulldogs Unified Club.
- I play on our school's Unified soccer team.
- I am a member of our state Youth Activation Committee.
- Cathy is my Unified partner.
- I Play Unified.

"Elevator Pitch":

- My name is Eric and I'm in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. I go to Brighton Middle School. Brighton is a Special Olympics Unified Champion School and I participate in many fun activities. My Unified partner's name is Kate and we play soccer together on the Brighton Bulldogs. We have so much fun together and I learn a lot from her. I'm also a member of the Unified Club at my school where I help plan events such as Spread the Word to End the Word Day, which is a big deal at my school.
- My school is a Unified Champion School. That means we have Unified sports teams and Unified clubs, where students of all abilities can plan and participate in activities together that promote friendship and awareness about us all being more alike than different.

Other Examples:

- At school we have Unified PE where everyone can participate.
- My younger brother participates in Young Athletes and is learning how to kick a soccer ball.
- On Spread the Word to End the Word Day, my school has a big assembly. We also sign a petition that says we will not use the R-word.
- You should sign up to do Unified Sports with me! I love participating with my teammate.



## **Suggested use in proposals, reports, case statements:**

In 2008, we started a strategy called Project UNIFY. Over the past 8 years, Special Olympics has been actively engaged in the development and implementation of a **Unified Schools strategy** for promoting and increasing the social inclusion of youth with intellectual disabilities in schools and in their communities. As we have evolved over the years, we are excited to ask you to join us as a Special Olympics Unified Champion School.

The **Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program** is the comprehensive model of the **Unified Schools strategy** that is implemented in the United States. This program could be implemented in any inclusive school system, or in areas that require youth with disabilities to attend school. This model could also be used in places where special education schools are the norm, but also be paired with a mainstream/regular education school for Unified Sports and other awareness and leadership activities.

With sports as the foundation, the **Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program** offers a combination of activities that equip young people with tools and training to create sport and classroom and community experiences that reduce bullying and exclusion, promote healthy activity and interactions, combat stereotypes and stigma, eliminate hurtful language in schools, and engage young people in pro-social activities that lead to more inclusive and accepting attitudes, behaviors and school climate.

The goal of **Unified Champion Schools** is to create school climates where students with disabilities feel welcome and are routinely included in all activities, opportunities and functions.

Special Olympics **Unified Schools** is a strategy built upon the premise that in order to have the greatest impact, the change process needs to start with young people.

The central **Unified Champion Schools** activity is the inclusive sports initiative Special Olympics Unified Sports, which acts as the catalyst for student awareness, understanding and engagement.

As a means for providing inclusive opportunities many schools may not otherwise be able to provide for their students, **Unified Champion Schools** programming helps to create a school climate where students without disabilities are accepting of their peers with disabilities both in the classroom and in the school overall.

It is the unique opportunities and experiences afforded by each activity, and in combination with one another, that allows for the greatest impact on students and schools. Importantly, regardless of activity, the **Unified Champion Schools** program has the greatest impact when its activities effectively promote social interactions between students with and without disabilities, with social interaction as the key to promoting positive attitudes and perceptions among youth, and also to affecting the greatest levels of positive personal and interpersonal growth.

Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership and Whole School Engagement let students with and without intellectual disabilities interact in a variety of ways. When all three components of the **Unified Champion Schools** program are utilized, it creates the maximum amount of opportunity for positive attitudes to be created by students and reinforced by the schools.