

Welcome to Special Olympics Club UNIFY!



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Welcome to Special Olympics Club UNIFY!

Creating an atmosphere of acceptance, understanding, and respect in our schools is more important than ever. That's what Club UNIFY is all about. This step-by-step guide will walk you through how to set up Club UNIFY at your school.

What is Club UNIFY?

Club UNIFY is a Special Olympics club for elementary students. Its purpose? To introduce students to Special Olympics and let them experience the fun of cheering for the athletes, all with a goal of helping them take the lead in building an atmosphere of respect and trust in schools and communities.



Club UNIFY Goals

- Form friendships
- support Special Olympics athletes
- raise awareness for Special Olympics
- help young people become advocates/youth leaders

Why start Club UNIFY at your school?

Students are never too young to experience how they can make a difference in the lives of others. Below are some ways for Club UNIFY to make a difference in your school:

- Getting to know people with intellectual disabilities and discovering what you have in common
- Learning how words can help or hurt others; learning what words, behaviors, and attitudes are acceptable during interactions between people with and without intellectual disabilities
- Taking a leadership role in setting a tone of acceptance and respect at your school
- Attending one or more Special Olympics events to cheer for athletes and friends.



About Special Olympics Project UNIFY®

Club UNIFY is part of Project UNIFY, a Special Olympics education and sports-based program that promotes respect through sports. Project UNIFY strives to build an inclusive environment among youth with and without intellectual disabilities, as well as empowering them to be leaders and agents for change.

Project UNIFY works in three ways:

- **Inclusive Sports**, which provide students with and without intellectual disabilities opportunities to participate in sports together,
- **Youth Leadership and Advocacy**, which provide students with and without intellectual disabilities opportunities to take on leadership roles in their schools and communities,
- **Whole-School Engagement**, which provides opportunities for all students to participate in Project UNIFY through sustained schoolwide activities.

At www.specialolympics.org/project_unify, you'll find a wealth of free programs and resources to help with your club, including activities, videos, athlete stories, online games, and much more. Materials teach important lessons about respect, acceptance, and perseverance.

About the R-word campaign

Club UNIFY is a precursor to the "Spread the Word to End the Word" campaign from Special Olympics. The goal of "Spread the Word to End the Word" is to eliminate the use of the terms "retard," "retarded," and "mental retardation," pledging instead to use words of respect. The R-word campaign is a grassroots and social media effort that challenges young people across the country to pledge to end the use of the R-word. Club UNIFY sets the stage for students with and without intellectual disabilities to form friendships. Then, on the basis of those friendships, students will come to understand how the R-word hurts those with intellectual disabilities, their families, and their friends, all with the goal of eliminating use of the R-word and creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and friendship. Decide whether to discuss the R-word based on your students' ages and levels of maturity.

**Special
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What is Special Olympics?



Many people know that Special Olympics trains people with intellectual disabilities to compete in Olympic-style sports events. But here are some things you may not realize:

- Special Olympics is for people ages 8 and up. Adults compete, too! Children between the ages of 2½ and 7 can participate in Young Athletes™.
- More than 70,000 competitions are held every year, or about 8 every hour.
- 4.2 million athletes in 170 countries participate in Special Olympics.
- More than 1.3 million volunteers and 338,000 coaches are involved.
- Athletes compete in 32 Olympic-style summer and winter sports.
- All training is provided free of charge to athletes and their families.
- Special Olympics is the world's largest sports organization for people with intellectual disabilities.

How did Special Olympics start?

In 1962, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, sister of President John F. Kennedy, started a day camp in her backyard to give children with intellectual disabilities the same opportunities and experiences as other children. Her goal? To see what these children *could* do in sports—not dwell on what they *couldn't* do.

Throughout the 1960s, Shriver continued her pioneering work, and her vision eventually grew into the Special Olympics Movement. In 1968, the first International Special Olympics Summer Games were held in Chicago, with 1,000 athletes from 26 states and Canada competing in track and field and swimming. In 1977, the first International Special Olympics Winter Games were held in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. More than 500 athletes took part in skiing and skating events, with major television networks covering the games.

Special Olympics training and competitions occur all over the country and all over the world. With more than 70,000 competitions each year, that averages out to about 193 games every day. There are local, state, and national events leading up to the World Games, when thousands of athletes from around the globe come together. The World Games are held every two years, alternating winter and summer games, to showcase athleticism and celebrate the spirit of Special Olympics.

What is the mission of Special Olympics?

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

What else does Special Olympics do?

- **Healthy Athletes.** Special Olympics is the world's largest public health organization for people with intellectual disabilities, whose health problems are often neglected. Special Olympics Healthy Athletes provides more than 1.2 million free health screening clinics in more than 100 countries. Through this program, more than 100,000 health care professionals have been trained to treat people with intellectual disabilities, leading to improved care for millions around the world. To learn more, visit www.specialolympics.org/health.
- **Young Athletes™.** The Young Athletes program gives children ages 2½ to 7 a head start in developing motor skills and hand-eye coordination through basic sports skills like kicking, throwing a ball, and jumping. Children with and without intellectual disabilities play together, gaining an early introduction to sports and the world of Special Olympics. The Young Athletes Toolkit includes activities and lesson plans to help schools implement the program. Find them at www.specialolympics.org/youngathletes.
- **Special Olympics Unified Sports®.** Unified Sports® puts athletes with and without intellectual disabilities on the same sports teams, grouping them according to age and ability. Students learn sports skills, have fun together, and bond as a team. Unified Sports® provides a great path to friendship. Find out more at www.specialolympics.org/unified_sports.aspx.

What is an “intellectual disability”?

About 200 million people around the world have intellectual disabilities. Children and adults with intellectual disabilities may learn new things slower than others. They may not understand ideas that other people learn easily and may have trouble with daily living skills. That doesn't mean that they don't have skills and talents to share and dreams and goals to pursue. Special Olympics strives to be a path to that success.

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FAQs About Special Olympics

Below are answers to questions your club members might ask about Special Olympics.

How can people with intellectual disabilities play sports if they have trouble learning?

Most people practice a lot before they get good at a sport. People with intellectual disabilities are the same. They train hard to learn their sports and excel.

Can I join Special Olympics?

Yes. While Special Olympics athletes are people with intellectual disabilities, there are many opportunities for people without intellectual disabilities to join in. They can become a Unified Sports® partner and play on the same team as a Special Olympics athlete or become a volunteer. Younger students can participate in the Young Athletes™ program.

How old do you have to be to join Special Olympics?

Athletes can join at age 8 and compete for as long as they want. Adults participate in Special Olympics too. Athletes between ages 2½ and 7 can enhance their skills while participating in the Young Athletes™ program. People of all ages can attend events and cheer from the stands.

I've seen the Olympics on TV. Is Special Olympics like that?

No. While the Olympics and Special Olympics both celebrate determination and perseverance and feature many of the same sports, only athletes with intellectual disabilities can participate in Special Olympics. You don't have to be a star athlete to participate in Special Olympics. Athletes are grouped according to their ages and ability levels when they compete.

In how many sports do athletes compete?

There are 32 different sports, from alpine skiing to volleyball. Like most athletes, Special Olympics athletes have a favorite sport they do best in and compete in.

When and where are the big competitions?

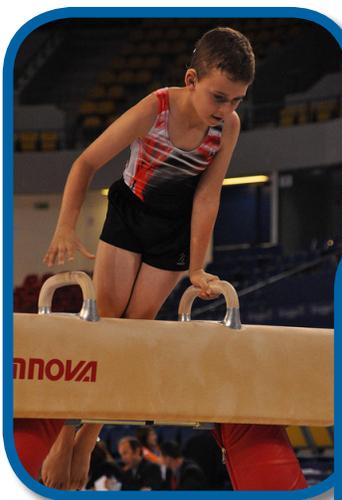
Local competitions are held all year long. In fact, there are more than 70,000 competitions each year around the world. The World Games are held every two years, alternating between summer and winter sports. They are hosted all over the world.

How do the athletes get ready for competitions?

Special Olympics athletes compete at the local, state, national, and international levels. All athletes train in a sport before they can compete in it. Training goes on all year long, with volunteer coaches teaching athletes the rules and skills for a sport. Athletes also learn about healthy eating habits and participate in health screenings.

Does it cost anything?

No. Special Olympics training is free. There are no fees to enter competitions, and all fans attend events for free.



I don't just want to watch; I want to play. How can I join a Unified Sports® team?

Contact your local Special Olympics office to find out about Unified Sports® programs in your area. You'll experience the benefits of training together and playing on a team made up of people with and without intellectual disabilities. Plus you'll see how having others cheer for you motivates you to do your best.

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Launching Club UNIFY

Get the word out about Club UNIFY, build excitement, and launch your club with a flourish!

Shaping your school's climate is a difficult task. Club UNIFY provides a powerful tool to get students thinking about the way they treat one another—and learning concrete steps that they can take to build a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere. Results will build throughout the year and in the years ahead.

Club UNIFY meetings can take many forms. In this start-up guide you'll find a variety of resources, including:

- topics to cover and video clips that correspond
- crafts and projects you can make to send to Special Olympics athletes, take to events, or display to encourage acceptance and inclusion in your school
- opportunities for students to take the lead in planning activities and leading discussions
- forms and templates to use for creating a Club UNIFY newsletter, communicating with parents, and planning meetings
- colorful badges to award as students exhibit behaviors that you want to reinforce.

Deciding when and where

The format for Club UNIFY is flexible. Depending on your schedule, meeting before or after school may work best. Some schools host meetings at lunch, during recess, or during the school day.

Your school size will help determine how many students to involve. At a large school, you might want to invite only students in your class and a similarly aged special education classroom or your entire grade level; at a smaller school, you might want to invite several grades. Club UNIFY is for all elementary students with and without intellectual disabilities.

A good starting point is to plan to meet twice a month for 45 minutes. You'll want to meet in a location where there is room to do art projects and where equipment is available to show videos or slideshows about Special Olympics. For resources, go to www.specialolympics.org/project_unify.

It's always nice to have a little extra help; recruiting another teacher to assist you will make things go more smoothly. Consider approaching your school's special education teacher, art teacher, and physical education teacher; their skills will be a natural fit with the club's activities.

District policies vary on school clubs, so be sure to keep your grade-level leader and principal fully updated about your plans.



Getting the word out

Word of mouth is the best way to spread the news. Tell your students about the club and encourage them to invite their friends. Also tell other teachers what the club is all about and ask them to talk about it in their classes. Give them a sample letter to send home to parents. (Tip: You can use the letter on page 9 and adapt it to fit your school.) You'll find that students are great ambassadors to spread the word about the club.

Do you have students in your class who are good citizens, who show an attitude of acceptance, helpfulness, and kindness in their daily interactions? What about students who are naturally empathetic or students who are thoughtful, quiet leaders and will set a tone of acceptance? Consider recruiting these students to be your Club UNIFY "starter group." They can help spread the news about this new club and what it's about. Enthusiasm is contagious, especially when it comes from fellow classmates. Group members can design and create posters advertising Club UNIFY to hang in your grade-level area or around your school.

For practical reasons you might need to limit club membership. But that doesn't mean you can't share club activities with the whole school. In fact, you should! Look for opportunities to recruit new members or share the work the club is doing, such as:

- posting updates on club activities on your school website
- sharing pictures of Club UNIFY activities at PTA meetings (if possible, have club members do the presentations instead of doing them yourself)
- sharing club updates at faculty meetings
- posting photos and sample activities on a centrally located bulletin board
- hanging up posters with club updates around school or request permission to do so at local businesses or on community bulletin boards (be sure to check school policies)
- hosting school-wide assemblies or pep rallies on the topics of respect and acceptance (complete with student-written cheers about respect, of course!)
- having a booth at school fairs or performances (again, let club members take the lead).

The more interest you generate about Club UNIFY, the better!

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● Planning the first meeting

The all-important first meeting sets the stage and breaks the ice. Here are some tips to make it go smoothly:

- **Make a strong first impression:** Explain the purpose of Club UNIFY, give a short overview of Special Olympics, and explain what you'll do at each meeting. Mention right away that your goal for the club is to spread inclusion and acceptance in your school while supporting Special Olympics athletes every way you can, including, if at all possible, attending a Special Olympics event. Let students know that they'll have the opportunity to plan and lead some of the activities.
- **Get to know the students:** Go around the room and have students say their names and grades. Ask them to name their favorite sport or physical activity and why they like it. Display the list of Special Olympics sports and see how many of the students' favorite sports are listed there.
- **Establish common ground:** Use the previous exercise to establish common ground, showing students that they and Special Olympics athletes enjoy many of the same sports. Weave the thread of common ground through all your meetings, discussing how we all want to do our best, feel proud, and feel accepted, not just in sports, but in other areas of our lives.
- **Start "the talk"—and keep it going:** Explain what "intellectual disabilities" are and give students time to ask questions. Remind students that those with and those without intellectual disabilities are more alike than they are different. A great activity to reinforce this idea is "We're All Alike... We're All Different" in the grades K–2 Get Into It lessons and activities available at getintoit.specialolympics.org/project_unify (Tip: need more activities to launch your discussion? Tap into the many other resources available in Get Into It. You'll find lessons for grades K–2 and 3–5, online games, and more.)
- **Define the terms:** Start with the word "unify," and explain that this means to bring people or things together. Being unified benefits everyone. Explain to students that this is what you hope they'll experience through Club UNIFY; they'll contribute their time and talents to cheer on Special Olympics athletes, and through those actions they'll find new friends and have fun. The ultimate goal is for club members to become leaders in spreading that atmosphere of unity throughout your class, school, and community. Discuss with students other terms that might be new to younger students, such as *acceptance*, *inclusiveness*, *individuality*, and *perseverance*.



● Club UNIFY Is for All Students

Club UNIFY is all about discovering what we have in common and celebrating the talents of ALL students. Remind students that they don't have to go to a Special Olympics event to get to know someone with an intellectual disability. Most likely there are students with intellectual disabilities in your school. Club activities give students with and without intellectual disabilities a chance to work side by side on projects and get to know one another. As students discover one another's strengths and see what they have in common, those friendships will grow.

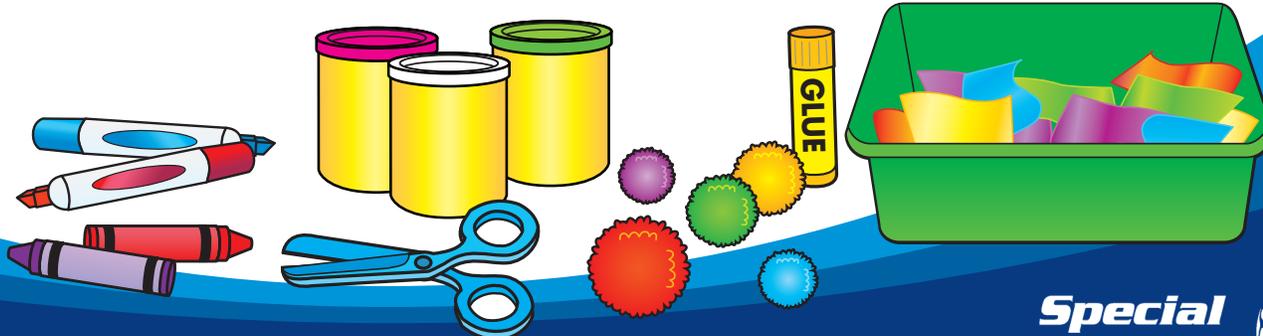
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Planning future meetings

Club meetings should be fun and informative, allowing time for discussion, a video, a craft project, and maybe a game. Check out the ideas below.

- Pick a topic:** Consider having a key topic for every meeting, such as “respect” or “perseverance,” and use this as the launchpad for your discussion and activities. For great ideas, visit getintoit.specialolympics.org, where you’ll find lesson plans and newsletters with a theme of the month, or review the list of words on page 23 to pick out other powerful words and themes.
- Show videos:** Find videos of Special Olympics athletes and events at www.specialolympics.org/videos.aspx or see the list on page 7 for suggestions. A short video near the beginning of each meeting will educate students about Special Olympics, remind them about the important role they can play, and keep the focus on the abilities and talents of everyone. Plus, kids love the videos! (Note: most videos run between 2 and 5 minutes.)
- Be crafty:** Students don’t want to just talk; they want to *do* something. Making cards, banners, and other items to take to Special Olympics events or to send to athletes can engage students’ creativity and empower them to see that their efforts matter. Make banners to support messages of acceptance and inclusion at your school as well. (See page 14 for ideas.) If you have a wide range of ages, consider having mixed-age groups, with older students serving as group leaders and directing activities. These leadership skills will serve students well!
- Get real:** Watch for behavior and actions around your school that exemplify (or don’t exemplify) your themes. When you see or hear them, jot notes to yourself in your meeting plans in the section called “The words I heard.” Giving students real examples of the interactions you observed (not naming names, of course) is powerful. Older students can watch for these same types of interactions and share them with the group as well.
- Stay current:** Periodically, stories in the news address the topics of respect and perseverance. Print these or cut them out to share with students. Ask students and parents to be on the lookout for these stories, too.
- Plan an event:** Remind students that your goal is to spread the message of unity and acceptance across your school and community. Suggest that your club sponsor a schoolwide event to highlight that message. For example, club members could work with your principal to declare one day each week to be Switch-It-Up Day, when students sit with someone they don’t know in the cafeteria or play with someone they don’t know on the playground. Club UNIFY members can make posters and flyers explaining the event, write a script to include it in your school’s morning announcements, and take the lead in switching things up that day. Another great idea is to hold a schoolwide pep rally on the topic of acceptance and respect.
- Write a newsletter:** Once a month, send home a club newsletter so parents know what the club is accomplishing. Be sure to include a summary of what you’ve discussed so families can continue the discussion at home. Educate families about Special Olympics by including some interesting facts and figures in each newsletter, along with information on Young Athletes™ and Unified Sports® programs in your area. Leave blank lines in the newsletter so club members can help write stories. (See page 13 for a newsletter form.)
- Record it in pictures:** Have students take turns being the club photographer to take photos during club meetings. Use the photos in your newsletter and to help publicize the club. Be sure to take lots of photos during your trips to cheer at Special Olympics events! At the end of the year, have the students mount the photos on poster board with captions or make a photo montage. If school policies permit, send photos to your local newspaper to let the community know about students’ successes.
- Let students become the leaders:** As Club UNIFY gets up and running, gradually hand over more responsibilities to the students to help plan meetings or lead particular segments. Roles might include meeting segment leader, recorder, timekeeper, and so forth. As students develop leadership abilities, you’ll be giving them the tools they need to advocate for the message of unity and respect.



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Themes and videos

Below is a list of key words or themes for your meetings and videos that correspond. Be sure to preview each video; every school and age group is different, so topics that might be right for one group might not fit another.

Topic	Title	URL	Hint
acceptance, skills and talents	See Our Athletes' Talents	http://www.specialolympics.org/Video3.aspx?id=18704	
changing lives	The Difference You Make	http://www.specialolympics.org/Video3.aspx?id=19486	
confidence	Speechless	http://www.specialolympics.org/Video3.aspx?id=23616	
determination	World Winter Games	http://www.specialolympics.org/Video3.aspx?id=19914	
determination	Sport Teaches Us	http://www.specialolympics.org/video-sports-teaches-us.aspx	(Hint: This is a great introduction to Special Olympics. Plan to use this video at one of your first meetings!)
determination, friendship, life's work, joy	Seeing Obstacles as Challenges	http://www.specialolympics.org/Video3.aspx?id=20000	(Hint: This coach got involved with Special Olympics at age 13. This video helps students see that they can make a difference even when they're young.)
friendship	Young Athletes	http://www.specialolympics.org/Video3.aspx?id=28797	
friendship	Project UNIFY Is... Friendship!	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpjf7W1XDDM&list=PL206593AE4BF8BE53	
fun	Project UNIFY Is...Fun!	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElALYCixLNY&list=PL206593AE4BF8BE53	
growth through sports	Swimming Is His Passion	http://www.specialolympics.org/Video3.aspx?id=18796	
leadership	What Is Project UNIFY?	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xk0_5qAJ5QM&list=PL206593AE4BF8BE53	(Hint: This video sets the stage for Club UNIFY and Project UNIFY. Plan to use it at one of your first meetings.)
meet the athletes	What's the Difference?	http://www.specialolympics.org/Video3.aspx?id=20897	
meet the athletes	Loretta Claiborne	http://media.specialolympics.org/soi/video/wwg2013/Unleashing-the-Human-Spirit-w-LorettaC.mov	
meet the athletes	Our Athletes	http://www.specialolympics.org/Video3.aspx?id=22431	
opportunity	Meet Coach Cohen	http://www.specialolympics.org/Video3.aspx?id=19469	
resilience, heroes	Unleashing the Human Spirit	http://www.specialolympics.org/Video3.aspx?id=26875	
spirit of sport	Three-Word Video	http://www.specialolympics.org/Video3.aspx?id=20726	(Hint: This video includes lots of phrases perfect for banners and signs.)
spirit of the games	Join Hands	http://www.specialolympics.org/Video3.aspx?id=18746	
success	Success, Plus Fun	http://www.specialolympics.org/Video3.aspx?id=24774	
thrill of sport	Different	http://www.specialolympics.org/Video3.aspx?id=19476	
unity, community	Champions Together	http://www.specialolympics.org/Video3.aspx?id=26428	



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Other important start-up tasks

- **Find out if you have a Special Olympics team or athletes at your school.** If so, connect with coaches and parents to find out dates and times for upcoming events.
- **Make a connection with your local Special Olympics office.** Find out who's best able to help you identify events to attend, answer questions, ensure that the materials your club creates reach the athletes, and so forth. Knowing who to call makes a big difference!
- **Put out the call for people who can help.** Identify parents, colleagues, friends, and others willing to help with club activities. Cast your net wide. Millions of people have been involved with Special Olympics, and they can be a huge help with club events.
- **Start gathering supplies.** One of the club's goals is to make items to encourage the athletes, from cards and banners to signs and pennants. Start gathering materials, including poster board, markers, felt, fabric markers, paint pens, fun foam, and so forth. Make a supply kit to take with you when the club goes to cheer at local events. Keep tape, twist ties or lightweight wire, and glue on hand in case of a stubborn banner that droops or a pennant that falls off its stick.

Did You Know?

Unified Sports® gives athletes with and without intellectual disabilities a chance to play on the same sports teams, providing a path to understanding and friendship. Unified Sports® currently engages over 69,000 athletes and partners between the ages of 12 and 15.

With the Special Olympics Athlete Leadership Program, nearly 32,000 athletes gain confidence by serving as spokespeople for the games. Plus more than 10,000 students without intellectual disabilities participate in the Youth Leadership Program and build their skills to promote dignity and respect for all people.



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Parent Letter

Here's a letter of introduction to Club UNIFY. Adapt it to fit your club and your school.

Dear Family,

This year, we're starting a new club at our school. **Club UNIFY is dedicated to cheering on Special Olympics athletes, especially those in our school and schools nearby, and getting other students involved as well.** Our inclusive club will introduce students to other students with different abilities. We will meet Special Olympics athletes and discover how much we all have in common. Our ultimate goal is to create an atmosphere of acceptance and respect at our school and in our community.

You probably know that Special Olympics trains people with intellectual disabilities to compete in Olympic-style sports. Training and competing in sports helps people find joy, acceptance, and success. They gain confidence and are prepared for new challenges.

Getting to know and support a person with an intellectual disability can enrich the lives of all students and teach them valuable lessons about acceptance, inclusion, and respect. Club UNIFY is more than a booster club—it's a club that teaches students lifelong lessons about the right way to treat other people and helps them spread the message of acceptance throughout their school.

Where we'll meet: _____

When we'll meet: _____

Teacher leaders: _____

Activities:

- learning about Special Olympics
- making posters, cards, banners, and other items to support and encourage the athletes
- meeting athletes, coaches, and volunteers
- watching videos and doing activities that teach acceptance and inclusion
- attending one or more Special Olympics events
- developing leadership skills to promote respect in our school

For more information, contact _____ **at** _____

Permission slips due: _____

We hope you'll encourage your child to join Club UNIFY and support the talents and abilities of all students. If you've been involved in Special Olympics yourself—for instance, as a coach, a parent, or a spectator—we'd love to have you come and talk to the club about your experiences. We'll also be seeking out athletes to come and visit the club and tell their stories.

We hope your student will decide to join Club UNIFY and become a fan of Special Olympics!

Sincerely,

(teacher name)

I give my child _____ permission to join Club UNIFY.

Signed _____

Date _____

Email address _____

Phone number _____

Child's teacher _____

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Developing an Understanding Of Others

Club members will have questions about people with diverse and unique abilities, including those with intellectual disabilities. You'll need to think carefully about how to respond and how to lead discussions that will bring about an attitude of acceptance and respect. This can be especially challenging in a club open to students of multiple ages.

Here are some ways to break the ice and start meaningful discussions:

● Mention the R-word—or not.

"Spread the Word to End the Word," a campaign from Special Olympics and Best Buddies, is committed to eliminating use of the R-Word, which includes the terms "retard," "retarded," and "mental retardation," while promoting words of respect and acceptance. Should you discuss the R-word with your students? That's up to you. A lot depends on the age of your club members and your school's policy. But chances are even the youngest students have heard the words "retarded" and "retard" used to make fun of someone. They may not completely understand what these words mean, but they get the message loud and clear: these are mean words that hurt people's feelings. For information on the R-word campaign, visit www.r-word.org.

If you choose not to bring up the R-word, open the discussion of intellectual disabilities and see if students bring up the R-word on their own. Then answer their questions honestly and age appropriately. Go around the room and allow them to whisper a hurtful word that they've heard in your ear. Share the list. Have other students ever been called these words? How did it make them feel? Students may ask: *What does "retard" mean? What should I do if I hear someone say it? What if it's an adult?* Work together to craft a respectful, yet proactive response.

Let students know that, besides eliminating the use of hurtful words, Club UNIFY is about using helpful, uplifting, and encouraging words to be supportive of students of all abilities.

● Discuss our unique abilities.

Tell students we're all unique. People look different, talk differently, and like to do different things. It would be a boring world if everyone were the same. State that they've probably seen people—including students at school—who look, act, or talk in their own way.

Next, talk about intellectual disabilities and what the term means. (This is a mouthful, so you might want to have the students call this "ID" from now on.) Explain to students that intellectual disabilities can make it more difficult to learn new things and more difficult to complete tasks associated with daily living (such as taking care of yourself, socializing, and communicating). Having an intellectual disability means you may learn through different methods or at a different pace, but it doesn't change that fact that you have dreams, hopes, fears, talents, and opinions. A person with an intellectual disability has feelings, and those feelings can be hurt.

Students may ask *Why do Tommy's eyes look like that? Why does Samantha read so slowly? Were they born that way? Could I have been born that way?* Explain to students that intellectual disabilities have many causes, including genetic conditions such as Down syndrome, problems during pregnancy or at birth, or exposure to toxins. Any one of us could have been born with those problems.



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Embrace our similarities.

Remind students that we're all the same in many ways. We all want to have fun, have friends, do our best, be happy, and feel successful, talented, and special. You want these things, and students with intellectual disabilities want them, too. Students may ask *How can Susie be happy when she can't talk like everyone else? Why would anyone want to be her friend?* Answer these questions honestly, helping students focus on their similarities instead of differences.

Actions count too.

Along with hurtful words, students may also encounter disrespectful attitudes and behaviors. For example, in the cafeteria they might see one student step in front of another, pretending not to notice that the other student is there. Or they might observe a child ignoring another child who's trying to talk to him or her. Explain that these slights might seem small, but they're hurtful and create an atmosphere of disrespect at your school.

Explain what the athletes do.

Explain that Special Olympics gives people with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to play a sport and then invites them to compete and win medals and ribbons. Students with intellectual disabilities may have to work harder or practice more than students without intellectual disabilities. Everyone feels special when they learn to do something new, achieve a goal, overcome an obstacle, and feel the satisfaction that comes with a job well done. The Special Olympics athletes' oath is "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt." This is an oath to which all athletes should aspire.

Check Out These Free Resources

Special Olympics offers dozens of free resources to provide teachers with activities, lessons, worksheets, and more to use in the classroom. Here's a sampling of what you'll find:



Get Into It

Getintoit.specialolympics.org

Classroom-ready lessons and activities for grades K–12



Movies That Move

<http://j.mp/MoviesThatMove>

Film clips from popular TV shows and movies to spark meaningful discussions



Online Games

Getintoit.specialolympics.org/students

Build academic skills while learning about respecting others.



**Special
Olympics**



Publishing a Club UNIFY Newsletter

One way to connect with club members' families and the school community at large is by sending a newsletter home every month. The newsletter should briefly describe what students did during their meetings, including activities, videos, and discussions. The newsletter is also a great place to keep parents up-to-date on your club's plans to attend Special Olympics events in your area and to invite their whole families to join in the fun.

Design:

- Keep it to one page. (See the template on page 13.)
- Make it eye-catching. If possible, scan or photograph student artwork and include it as well.

What to include:

- Briefly describe the highlights of the month's club meetings. Use a bulleted list to outline the main activities.
- At the bottom of the page, include a box with facts for parents about Special Olympics. Appoint a student editor to select the facts each time. List at least two new facts each month.
- Let parents know about Unified Sports® and Youth Athletes™ programs in your area.
- Ask one student to share main points about the club discussion, have another student summarize the movie or video, and have a third student describe activities, crafts, or games.
- Include an "Upcoming Events" section where you list Special Olympics events in your area, information about events the club will attend, and dates for when permission slips and other paperwork is due.
- Ask students what stories they'd like to include in the newsletter. Encourage individual students or small groups to develop those stories, and set up a schedule for when they'll be published.
- Be sure to credit your contributing writers for each newsletter. If possible, give each child a chance to contribute at some point during the year. (Tip: young students can do simple illustrations to show their favorite activities.)

**Special
Olympics**



Club UNIFY News



Special Olympics

Highlights of the Month



Upcoming Events



Discussions

Date:

Date:

Activities

Movies and Videos

Special Olympics Facts



Student editors:

Cheering on the Athletes

When you think about a sporting event, what do you envision in the stands? Signs! Banners! Pennants! Try these ideas to make items club members can send to athletes in advance or take to the games, to a team's practice, or to a Youth Athletes™ event to show their support. Students will enjoy the creative outlet, and athletes will be buoyed by the words of encouragement and support.

As you plan your club meetings, identify several upcoming events for which you want to create items and determine the best types of items to send in advance or take to the event. (Contact your local Special Olympics office for details or visit your local office's website.) For example, banners work well for outdoor events, pennants might be best for indoor events, and cards are good for far-away events.

Brainstorm items students can create to help them get to know the athletes. Display athletes' pictures, make sports cards with facts and stats, or make scrapbooks for the athletes. The possibilities are endless!

You'll soon find your meeting times can go quickly. To make the best use of time, once students learn the process for making a particular item, plan to make it again for a different event. You won't have to teach students how to do it again, so you'll be able to produce items with just a quick refresher.

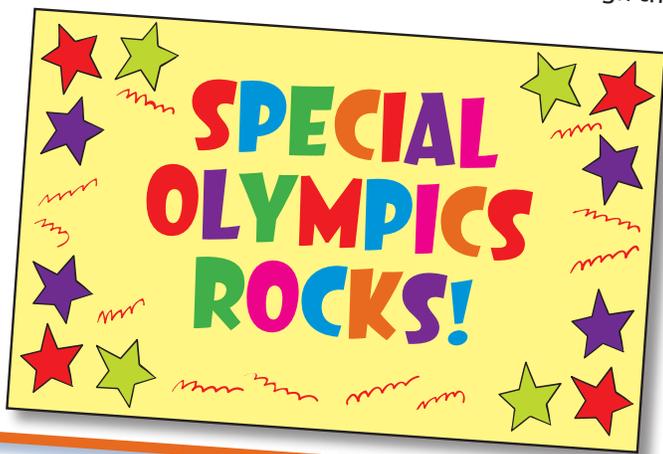
Take pictures of the items or scan them so you can share your students' handiwork in your newsletter or on flyers or posters announcing club events.

Here's an array of items that will work well as your students cheer on the athletes.

How to make a handheld sign

Materials: Large white or light-colored poster board, pencil, markers with a thick point, ruler.

1. Have small groups of students come up with an encouraging message for the athletes, such as *Special Olympics Rocks!* or *Do Your Best!* Keep it short and simple.
2. Have older students take the lead in lightly writing the message on the poster board, using a ruler to keep the lines straight.
3. Encourage students to stand back and see how it looks. Are the lines straight? Are the margins even? Are all the words spelled right? Are the words large enough to read from a distance?
4. Have all of the group members use the markers to color the letters and add simple illustrations.
5. Tell students to leave room on the sign for athletes to sign their names at the event.



How to make a triangular pennant

Materials: Felt, dowel rods or old wooden rulers, a hot glue gun (for teacher use only), fabric markers or fabric paint, letter stencils or stick-on letters, scissors, pencil.

1. Cut the felt into large triangles so you have one per club member.
2. Have students choose a short message to put on their pennants, such as #1 or Go! If you are using letter stencils, have students plan their messages and use pencil to trace the letters onto the pennants. Once their messages are ready, have them use the fabric markers or fabric paint to trace the letters and fill them in. Ask older students to help younger students. Be sure students leave a flap on the side of the triangle so you can glue the pennant to the dowel rod or ruler.
3. Fold the flap over the dowel rod or ruler, using the hot glue gun to glue it into place. Insert the stick, adding more glue as needed.

Creative options: You can do lots of variations on this project to mix things up.

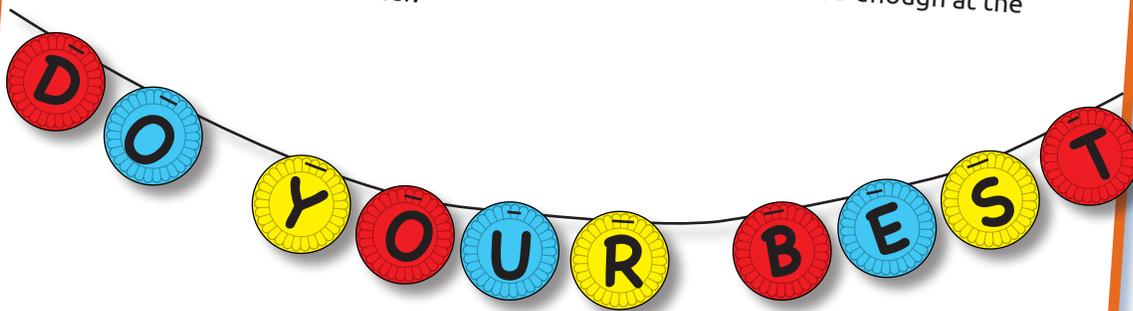
- Have the whole class select one message. Then have each child put one letter on his or her pennant. String the letters onto yarn (with the flap at the top) to spell out the message.
- Purchase several colors of felt. Have students trace letters onto one color and then glue them onto triangles of another color.
- Use other materials, such as fun foam or laminated construction paper, to make pennants.
- Challenge small groups of students to each put one word on their pennants and then stand together to spell out a message. They might even want to do the wave or create a cheer!



How to make a banner with paper plates

Materials: Paper plates in different colors, scissors, hole punchers, permanent markers, at least 8 feet of thin cord or heavy yarn.

1. Punch two holes next to each other near the edge of each plate.
2. Decide on your message. Use a permanent marker to write it, one letter per plate.
3. Decorate the two end plates with the Special Olympics logo. (Note: Students' handprints add a nice personalized touch as well.)
4. String cord or yarn through the holes on all the plates. Leave enough at the ends to hang the banner.



Other types of banners

You can make banners using lots of different types of materials. Look around to see what you have on hand; then modify the instructions as needed.

- Fabric and fabric paint
- Butcher paper and markers
- An inexpensive vinyl tablecloth, shower curtain, or plastic tarp cut to size and permanent markers
- Newsprint (contact your local newspaper for inexpensive rolls or request a donation).

Note: Be sure to ask parents for suggestions on materials they may have access to. For example, a parent who works at a fabric store might be able to purchase clearance fabric at a discount.

How to make a pop-up card

Pop-up cards are a great way to encourage and support the athletes, either before or after an event. If you can't get to an event in person, send a card—or a bunch of them! Here are directions for a cute pop-up card to let the athletes know you're rooting for them. For a tracer, see page 18.

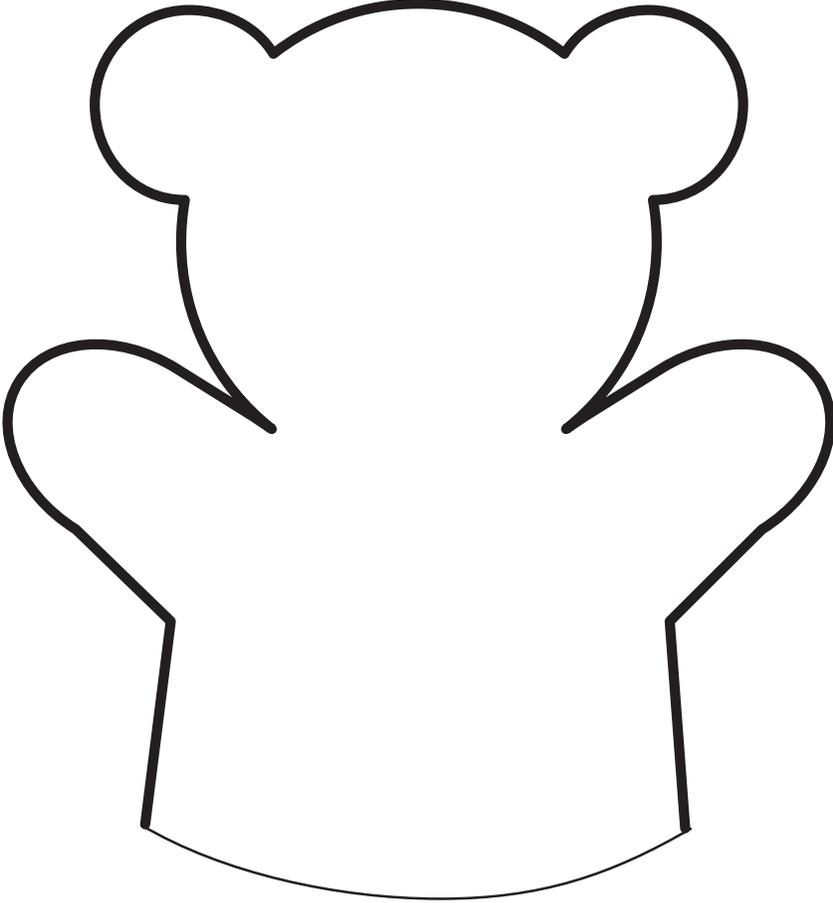
Materials: Tagboard bear tracer, 9-inch white paper plate, yellow and brown tempera paint, paintbrush, black marker, craft knife, tape.

1. Turn the paper plate facedown. Paint the center brown and the outer rim yellow.
2. After the paint dries, label the outer rim with the words "Do Your 'Bear-y' Best Today!"
3. Turn the plate over and fit the bear tracer to the inside curve of the plate rim. Trace the bear onto the plate, as shown.
4. Use a craft knife to cut along the traced lines; then cut along the inner rim of the plate, as shown. Don't cut this piece completely out. (This step is for adults only.)
5. Add facial features to the pop-up bear on the painted side.
6. Carefully separate the cutout sections of the plate. Fold the bear and outer rim forward and the bear silhouette back so the bear stands upright under the yellow arch.
7. Write each athlete's name on the bottom of the plate rim.

Creative options: Once students see how to make the pop-ups, challenge them to create other cards with fun messages to send both before and after events. For example, a lion-themed card might say, "We'll be roaring in the stands for you! Good luck!" or a ladybug-themed card might say, "We spotted your great performance. Way to go!" Students will enjoy dreaming up lots of fun puns and clever sayings.



Pop-Up Card Pattern



Special Olympics

Adding Excitement With Contests!

One goal of Club UNIFY is to support Special Olympics athletes during competitions. So why not give club members and other students a chance to compete in contests that showcase their artistic talents while cheering on the athletes!

Below, you'll find tips for holding a door decorating contest, a poster contest, and a T-shirt decorating contest. You can do these activities as part of club meetings or you can offer teachers schoolwide the opportunity to involve their classes in one or more of these contests. It's a good way for students who aren't in Club UNIFY to learn more about the club and Special Olympics. It might even spur them to join the club!

Each contest has suggested guidelines and ideas for getting started. Your students may want to modify these to reflect recent club themes and discussions. For example, if students have noticed that individual differences aren't always treated with respect at your school, then a door decorating contest specifically focused on respect might be a good option. Modify the contests to reflect the atmosphere at your school.

Door decorating contest

As club members brainstorm contest rules, encourage them to consider the following:

- materials that are permitted
- how much of the door must be covered
- how much participation is required from students
- criteria for judging doors (Creativity? Originality? Overall appeal?)
- who the judges will be
- what kind of award, medal, or ribbon the winning class receives.

Starter ideas:

- Look at the materials you have on hand. Those scraps of holiday tinsel might make a great border, or that leftover glitter glue could add the perfect finishing touch.
- Sketch out your plan. What's your central image? What elements will accent it? Will you put words on the door? Ask students to contribute their ideas and vote on favorite designs.
- Add some dimension—a gold medal popping off the door can really enhance your design.
- Think outside the frame. You don't necessarily have to keep your design confined to the door itself.
- Go a little topsy-turvy. An element of movement makes your design eye-catching.
- Most of all, have fun!



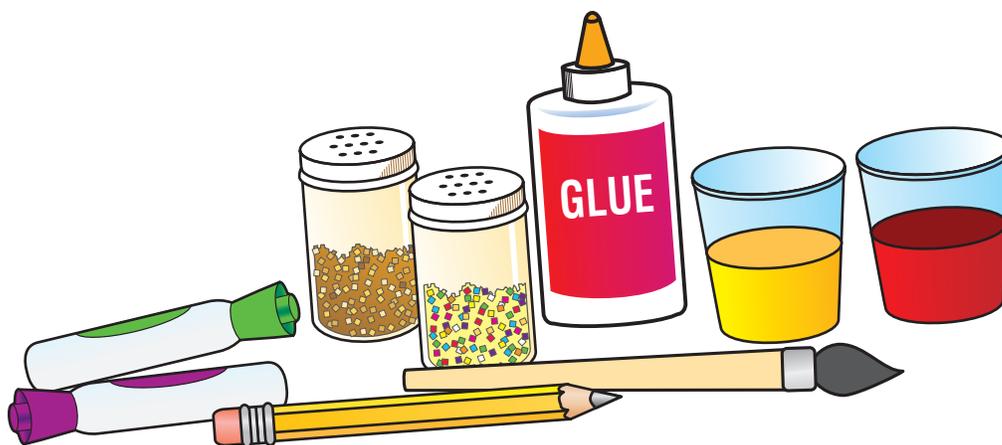
Poster contest

As club members brainstorm contest rules, encourage them to consider the following:

- poster sizes
- materials that are and aren't permitted
- words or themes to include
- where students' names should appear
- who the judges will be
- when and how the winners will be named
- incentives for participation
- ways to recognize participants
- Tip: ask your art teacher if he or she can devote a class period to having students create these posters.

Starter ideas:

- Suggest that students sketch out their ideas before they start to draw.
- A few words can be powerful; too many words can be overwhelming. Help students choose effective words to use—and be sure they check the spelling before they make their final design!
- Encourage students to have one main image and, if space allows, several supporting images. The main image should be larger than the others.
- Remind students that vibrant colors can make all the difference.
- If possible, ask your art teacher or a high school art student to visit your class to make suggestions or help students get started.

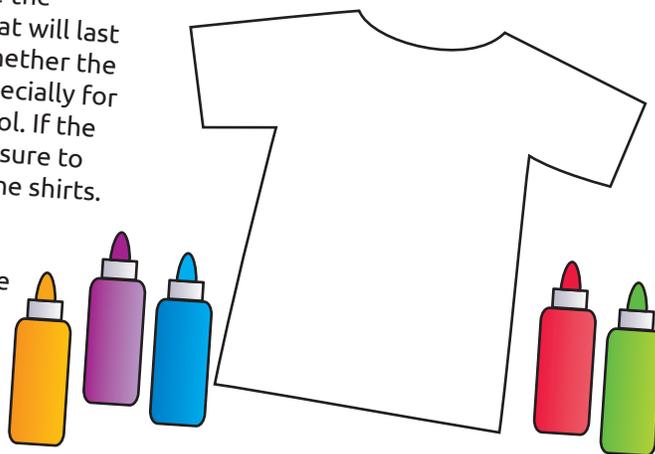


T-shirt decorating contest

With a T-shirt contest students have the opportunity to create something that will last for years. Ask students to decide whether the contest will be to create T-shirts especially for club members or for the whole school. If the shirts are for club members only, be sure to include the words "Club UNIFY" on the shirts.

As club members brainstorm contest rules, encourage them to consider the following:

- how designs will be submitted
- whether both the front and back of the shirt can be decorated
- specific words, phrases, or themes to include
- who the judges will be
- incentives for participants
- ways to recognize participants
- how and when the winning designs will be unveiled.



If possible, contact a local T-shirt shop to have the winning shirts printed. Give one to the contest winner—and one to your principal as well! Sell the extras to raise money for your local Special Olympics office.

Also encourage students to wear their T-shirts to Club UNIFY meetings, Special Olympics events, and anywhere else. Be sure they're ready to explain what Club UNIFY is all about in case someone asks about their shirts.

Starter ideas:

- Suggest that students sketch out their ideas before they start to draw. If possible, bring in a few T-shirts and look at the designs together. What makes them effective?
- A few words can be powerful; too many words can be overwhelming. Help students choose effective words to use—and be sure they check the spelling before they make their final design!
- Encourage students to have one main image. Remind students that they can use the space on the sleeves to reinforce that image. All of the images should tie together for a cohesive design.
- Remind students that vibrant colors can make all the difference.
- If possible, ask your art teacher or a high school art student to visit your class to make suggestions or help students get started.

Puzzles, Games, and More

Club UNIFY lets members stretch their minds and think about people in a different way. But students also need to stretch their legs after a long school day. Below, find a way to get physical while learning a lesson, a puzzling mind exercise, and a way to reward club members for a job well done.

Did You Know?

Children ages 2½ to 7 can get involved in Young Athletes™, which is a sport and play program for children with intellectual disabilities.

Physical Challenges

You might not have time at every meeting, but plan to take the students to the gym or out to the playground during one of your first meetings. This activity helps students appreciate how Special Olympics athletes have to be brave to compete and work hard to succeed.

Have students run and then try to do a 180-degree jump/turn. Then have them run and try a 360-degree jump/turn. These moves are hard to accomplish without practice. They show students that not everything is easy, and that it can be frustrating trying to conquer a new physical challenge. For younger students, have them try to jump/turn in place.

Chances are, the students will come up with more physical challenges to try! (Tip: Special Olympics' Get Into It has lots of activities for outside the classroom. Visit getintoit.specialolympics.org to download it.)

Earning Badges

At meetings, Club UNIFY members participate in a variety of activities, such as making crafts, learning about acceptance and respect, performing physical challenges, designing word games, writing a newsletter, and much more. Give students a concrete way to see just how much they accomplish by giving out paper badges after each meeting.

Give each child a piece of card stock to fold in half to make a booklet. Have the child decorate the front of the booklet with the Special Olympics logo and his or her name. Explain that you'll distribute a badge after each meeting. Students paste that week's badge inside and write the date and the week's activities. Make up your own badges as your club's activities evolve, and recognize students once they've earned five, ten, 15, or 20 badges.



**Special
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Creating Word Puzzles

During Club UNIFY meetings, you'll be talking about words—those to use and those *not* to use. Periodically, set aside a club meeting for students to create puzzles using words of kindness and acceptance or terms about Special Olympics, sports, and athletes. (Tip: there are lots of online puzzle generators that can make this task quick and fun.)

Choose a theme to go with your meeting and a type of word puzzle that you'd like to have students create. Options include word searches, crossword puzzles, and mazes featuring secret messages. Then have students brainstorm a list of words to go with your theme. Challenge students to create a puzzle by hand or using an online tool. Make a copy, create an answer key, and have students trade puzzles to solve. Alternatively, distribute the puzzles to other teachers to use as filler activities. You'll be showing off club members' work and spreading the word about Club UNIFY and Special Olympics.

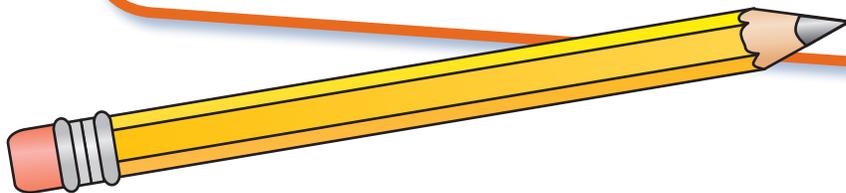
Words to use in your puzzles

Short words for younger students:

Alike	Field	Play/Player
Care	Friend	Same
Change	Fun	Sport
Cheer	Game	Team
Coach	Hope	Train
Fan	Joy	

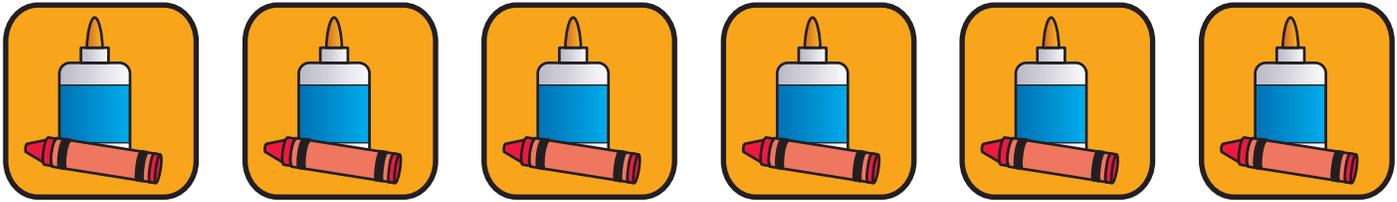
Long words for older students:

Accept/Acceptance	Family	Share
Advocate	Future	Special Olympics
Athlete	Global	Strive
Build	Health/Healthy	Success
Celebrate	Include	Support
Champion	Kindness	Teammate
Community	Laugh	Together
Compete	Leader	Unify
Connect	Medal	Unite
Courage	Practice	Volunteer
Determination	Pursue	World
Empower	Resilience	Youth
Encourage	Respect	
Excel	Service	

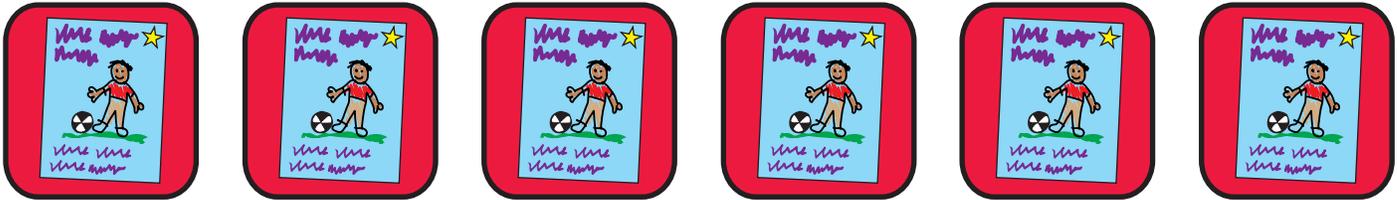


Printable Badges

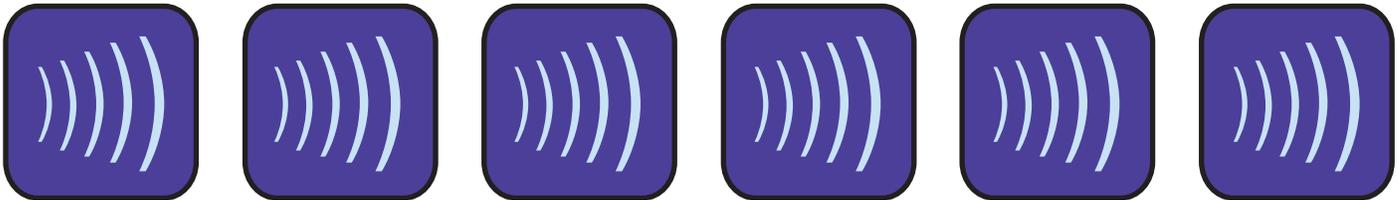
Art Achievers—Award students this badge anytime they create banners, cards, signs, or other items to cheer on Special Olympics athletes.



Advertising Experts—Award students this badge anytime they create posters, flyers, or other materials to advertise club events or promote messages of acceptance and respect around the school.



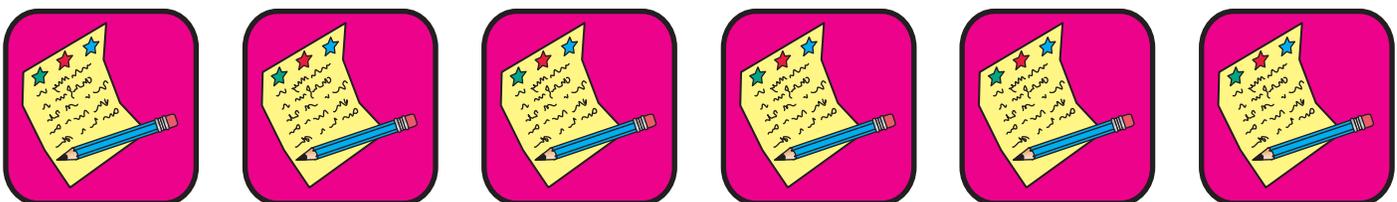
Listeners & Learners—Award students this badge when they listen attentively to a guest speaker or video clip or share insightful responses to club presentations.



Fabulous Photographers—Award students this badge when they take photographs of club events or use photos to share club events.



Ready Writers—Award students this badge when they contribute articles to your newsletter or do other writing activities.



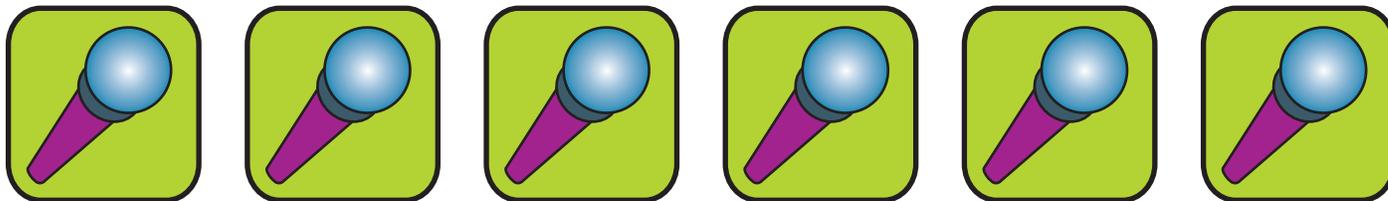
Special Olympics

Printable Badges

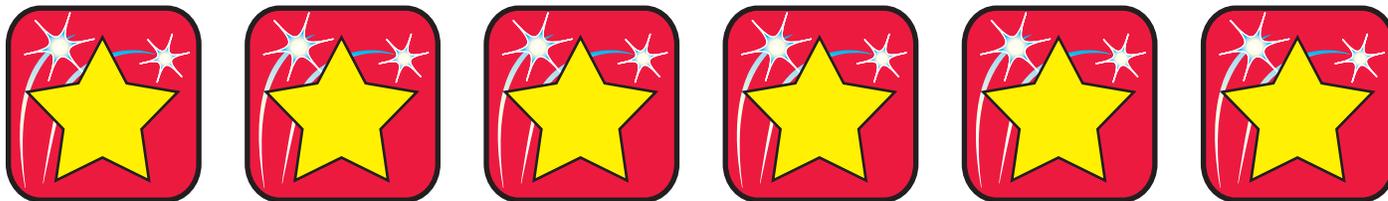
Sport Explorers—Award students this badge when they learn about or try a new sport.



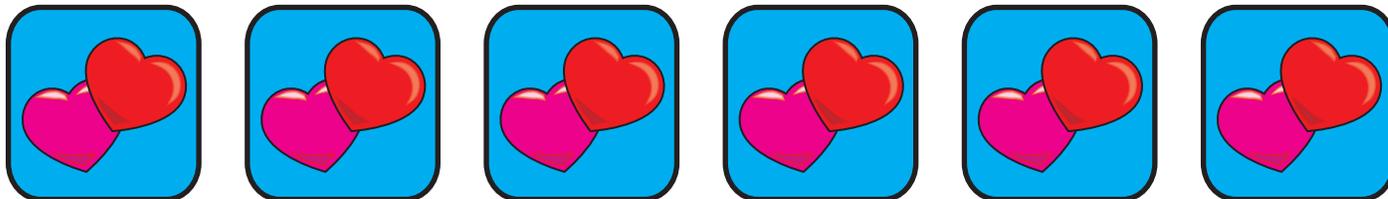
Club UNIFY Messengers—Award students this badge when they make presentations about Club UNIFY or tell others about club events and activities.



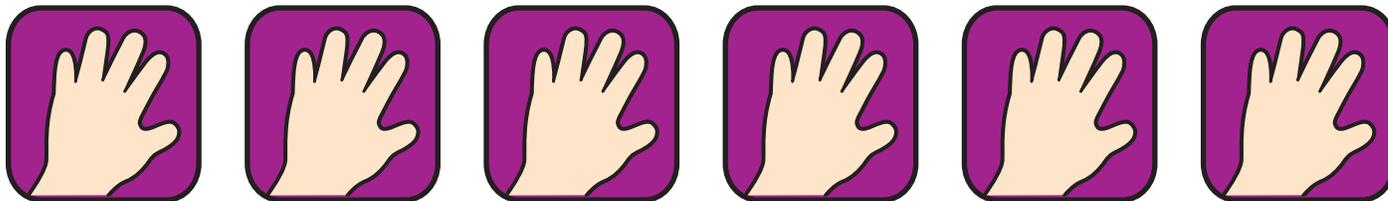
Eager Leaders—Award students this badge when they take leadership roles in planning or directing club activities.



Forever Friends—Award students this badge when they demonstrate traits of true friendship to one another, either during club events or at school.



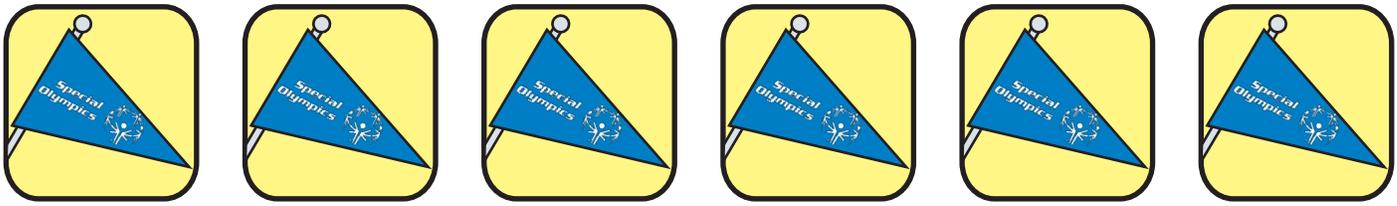
Helping Hands—Award students this badge when they lend a helping hand to you or to others during meetings and club events.



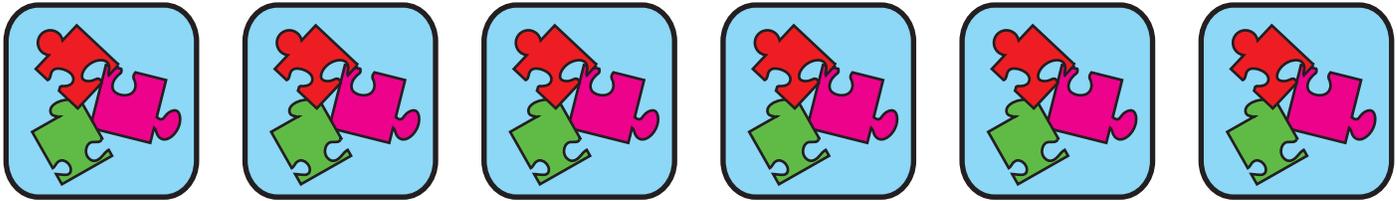
Special Olympics

Printable Badges

Champion Cheerers—Award students this badge when they cheer at Special Olympics events or practices.



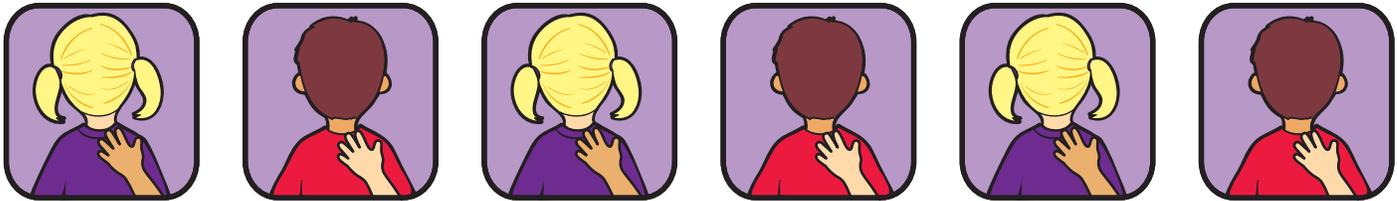
Puzzle Masters—Award students this badge when they create word puzzles to share with club members or other classes.



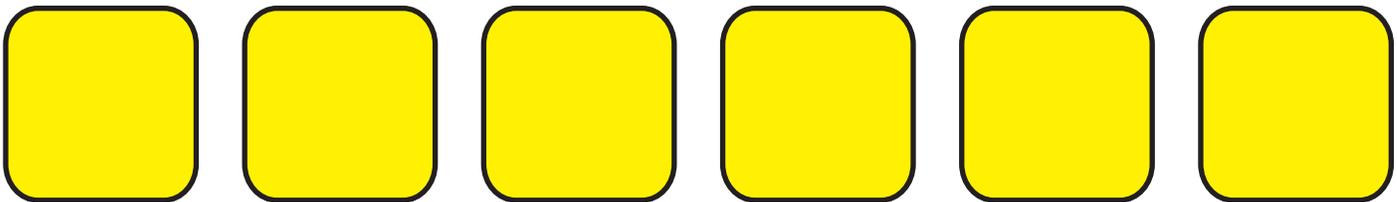
School Improvement Trendsetters—Award students this badge when they take steps to make their school a more inclusive place.



Inclusion Leaders—Award students this badge when they include or respect others during and outside of club activities.



Create Your Own Badge—Create a badge to address special events, roles, and activities in your club.



Special Olympics

How to Find Guest Speakers

Special Olympics coaches, staff members, and athletes make great guest speakers for your club. Not only can they tell club members about their first-hand experiences with Special Olympics, but they can also speak to the importance of students taking leadership roles in creating an inclusive atmosphere at your school.

- Are any of your club members current or former Special Olympics participants? Ask them to get the ball rolling and be the first speakers for your club.
- Talk to your principal and school staff to see if any students in your school participate in Special Olympics. Reach out to middle school and high school teachers, administrators, and staff as well.
- Contact your nearest Special Olympics office to find out about staff members, athletes, parents, coaches, and other supporters who can visit your club. Go to www.specialolympics.org, scroll to the bottom, and click “North America.” Then click your state to find a wealth of information. Or simply type your state’s name and “Special Olympics” into your browser to find your state’s Special Olympics website. (Tip: Special Olympics Global Messengers are athlete leaders who have special training in public speaking. Ask if there are any Global Messengers in your area who can visit your club.)
- Involve club members’ parents, friends, and family. Ask early on if they have connections to Special Olympics, have volunteered at the games, or have connections to the athletes.
- Athletes may be nervous about speaking to a group. Consider having club members submit questions in advance; then ask the athlete’s family or coach to videotape the answers. This is particularly handy since absent club members can watch it at a later date.

How to “Adopt an Athlete”

Contact your local Special Olympics office to pair club members or small groups with a particular athlete or local team, or ask if any local athletes are participating in a Special Olympics national or world competition. Explain that your group will commit to sending that athlete good wishes and words of encouragement. Your local office will have to obtain parental permission to give out athletes’ addresses, so start early to make sure you have plenty of time to shower athletes with good wishes.

How to Find Special Olympics Events

Visit your state’s website to find Special Olympics events to attend. Chances are, you’ll find hundreds across the state. To locate the events nearest you, click on “Local Programs” and then click on your county. You’ll find a list of events for training and competitions, the dates, and where they’re being held. You’ll also find the name of your county’s Special Olympics representative, who you can contact for more information.

- Go high tech! Contact Special Olympics offices and arrange Skype chats or email exchanges with athletes and coaches.
- Help students build an understanding of the different Special Olympics sports (especially if you’ll be attending an event as a group). Invite a high school athlete or coach to your meeting to explain the sport and its basic rules. High school students might even be willing to do a demonstration or to lead students so they can try out the sport themselves. Students will be better equipped to cheer when they’ve tried the activity and understand its challenges. (Tip: let students know that, in some cases, Special Olympics rules are slightly different, but the idea behind the game is the same.)
- Before your speaker’s visit, help students brainstorm questions to ask the speaker. If your speaker is nervous, asking questions will help keep the conversation moving. Your speakers will appreciate that students are interested in what they have to say.



