

**Special  
Olympics**



# **Special Olympics Project UNIFY®**

**Social Inclusion Lessons From The Field**

# Welcome

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I am so excited to unveil the latest resource created by Special Olympics Project UNIFY®. For the past few years, Project UNIFY has collaborated with an array of school communities across the country. Now, for the first time, we look inside 21 schools, all unique in their contributions to the Special Olympics movement, and share their stories and strategies. What is the benefit in studying a cross section of schools that offer Project UNIFY? There are significant differences between many of these schools, but there are also many commonalities and lessons to learn. And these lessons and examples can inspire all our collective efforts in building authentic inclusion for all.

I hope that you find these snapshots helpful in sparking ideas for current Project UNIFY schools and promoting new enthusiasm. I want to thank all of the U.S. Programs and their featured schools for participating. This collaborative effort will no doubt help us reach beyond our current pool of schools with the promise of social inclusion through sports and the power of youth leadership.

So please, enjoy, and find renewed motivation in the creative work of our students, teachers and administrators.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrea Cahn'.

Andrea Cahn  
Senior Director, Project UNIFY®  
Special Olympics North America

# Executive Summary

**Special Olympics Project UNIFY® provides State Special Olympics Programs with a range of options to work with schools in creating unique Project UNIFY opportunities that best fit within the school's existing programming, the population of students they serve, and the school's goals for creating a socially inclusive environment. When local schools are supported in allowing their efforts to evolve based on individual expectations, experience and readiness, the adoption and implementation of Project UNIFY can ensure that social inclusion will become a part of the fabric of the school.**

Given the flexibility of implementation inherent to Project UNIFY, it is understandable that there are a variety of effective strategies for achieving its intended goals. The following report describes in detail the Project UNIFY programming and socially inclusive educational practices implemented in 21 elementary, middle, and high schools participating in Project UNIFY throughout the United States. Each of the schools selected provided a considerable opportunity to not only explore scalable Project UNIFY programs, but also to demonstrate the power of Project UNIFY when integrated with ongoing socially inclusive strategies and programming. Site visits to these selected schools and the resultant first-hand observations and conversations with school administration, teachers, and students with and without disabilities provided an opportunity to better understand how the principle of social inclusion fits within a Project UNIFY school, and how socially inclusive educational practices are implemented and enhanced by its presence.

Each of the participating 21 schools were at various stages of Project UNIFY implementation, yet each contained

elements of the central characteristics of Project UNIFY. These characteristics are: youth leadership, school-community collaborations, continuous improvement, communication, professional development, unifying programming and creating/sustaining relationships. Although individual schools went about including these key characteristics in different ways, and many experienced challenges during the process, there were several fundamental features consistently present in each, such as: efforts to promote social inclusion were student centered, where all students are supported such that they can contribute in meaningful ways; youth leadership was encouraged among a wide range of students; continuous improvement was guided by students, teachers, and administrators; and there was active and ongoing support from administration at both the school and district levels.

It is clear that through Project UNIFY schools are able to enhance existing practice and generate new goals for promoting social inclusion. It is also clear however that to do so, policy makers, education leaders, teachers and other advocates of inclusion must begin

with a plan that is intentional, measured and mindful of the present circumstances of the school or district. Fundamentally, Project UNIFY is not a one size fits all program. Thus the schools and diversity of programming outlined in this report, and common characteristics of success presented, can assist schools and districts as they formulate a plan for creating, or further evolving, school environments where "...all young people are agents of change - fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities."

## Overview

As states, districts and schools work to create more socially inclusive environments, it is important to remember that students engage socially across both formal and informal settings. For social inclusion to become sufficiently infused into the school culture and

climate, efforts to build awareness, nurture inclusive relationships and build expectations for inclusive behavior need to take place in unstructured and structured environments, within classrooms and hallways, gyms and lunchrooms.

While this cross-context is critical to ensure social inclusion becomes part of the fabric of the school, it won't happen all at once, and it will happen differently in each school. There are a plethora of alternative strategies for achieving this end, and there will be many starting points and adjustments along the way. Like weaving a delicate tapestry, each thread of inclusive strategies that is added creates a more complete picture and fills gaps between the strategies previously developed.



# School Visit Process

## Project UNIFY Leadership Team

The 21 Special Olympics Project UNIFY® School Visits, conducted between December 2011 and March 2013, were designed and implemented by a leadership team composed of the following Project UNIFY national leaders:

- **Andrea Cahn**
- **Teri Dary**
- **Rhonda McClung**
- **Terry Pickeral**
- **Brian Quinn**
- **Sarah Wright**

The leadership team created the School Visit strategies and protocols, engaged Special Olympics State Program leaders, conducted the School Visits, and created School Visit Reports identifying the schools' activities, engagement strategies, challenges, outcomes, impacts and implications for other schools. (NOTE: the School Visit Protocols and Prompts can be found in Appendix B).



## Project UNIFY State Program School Visits

Special Olympics Project UNIFY® is an education-based project that uses sports and education programs to activate young people to develop school communities where all youth are agents of change – fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities.

Project UNIFY strategies include service-learning curricula, Unified Sports® and Young Athletes™ programs, R-Word campaigns, and youth leadership development opportunities for young people with and without intellectual disabilities.

In 2011, Project UNIFY developed a set of protocols to examine the specific strategies schools employ to integrate and sustain the constellation of the above practices. By examining schools in depth, the process yields a deeper set of quality policy and practice options for other schools to consider, adopt and/or adapt. Another anticipated outcome, as we share the outcomes and impacts with education leaders and policymakers, is that schools across the country will better understand how to integrate and sustain socially inclusive characteristics.

Project UNIFY national leaders conducted formal school visits with State Program staff using these protocols. The results have proven very helpful in efforts to advance social inclusiveness in schools throughout the nation and within the Special Olympics community.

The following offers the rationale, criteria, insights, strategies and resources that guided the school visits and the collection and analyses of corresponding information.

## Selection of Schools

In order to examine the diversity of quality social inclusion strategies implemented in schools throughout the United States, we selected 21 schools representing all grades and the constellation of strategies that other schools can consider, adopt and/or adapt.

In selecting the 21 schools, we reviewed formal reports, talked with State Program leaders and staff, explored State Program web sites, examined formal evaluations, and reviewed resources provided by schools such as press releases, videos, news articles and TV stories. The corresponding analyses identified 21 schools that in our opinion not only offered scalable strategies, information, stories and quotes to advance social inclusion, but also demonstrated the impacts of integrating Project UNIFY strategies and programs. Schools were selected based on their ability to provide the greatest opportunity to learn from schools that advance social inclusion by identifying strategies, resources and lessons learned to deepen and broaden social inclusion.

The expectation is that Special Olympics State Programs and their Project UNIFY schools can see themselves in the stories of the 21 schools in 10 states and enhance their own social inclusion strategies.

## Purpose

The purpose of the school visits was to identify and describe socially inclusive educational practices implemented in Project UNIFY schools, and disseminate those results to policymakers, education leaders, practitioners and Project UNIFY advocates to understand:

- **What a Project UNIFY school looks like**
- **How students experience social inclusion in their school**
- **How social inclusion aligns with school priorities and programs**
- **The various responsibilities of education stakeholders to successfully integrate and sustain socially inclusive characteristics in school**
- **What stories, examples and lessons learned can inform others**
- **The challenges schools face and strategies used to address them**
- **Effective policies and quality practices that schools incorporate**
- **Insights to integrate and sustain Project UNIFY characteristics in additional schools**

In addition, Project UNIFY representatives responded to questions from school representatives to advance Project UNIFY in their school.



### Preparation

School visits provided opportunities for Project UNIFY national staff and State Program leaders to collaboratively examine school-based practices and share experiences, interactions, insights and implications. Therefore, Project UNIFY national and State Program staff worked together to prepare for the visits in order to ensure a common set of expectations and responsibilities.

Schools are busy places with schedules and patterns of behavior that are somewhat challenged by a school visit. To ensure our visits were helpful rather than disruptive, we prepared thoroughly and had frequent interactions with Special Olympics State Program staff and school leaders prior to, during and after the school visit).

The majority of school visits took two to three hours and focused on observations and conversations with students, teachers, administrators and staff, along with parents and community members as appropriate. We

implemented specific protocols (prompts and questions) for each of these constituent groups and adapted them for each school visit.

Three school visits (Brophy Preparatory Academy, Mt. Horeb High School and Northland Pines High School) were conducted using technology rather than on-site visits, following the school visit protocols and conducting interviews with students, teachers, administrators and parents. These school visits engaged State Program Project UNIFY leaders/staff and proved to be effective and efficient in securing and analyzing data.

Each school's Project UNIFY liaison or point of contact assisted in the scheduling (date, day and time) and ensured the participating individuals and groups were aware of the school visit purpose and activities.

We emphasized to the liaisons and those we interacted with that we were visiting not to make judgments, but rather to examine their strategies and learn from them. Because school leaders and

teachers often host visitors who judge their work, they welcomed our nonjudgmental visits as an opportunity to talk with us about their strategies.

Most school visits engaged three to five leadership team members to share leadership and ensure diverse perspectives of the observations and interactions. As the teams were developed it was important to ensure that each member:

1. **understood the purpose of the school visit and use of the data/information;**
2. **knew his or her responsibilities (when to take the lead, conduct interviews, take notes, etc.);**
3. **worked as a member of a team that is making a contribution to the advancement of social inclusiveness; and**
4. **committed to reflecting on the experience and contributing to a formal summary of the school visit.**

The following template was used to plan the school visit.

### School Visit Schedule

Schools adopted and/or adapted the following schedule and attached protocols:

- **A conversation with the principal**
- **Observation of a Project UNIFY activity, classroom, etc.**
- **A conversation with special and general education students**
- **A conversation with teachers engaged in Project UNIFY**
- **A debrief with the principal to share experiences and insights**
- **A debrief between staff to discuss what the specific strategies and insights relevant for sharing among PU Programs**
- **Create a formal summary with action steps to inform State Program leaders, staff and partners as well as Project UNIFY of the experiences and implications.**

### Benefits

Schools benefit by reflecting on the data collected to celebrate their progress and continuously improve their efforts to deepen and broaden social inclusive characteristics.

Special Olympics State Programs benefit by better understanding (1) how schools effectively integrate and sustain Project UNIFY characteristics, (2) how to provide quality professional development to critical constituents using the data from the school visits, (3) which new/enhanced resources it can develop to increase education leaders' and policymakers' awareness and adoption of social inclusion characteristics and (4) how to answer the questions "what does it look like?" and "what does it take?" to successfully integrate and sustain social inclusiveness in schools.

Special Olympics Project UNIFY benefits by better understanding (1) the most effective policies and practices schools adopt to sustain social inclusiveness in schools and (2) how to communicate these strategies effectively to district and school leaders, staff, students and collaborators.



# School Accomplishments

## General Findings

While each of the 21 Project UNIFY schools included in this report implemented and integrated social inclusion activities and programs in its own way, they each followed the characteristics and principles central to Special Olympics Project UNIFY®. These characteristics are: youth leadership, school-community collaborations, continuous improvement, communication, professional development, unifying programming and creating/sustaining relationships.

Special Olympics Project UNIFY focuses on creating inclusive schools by ensuring all students are encouraged and supported to be “agents of change” where all students are capable of being leaders. All students deserve the opportunity to experience an engaging school and community environment that recognizes their gifts and shares them with others.

Each of the elementary, middle/junior high and high schools visited built on its own strengths, specific social inclusion opportunities and champions committed to social inclusion. Therefore, while the characteristics of social inclusion are consistent across all school settings, the Project UNIFY strategies that are implemented vary from school to school. This provides a diverse set of models and options for other schools to consider, adopt and/or adapt.

The following 10 characteristics were consistently present in the 21 schools visited. As mentioned earlier, the precise combination of these characteristics established a distinct pathway that each school followed to social inclusion.

- 1. Social inclusion is a purposeful process and is woven into the fabric of the school.**
- 2. Efforts are student-centered.**
- 3. Social inclusion is valued, nurtured and supported across formal and informal settings.**
- 4. Consistent opportunities are provided to engage students in developing, implementing, and sustaining a wide range of inclusive activities.**
- 5. Shared leadership is embraced, and includes a broad range of stakeholders.**
- 6. Leaders are intentionally cultivated beyond a passionate few.**
- 7. There is a vision and purpose for social inclusion that is understood and shared by the school community as work that is core to the school/district’s mission.**
- 8. Social inclusion is about all students being supported in contributing in meaningful ways, not some being the “helped” and others being the “helpers.”**
- 9. Students, teachers, and administrators value and engage in ongoing reflection to guide continuous improvement.**
- 10. Administrative support is concrete, visible, and active at both school and district levels.**

## School Profiles

Below we provide information on each school’s accomplishments toward integrating social inclusiveness. The information is organized by elementary, middle and high schools.

For each school we offer a tag line and an outline of its social inclusion integration strategies followed by a summary highlighting their work. In Appendix A we provide contact information for each school.

### Elementary Schools

#### **Dodson Elementary School New Iberia, Louisiana**

*School-wide social inclusion with support from university students*

- ✓ Inclusive Physical Education classes
- ✓ Socially inclusive school climate
- ✓ Inclusive after-school and social activities
- ✓ Collaboration with higher education students as mentors

#### **Overview**

Dodson Elementary School models social inclusion through classroom and school activities. Walking through the school, you find hand-made banners everywhere welcoming “SOI/Project UNIFY.” Special Olympics activities are ingrained in the culture of this school.

This was the principal’s, Ms. Louviere, first year at the school, but she was hired from within the district. She spoke about the socially inclusive culture at Dodson Elementary School and said it was well known in the district for this work.

#### **Social Inclusion Strategies**

Dodson Elementary School models social inclusion through classroom and school activities. Inclusive Physical Education engages special and general education students in sports activities and team building games focusing on mutual support and assistance. The school hosts an R-Word assembly and plans to form an after-school Partners Club to include social and sports activities.

Ms. Landry is a model PU liaison that “gets” the need for PU in addition to traditional SO. She has seamlessly integrated PU initiatives into the school culture. Ms. Landry has been involved with SO for many years and has even attended World Games.

Ms. Landry sees a lot of value in the “social” activities they have held at the school and would like to increase these opportunities for more students, but needs funding for supplies and food.

### Unique Highlights

College students serve as mentors for Project UNIFY schools. The mentors are organized by regions, and thus Dodson Elementary School had access to a University of Louisiana-Lafayette student. One college student mentor had been engaged in Project UNIFY in her high school and provided guidance and support to the Dodson Elementary School teachers.

Although PE classes are inclusive at Dodson, each class typically has few SO athletes. SO practices therefore take place after school and include students from other elementary schools in the district.

### Outcomes

The students clearly understood that not everyone is the same, but they did not focus on these differences. They mentioned that everyone needs support from each other at different times. When they were asked, "What is the R-Word?" They responded in unison, "We can't say it!"

The combination of the principal's leadership, the school liaison's experience and commitment to social inclusion, and the college student's encouragement and support give Dodson Elementary School a great leadership team to successfully integrate and sustain quality social inclusion activities and programs.

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### Forest View Elementary School Lansing, Michigan

*School-based Unified Sports with district-wide support*

- ✓ School district support
- ✓ Adaptive Physical Education
- ✓ Youth Athletes Program
- ✓ Student engagement and leadership

### Overview

Forest View Elementary School's social inclusion activities and programs are supported by the Lansing School District and the Special Olympics Michigan Regional Director (employed by the

school district). Lansing School District engages 18 of its 32 schools in Project UNIFY and views social inclusiveness as both a value and quality practice for student development and achievement.

Inclusiveness is a common value among teachers and students, characterized by respect and by an understanding that all students need to be together to overcome fear and mis-perceptions. This is achieved through Adaptive Physical Education, Young Athletes and school-wide activities. In addition, teachers and students are eager to enhance socially inclusive activities with specific focus on student engagement and leadership.

### Social Inclusion Strategies

Unified Sports and Young Athletes are the two major social inclusion strategies integrated into Forest View Elementary School.

### Unique Highlights

The Lansing School District's commitment to social inclusion and Project UNIFY strategies and programs is built on mutual trust and positive outcomes and impacts. The formal relationship between the school district and Special Olympics Michigan ensures high levels of support, shared leadership and sustainability.

The co-creating of the Regional Director's job description by Lansing School District Adaptive Physical Education Department and the Special Olympics Michigan is a model that can be replicated in other states, districts and schools.

Given the district-wide implementation strategy, students will be engaged in social inclusion from elementary school through middle school and high school, ensuring ongoing development of socially inclusive attitudes, values, knowledge, skills and actions.

### Outcomes

There is a definite feeling of unity, a positive response and support from teachers, and acknowledgment by the principals that this is good programming that should continue.

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*The Director of Special Education for the Lansing School District stated during the school visit, "I don't know why anyone would not do this."*

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The activities they plan are well-accepted and gaining popularity, and they should be leveraged for more school-wide impact when possible. In addition, schools could develop additional strategies to ensure sustainability of the activities and to embed them more deeply into the fabric of the school culture.

The Lansing School District leadership is tremendously supportive and engaged. This relationship should be cultivated and leveraged throughout the state.

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### Frances Rhodes Elementary School San Antonio, Texas

*Social inclusion built on trust and adaptability*

- ✓ Buddies mentoring program
- ✓ Special Olympics Project UNIFY sports days
- ✓ Student engagement
- ✓ Parent engagement

### Overview

Frances M. Rhodes Elementary School, San Antonio, Texas, is a kindergarten through fifth grade school with 629 students (62% Title I).

There is a school-wide shared vision and commitment to creating and maintaining an inclusive school climate, driven by supportive and committed shared leadership on the part of the administrators and school staff.

Engagement is at the core of the inclusive values and activities, focusing on the benefits to special and general education students, teachers and the school.

There is a focus on communication, appreciating the gifts/talents of each student, and on engaging parents and other partners in inclusive activities.

### Social Inclusion Strategies

Rhodes Elementary School uses embedded inclusive activities along with Project UNIFY Meet in the Middle social inclusion strategies to engage special education and fifth grade students with inclusive activities in the classroom on a weekly basis, and in physical education every other day. School-wide inclusive opportunities are provided through school-wide sports and recreational activities throughout the year.

Ms. Brauchle is the Special Education Campus Coordinator and Alternative Learning Environment Teacher. She has developed a "Buddies" program that engages fifth grade students with special education students in a variety of academic, sports and social activities. Kitchen and gardening activities are highlights of the program.

### Unique Highlights

Principal Lehr has been at Rhodes since it opened and has hired all teachers, assistants and staff. Mr. Lehr demonstrates trust in people and programs thorough shared leadership and is highly engaged in the inclusive efforts at his school. He frequently communicates about the Buddies program with constituents. In addition, district-level leaders are aware of the Buddies program and share information with other schools in the district.

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*According to Mr. Lehr:*

*"Our sustainability plan starts with hiring the right people and focusing on the little things that includes modeling inclusiveness. We also believe in co-creating our values and instructional strategies and how we continuously improve."*

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## School Accomplishments

The following set of beliefs depicts the positive, caring, respectful school climate found at Rhodes Elementary School. We believe we have the “best of the best” teachers and students in our school.

- We believe relationships build love.
- We have an active PTA and have been able to engage fathers and we are very proud of that.
- We lead by example and ensure we:
  - › Have an open door policy.
  - › We are visible to everyone.
  - › We show we care.
  - › We listen.
  - › We continuously improve.

### Outcomes

According to Ms. Brauchle, “Our progress and success are a function of being trusted to adapt and be flexible to meet the needs of our students and structure corresponding activities that benefit our students.” The Buddy program and inclusiveness are “part of the school” and create a sense of community through focusing on engagement, social skill development, role modeling and compassion.

Evidence that inclusion is a core value at the school is found in the ongoing and active support of the following strategies:

- Frequent/planned special and general education classroom activities;
- Choices that fifth grade students have to engage in the inclusive activities;
- Encouragement for special and general education students to develop friendships through their one-on-one Buddies Program;
- The Buddies activities lead to friendships that exist beyond the classroom and activities (e.g., in the hallway, at lunch, school activities, etc.);
- Fifth grade students reflect on their experiences and share them with others, encouraging them to engage in the ongoing opportunities that are available;
- School-wide Unified Sports activities involve students across the student body;
- Engagement opportunities for parents to be engaged in inclusive activities; and
- Inclusive values and leadership sustained throughout the school.

Mr. Castings, a fifth-grade teacher and father of a student with special education needs, noted, “Special education parents are not looking for school environments that are exclusive, rather for a school climate that is ‘inclusive’ and engaging, ensuring their students’ experiences are ‘part of the system.’ The inclusive school climate at Rhodes Elementary School creates the conditions for students to experience school as a place where everyone is part of the school and is able to share their talents in meaningful ways, allowing them to be their ‘best self.’”

### Heritage Preschool Denver, Colorado

*Unified yoga and inclusive student leadership*

- ✓ Unified Yoga
- ✓ Shared student leadership
- ✓ Parent engagement

### Overview

Outside the Heritage Elementary Focus School door is a large sign:

**To Inspire Every Student  
And Teacher  
To Think, to Learn,  
To Achieve, to Care**

The Heritage Preschool is housed in the elementary school and reflects these values through its social inclusion focus. Heritage Elementary School is a public school serving 360 students PK-fifth grade.

Ms. Gassen is a preschool teacher who incorporates social inclusion in her morning and afternoon classes made up of special and general education students. Over the past years, Ms. Gassen has sustained Unified Yoga as an effective social inclusion strategy that engages students in creative stretching and storytelling for knowledge and skill development as well as a focus on health.

### Social Inclusion Strategies

Unified yoga engages students in diverse, safe and physical activities related to classroom stories re-told through stretching activities. Students take turns in the classroom leading sets of activities from role taking to storytelling to creating art and craft projects.

The students begin their class with breathing exercises following the in-and-out demonstrations using a Hoberman Sphere (a multi-colored ball that expands and contracts). This sets a tone of exercise and health but also calms students to begin the various lessons and classroom activities.

The opportunity for each student to be a leader demonstrates inclusion by building on the talents of each student. The arts and craft projects are conducted independently and in small groups, allowing students to explore their talents and learn teamwork and group creativity.

The classroom and associated activities are all inclusive, creating an equitable, trusting, safe and engaging climate for all students to develop academically, socially and physically.

After reading and discussing stories, the students grab their yoga mats and prepare to re-tell the stories using yoga (creative stretching) exercises. They have learned a variety of yoga positions associated with movements by animals (e.g., a bear running through the woods and a dinosaur eating leaves from the tops of trees); playing (e.g., snow yoga); cooking (e.g., making a pie).

### Unique Highlights

Unified Yoga blends academic content with physical exercise in an inclusive environment leading to student knowledge, skill and disposition development. Leadership is expected of each student and is a common opportunity each day.

Ms. Gassen is now leading a district-wide professional learning community to help other teachers in the district gain knowledge and skills necessary to successfully implement Unified Yoga and social inclusiveness in their classrooms and schools.



### Outcomes

By engaging in socially inclusive activities in the classroom, students are relaxed and calm; they use and build their gross motor skills and improve their focus.

The students learn leadership skills and respect each other by celebrating differences.

Teachers combine academic, social and health content through Unified Yoga, creating more effective and efficient use of classroom time. The blending of academic standards is very effective for teachers and also encourages the engagement of parents in classroom activities.

The school has created a climate of inclusiveness, equity, engagement and high expectations for all students to be leaders and succeed.

District leaders are impressed with the socially inclusive practices and support taking Heritage Preschool practices to scale.

### White Pine Elementary School Boise, Idaho

*PE Buddies leading to social inclusiveness*

- ✓ PE Buddies
- ✓ Reading Buddies
- ✓ Lunch Buddies

### Overview

White Pine Elementary School is located in Boise, Idaho. The school serves 468 students in grades PK-6.

### Social Inclusion Strategies

Project UNIFY offers a variety of opportunities for relationships to develop between students in general education and students with special education needs. Inclusiveness is fostered through a Buddies program. The program began as PE Buddies, which focuses on fitness and friendship.

This effort led to the development of Reading Buddies and, soon thereafter, Lunch Buddies.

The Project UNIFY liaison, Ms. Beymer, is critical to the progress and success of inclusive activities at White Pines Elementary School. She has helped interested faculty and encouraged other faculty to create inclusive opportunities for general and special education students.

### Unique Highlights

Students in the PE Buddies program assist their peers in physical education class. The students were asked about their experience as a Buddy and why they participate in the program. Some of their answers included:

- **It is the right thing to do.**
- **It is good for the community.**

When the students were asked what they would tell future Buddies that would help prepare them for this program, one student said, "You really just have to care." Another student cited the need for patience.

The same students also acknowledged that sometimes it is difficult to work with peers who cannot communicate as they do. However, they said that over the course of being Buddies they have learned a lot about their special education friends and what they like and don't like.

### Outcomes

White Pines Elementary School provides quality inclusive opportunities through their PE Buddies, Lunch Buddies and Reading Buddies activities. The principal's, Ms. Anderson, and liaison's, Ms. Beymer, commitment to inclusiveness is critical to integrating and sustaining inclusiveness in the school. The current inclusive activities are leading to additional opportunities for more students and teachers to engage in inclusive activities. While there is an identified "champion" at the school, there is also a high level of administrative support, and a variety of teachers are directly involved in implementing the Buddies program.

## Middle Schools

### South Junior High School Boise, Idaho

*Student clubs, arts, music, sports and student teamwork*

- ✓ Social inclusive sports and music
- ✓ Socially inclusive school climate
- ✓ Builders Club
- ✓ Unified Sports
- ✓ Inclusive student clubs

### Overview

South Junior High School is located in Boise, Idaho. The school serves grades 7-9, with a total student population of 613 students.

The school principal, Ms. Olsen, appreciates the importance of an inclusive school and strives to build a similar commitment in her staff. With that overarching value in mind, South Junior High School has created a variety of avenues that increase social inclusion, including sports, ROTC and an inclusive music class. Other strategies that contribute to the sense of pride they feel in creating an equitable learning environment include the school uniforms, basketball team, openness to learning, and the way the school supports students' strengths and good attitudes.

### Social Inclusion Strategies

South Junior High School offers its students a range of opportunities to engage in social inclusion efforts both inside and outside the classroom environment. The strategies include:

- **teamwork in class; special and general education students working together**
- **Unified Sports® during lunchtime**
- **tutoring that leads to development of friendships**
- **after-school clubs including Builders' Club, sports, music, art, National Honor Society, and other clubs**
- **inclusive science and music classes**

- **building on students' interests**
- **engaging parents in school-based activities**
- **being able to share strategies with other teachers through the school's problem-solving team**
- **reviewing research on student progress and challenges**

A group of students recently attended the Special Olympics Idaho Youth Activation Summit. When asked what steps they are planning as a result of their summit attendance, they said they plan to create an R-Word Campaign and increase the Unified Sports® opportunities at their school.

### Unique Highlights

One of the unique implementation efforts at South Junior High School is a "problem-solving team." This team comprises a counselor, nurse, psychologist, social worker and others who work together to address issues of inclusion, diversity and student progress and success. It also provides an avenue for teachers to share successful inclusion strategies.

### Outcomes

As a result of the wide-ranging efforts to create a socially inclusive school, teachers and students at South Junior High School voice a consistent theme of empathy. Students and teachers understand and often discuss equity and inclusiveness. There is a readiness for students and teachers to enhance existing opportunities for inclusiveness, engagement, and student leadership supported by the principal, whose personal stories of inclusion have a positive impact on staff and students at the school.

While there is an identified "champion of Project UNIFY" in the school, engagement and leadership do not stop there. General education teachers want to learn more about working with students with differing abilities to enhance their work in an inclusive environment.

## School Accomplishments

Project UNIFY strategies have led to many inclusive classrooms, sports and extracurricular activities that engage special and general education students and their parents. Sports and arts are two special classes/activities that are inclusive with demonstrable results. Students say they have good experiences in the school and that they would like more opportunities to enhance their leadership knowledge and skills and as well as to engage more students as inclusive leaders.

### James C. Wright Middle School Madison, Wisconsin

*After-school unified leadership leads to inclusive school climate*

- ✓ After-school unified leadership club
- ✓ Get Into It resources in classrooms
- ✓ Service to the community

### Overview

James C. Wright Middle School in Madison, Wisconsin is a sixth through eighth grade charter school serving 242 students (83% Title I).

The school exemplifies a positive, caring, inclusive school climate that has high expectations for all students. Partnerships across various groups within the school are valued and nurtured, with diverse groups joining in efforts to advance a shared vision and mutual goals.

A strong sense of community is visible in the way students and adults interact, and each individual is valued, nurtured, and provided equitable opportunities to experience success.

### Social Inclusion Strategies

Project UNIFY at Wright Middle School is described as an after-school Unified Leadership club, led by an AmeriCorps member at the school. Students gain leadership skills through Get Into It and other activities, and they also design inclusive student-led activities for the school.

While Project UNIFY originated as a club in a lengthy list of after-school opportunities, students and staff have developed a number of partnerships between Project UNIFY and other groups in the school. For example, Crew, an eighth-grade club aimed at organizing community service activities, has partnered with Project UNIFY in planning and hosting a Hoops for Heart fundraiser. Another after-school club, Team Wright, works with Project UNIFY on food pantry efforts.

These partnerships have given students numerous opportunities for leadership and community service. In addition, the involvement of Project UNIFY means that more students are participating in these efforts. This has helped create an expanded awareness of Project UNIFY, resulting in more students wanting to join their efforts.

### Unique Highlights

Staff and students at Wright Middle School exhibit a clear focus on what is possible rather than what is wrong or needs fixing. Positive affirmations abound amidst high expectations for student behavior and performance. The following anecdote is an example of how this approach works:

*During announcements, a behavioral issue was raised about students taking care of their physical space. Rather than talking about what was wrong with student behavior, the speaker provided positive reminders of behavior expectations, followed by examples of the expected behavior.*

Leadership at Wright Middle School is a shared experience and nurtured in all stakeholders. There is a shared commitment to engagement and social action in an inclusive learning environment. Students and staff exemplify the school's

mission: *To successfully educate all students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence required to participate fully in an evolving global society.*

Orientations to student expectations and student-adult interactions such as this provide an important foundation to social inclusion. All students can be successful because all students are expected to be successful. The role of the adult is to scaffold student growth by creating the necessary conditions for all students to have equitable access to success.

Wright Middle School emphasizes inclusion in providing services for students with disabilities in the general education setting. Staff members seek opportunities to provide an education within an inclusive learning environment, such as:

- intentionally designing advisory periods to be inclusive;
- offering universal supports and high expectations to ensure all students are successful; and
- engaging a wide range of stakeholders in creating and carrying out their shared vision.

### Outcomes

Wright Middle School staff describes the school as using an inclusive teaching model, with 95% of students with disabilities being educated in the general education setting with special education support. Rather than sending students outside the general education classroom for needed services, staff report they ask themselves as a team, "What resources can we bring to the classroom to support students' success?" A non-inclusive classroom is not an option.

At Wright Middle School, Project UNIFY provides a structure for students with disabilities to be an integral part of the community. This structure is expanding as other clubs and groups partner with Project UNIFY and begin to embrace socially inclusive strategies.

Students are learning to apply their Project UNIFY experiences to peer interactions in other settings. They have begun to address bullying issues independent of adult intervention, seek opportunities to engage in social activities with students with disabilities in informal settings, and take their lessons on respectful behavior home with them as they impact their family's perceptions and interactions.



High Schools

**Brophy Preparatory Academy  
Phoenix, Arizona**

*Private school embraces social inclusion through partnership with Special Olympic and student clubs*

- ✓ Special Olympics Game Day
- ✓ Special Olympics Club
- ✓ Student Leadership

**Overview**

Brophy Preparatory School for young men in Phoenix, Arizona, has 1,286 students and is dedicated to serving students of all socioeconomic backgrounds who have the potential and desire to maximize their God-given gifts. By creating an atmosphere for academic, emotional and spiritual growth, Brophy develops articulate, sensitive and aware students with a strong sense of self-worth. Brophy graduates develop a deep awareness of each student's gifts and talents, an ability to think critically about the world, and an understanding of the importance of living life in the service of others.

**Social Inclusion Strategies**

Brophy Prep has developed a formal relationship with Special Olympics to implement Special Olympics Game Day, Special Olympics Club and other school and statewide social inclusion activities. The school began its involvement began by offering its campus for Unified Sports/games and transitioned to engaging their students in quality inclusive activities with special education students from other schools. Freshmen take part in an annual Game Day that serves as an orientation to inclusion and an opportunity to learn about other school-based inclusion opportunities.

The required freshman Game Day leads to the opportunity to join the Special Olympics Club, Best Buddies Program and/or other student-developed social inclusion activities. It is significant to note that three students began a Special Olympics Club as a result of their initial Game Day experience. Student leaders are also developing additional ideas for expansion, including Unified Sports teams.

**Unique Highlights**

Efforts at Brophy Prep are uniquely sustainable due to the school's commitment to *Envisioning the Graduate at Graduation*, Characteristics expected of each student include:

- **Open to Growth**
- **Intellectually Competent**
- **Religious**
- **Loving**
- **Committed to Doing Justice**

The collaboration with Special Olympics, and the activities associated with it, are viewed as directly leading to these competencies, Participation has been integrated into the service requirement for all students.

**Outcomes**

As a result of the partnership with Special Olympics, Brophy Prep organizes 350 students and over 200 athletes in Game Day. This effort becomes integrated into conversations on compassion and social justice, transforming it from a stand-alone event with minimal impact to one that expands engagement well beyond this freshman experience.

Brophy Prep focuses on helping each student develop a deep awareness of his own gifts and talents. The school provides a wide variety of ways to be engaged: curricular and extracurricular activities, leadership opportunities, and clubs. Students have a chance to discover and develop their unique gifts, with the set of work developed through Special Olympics serving as an important cornerstone.

Students' experiences with Special Olympics also help increase knowledge and skills in social justice. Each year, Brophy Prep holds a summit on human dignity that helps students understand their personal stance on topics related to social justice. In this context, Special Olympics teaches them how to be involved and what they can do (e.g., tutoring grade school students) to increase social justice at their school.

**Trevor C. Browne High School  
Phoenix, Arizona**

*Unified Sports, student leadership course and school-wide activities*

- ✓ Leadership course
- ✓ Unified Sports and Unified Physical Education
- ✓ Assemblies
- ✓ R-Word Campaign and Spread the Word Dance
- ✓ Student clubs such as DECA and HTIN

**Overview**

Trevor G. Browne High School's comprehensive socially inclusive activities serve as an effective model that other schools can adopt/adapt to make social inclusion an expected component of each student's education experience.

Social inclusiveness through Project UNIFY has increasingly engaged more students and developed more activities to ensure that more students have the opportunity to participate and contribute. Given the high level of social inclusion activities, along with school and community recognition of the positive impact of these activities on individuals, the school and the community, there is much progress to celebrate. Social inclusion efforts currently rely on a small group of teacher and student leaders, who have created a wide range of opportunities through which students are engaged.

**Social Inclusion Strategies**

Trevor G. Browne High School has integrated and sustained a comprehensive set of student-led activities to enhance social inclusiveness as a key school climate characteristic. They include:

- **Physical Education Opportunity Program for Exceptional Learners (PEOPEL) Leadership course**
- **Unified Sports**
- **Unified Physical Education**
- **Assemblies**
- **R-Word Campaign**



- **Student clubs**
  - DECA
  - **Helping Those In Need (HTIN)**
- **Advisory**
- **Student Connect**
- **Transition**
- **Student Council**

Several teachers provide high-quality opportunities for special and general education students to join together for exercise and socially inclusive activities. Teachers responsible for Student Council and student clubs are supportive of social inclusion and appear eager to integrate more socially inclusive activities.

### Unique Highlights

The PEOPEL leadership course is a great formal opportunity for students to build knowledge, skills and attitudes about social inclusion. The positive collaboration among a set of teachers is admirable and demonstrates that a small group can achieve successful integration of social inclusion. The PEOPEL activities include expanded school-based activities. For instance, a recent Hawaiian-themed dance was very high profile and raised funds to further support PEOPEL efforts. Lunchtime also proves to be a great time for engaging other students.

### Outcomes

There is a core set of teachers that understands and supports social inclusiveness at Trevor G. Browne High School. Students have many formal and informal opportunities to understand the multitude of benefits to them, other students, teachers, administrators and the school's climate as they move from awareness to actual social inclusiveness.

The PEOPEL Leadership class provides students an opportunity to design and implement school-wide socially inclusive activities such as the Spread the Word dance, and to effectively use social media to share their activities and success.

Through collaborative efforts to provide mentorship opportunities that engage students in tasks appropriate to their skill, social, and independence

level, teachers have been able to help students understand appropriate behavior and attachment (hugging), and how to effectively engage in groups.

The students identified several lessons they have learned from their socially inclusive school-based activities including:

- **Unified Sports provides exercise and other healthy activity.**
- **The PEOPEL course offers a formal opportunity to build leadership skills while meeting a real need through engagement.**
- **Special education students have gifts and talents that can be expressed to others throughout the school campus.**
- **Lunchtime is a great time to for students to build their social inclusion awareness and engage them in activities.**
- **School-wide activities such as dances, assemblies and clubs build social inclusiveness among the students.**



### Cactus Shadows High School Cave Creek, Arizona

*Student leadership, Partners Club, Unified Sports and inclusive school climate*

- ✓ Socially inclusive student council
- ✓ Partners Club
- ✓ Unified Sports
- ✓ Principal leadership

### Overview

Cactus Shadow High School is located in Cave Cree, Arizona. The school serves 1,772 students in grades 9-12.

### Social Inclusion Strategies

The principal, Mr. Bebee understands the role of the Partners Club, student council and Unified Sports® activities in creating a socially inclusive school and supports these efforts. Special education students work in his office and thus he has daily contact with them and acknowledges their contributions to the school. He recognizes the schools' progress in inclusion, but also wants to enhance the opportunity for more students to understand, participate in, and contribute to inclusiveness.

Cactus Shadows integrates the following inclusive strategies:

- **Unified Sports®**
- **Partners Club**
- **Student Council**
- **Elective class for general education students to be with special education students**

### Unique Highlights

Cactus Shadows has strong leadership by administration, special and general education teachers, and students. There is a readiness to integrate the inclusive curriculum that has been developed and used in other schools in Arizona. Special and general education teachers work together to create quality opportunities for inclusiveness that is supported by the principal, and the paraprofessionals in the special education classrooms have proven critical to effective inclusion activities.

Students have multiple opportunities to engage in creating a socially inclusive school climate through Student Council, elective courses, Unified Sports® and Partners Club. The passion and commitment of students in the Partners Club is contagious.

### Outcomes

Students described Partners Club as "the best part of my life." They understand the Partners Club offers a tremendous opportunity for students with and without disabilities to learn and grow together. They said it really pleases them to see many people show up for Special Olympics sports activities and how supportive they are of the athletes.

Partners noted that sports provide a great way for students with different abilities to join together as teammates, but they added that special and general education students have become friends as well.

Cactus Shadows High School takes inclusiveness seriously. Shared leadership among adults and students is nurtured to ensure the school is socially inclusive and bullying is reduced. Special and general education teachers work together to provide quality opportunities for students to engage in inclusive activities; Unified Sports® is popular and an effective inclusive strategy, and the administration is committed to continuously improving their inclusion efforts.

### Chandler High School Chandler, Arizona

*Unified Sports, student leadership  
and district support*

- ✓ Leadership in the Community course (utilizing Get Into It resources)
- ✓ Unified Sports
- ✓ Assemblies
- ✓ Chandler Buddies
- ✓ Student council

#### Overview

Chandler High School serves 3,209 students in grades 9-12.

Chandler High School has integrated and sustained a comprehensive set of activities that engage students in a full set of inclusive activities led by students to enhance social inclusiveness as a key school climate characteristic. This includes Chandler Buddies, a student leadership course, student council engagement, Unified Sports and school assemblies.

Chandler High School has deepened social inclusiveness within its school and community and broadened social inclusion throughout the district. High levels of district support provide facilities, transportation and uniforms, ensuring resources are available for Unified Sports activities.

Chandler High School values district-wide integration across schools and thus is working with two junior high schools on social inclusion and interested in additional pilot programs in the elementary schools.

#### Social Inclusion Strategies

Chandler High School has integrated and sustained a comprehensive set of student-led activities to enhance social inclusiveness as a key school climate characteristic, including:

- Leadership in the Community course (utilizing Get Into It resources)
- Unified Sports

- Cheer Squad
- Basketball
- Track and Field
- Flag Football
- Assemblies
- Chandler Buddies
- Student Council

Social inclusiveness through Project UNIFY has increasingly engaged more students and developed additional activities to ensure that more students have the opportunity to participate and contribute.

#### Unique Highlights

One unique component of Chandler High School Unified Sports is that the athletes wear the same uniform (home and away) as the varsity athletes. This is a simple yet very important commitment that Chandler High School has made to social inclusiveness and equity.

#### Outcomes

##### Teachers

The teachers shared the comprehensive nature of social inclusiveness opportunities available to students in the high school (listed above) and the impacts on students, teachers, staff, parents, the school and community.

One of the specific student impacts is an increase in self-esteem that comes from authentic engagement of special and general education students in meaningful school, extracurricular and community-based activities.

Teachers shared stories of students who at first were reluctant to engage with special education students, but challenged themselves to examine inclusive opportunities, which led to high levels of engagement, learning, development and friendships.

Another story described how students encounter uncomfortable and awkward circumstances and turn them into positive learning opportunities. For example, when a student with special



needs attended the Homecoming Dance in a costume (confusing two activities), students took turns dancing with him, taking pictures with him and in fact identifying his costume as the winner of a costume contest.

According to the teachers, students engaged in socially inclusive activities learn about team-member responsibilities and team building – knowledge they use throughout their school experiences. The sports activities carry over into the classroom with many of the special education students referring to their teachers as “coach”. A combination of all these factors creates a stronger bond between the student and the school. Unified Sports has been an engagement tool for at-risk students or those with learning disabilities to become Unified partners. It was mentioned that when they “have responsibility for other athletes” they become better citizens.

##### Parents

According to the mother of a Chandler High School special needs student, the school’s inclusive and caring climate ensures participation; engages the heart and soul and has open arms. She said, “I see my son not as an exception but as a student with equal opportunities and unique strengths.” Added this parent, “My son’s experiences are real and have a positive impact, as he is putting himself right in the middle of the activities and is totally engaged.”

##### Students

A special education student said he recently decided to join the Unified basketball team to lose weight, get stronger and run faster. He quickly found, though, that he was making new friends in the process. The student thinks Chandler High School is “awesome,” and his parents really like it.

Another special education student is on the Unified basketball and track (running and shot put) teams and said they give him exercise opportunities, make him healthier and help him stay out of trouble. He also makes friends on the inclusive teams. He has fun in school, and likes reading, math and art (especially the fact that he shares his art with others).

The students identified several lessons they have learned from their socially inclusive school-based activities, including:

- Unified Sports provides exercise and other healthy activity.
- Unified Sports provides opportunities to learn teamwork.
- Unified Sports provides opportunities to make new friends.
- Unified Sports provides opportunities to achieve individual and team goals.

### Eastside High School Taylors, South Carolina

*Partners Club, faculty ownership  
and inclusive school climate*

- ✓ Socially inclusive school climate
- ✓ Shared leadership among administrators, teachers and staff
- ✓ Socially inclusive art projects
- ✓ Parent engagement

#### Overview

Eastside High School serves 1,223 students in grades 9 through 12. According to the principal, Mr. Thorne, who has been at the school for 1.5 years with 29 previous years of experience as an administrator, the school is known as “the little gem.” It was evident that he had full faith in his staff to create an environment where all students feel welcome and a part of the school community. He has numerous staff members who are alumnae of the school and very dedicated to their students.

One of the strategies Eastside High School implements is asking special and general education students to paint ceiling tiles throughout the classrooms and hallways, demonstrating the talents of all students. Mr. Thorne described the ceiling tile painting as a way to engage all students and allow them to take pride in the building.

Eastside High School has an inclusively student-run coffee shop called the Eagle’s Nest adjacent to the cafeteria. This coffee shop is primarily run by special education students and supported by their peers.

Eastside High School implemented a Partners’ Club/Class made up of those with and without disabilities. The student partners who act as “peer tutors” can receive elective credit for participating in this class. There is also an opportunity for student partners to receive class credit through a Unified physical education class. Interestingly several students partners from previous classes continue to participate in this group.

#### Social Inclusion Strategies

- All faculty and staff involved in promoting inclusiveness; it is not the responsibility of one person
- Partners Club/Class offered as an elective for special and general education students
- Opportunities for special education students to be varsity sports team managers
- Eagle’s Nest coffee shop operated by students in the special education class
- Students’ artwork displayed through the school, including ceiling tiles painted by special and general education students
- Parent engagement in socially inclusive school activities

#### Unique Highlights

There is an intentional focus on implementing and sustaining a socially inclusive school climate that encourages special and general education students to be school leaders.

At Eastside High School “inclusiveness” is a core value manifested in courses, clubs and leadership opportunities for students.

#### Outcomes

Even before Project UNIFY, Eastside High School was mostly likely “ahead of the curve” on social inclusion.

With support from Special Olympics South Carolina, the school has been able to enhance and deepen its activities that support youth leadership and social inclusion.

“A climate of inclusiveness” is a priority at Eastside High School. The school works toward this goal through a variety of social inclusion strategies identified above. It fosters the climate of inclusiveness through a welcoming entrance; active participation of parents, administrator, faculty and staff; and opportunities for everyone to participate in their school community. Integration of Project UNIFY and other socially inclusive activities and programs is easier at Eastside High School than at many other schools, given Eastside’s commitment to inclusiveness and

the expected responsibilities of all stakeholders (youth and adults) to ensure that it exists. This was evidenced by parents, students, facilities and office staff, coaches and special and general education teachers’ high level of engagement. Project UNIFY enhances rather than catalyzes Eastside High School’s commitment to inclusiveness.

### Everett High School Lansing, Michigan

*Youth Activation Committee, student  
engagement and district support*

- ✓ Youth Activation Council
- ✓ Adaptive Physical Education
- ✓ R-word Campaign
- ✓ Unified Sports
- ✓ School Climate Improvement

#### Overview

It is the mission of the Lansing School District to provide relevant educational excellence in a safe and nurturing environment. Within this district context, Everett High School provides a magnet school experience, focused on the visual and performing arts.

Everett High School did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2011. It is below state levels in all areas of 11th grade test scores and dropped in almost all areas in 2011. The student body is 47% black, 28% white and 24% Hispanic/Asian/Pacific Islander/Native American in the student body. In 2010, Everett High School had 69% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch programs; the Michigan average is 41%.

#### Social Inclusion Strategies

One of the strategies for social inclusion at Everett High School is the Youth Activation Council (YAC), listed as Project UNIFY on the school website as an official school club. The YAC comprises both general education students and students with special needs, including intellectual disabilities, hearing impairment, and English Language Learners.

YAC members view their role in the school as being “Up-standers” working on social inclusion throughout the school. They described experiences in which they spoke up to friends and family members about the “uncool” use of the R-Word. A clear sense of camaraderie has developed between students in special and general education through this work.

#### Unique Highlights

Lansing School District (LSD) is a great hub to turn into a model district, given the extraordinary level of district support. Everett High School is one of 18 schools in the district to engage in social inclusion efforts through Project UNIFY. Having 18 of 32 schools involved has the potential to create a tipping point for the entire district.

*One unique feature is the Adaptive Physical Education Department, in which the Special Olympics role is part of the job description.*

Inclusiveness is a common value among teachers and students. Students see the need for general education teachers to have a better understanding of special education, and to value the unique skills and abilities of all students.

#### Outcomes

Everett High School has a School Improvement Plan that identifies improving the school culture and climate as one of the objectives. Many students said Project UNIFY provides a sense of belonging and gives them a voice. The students perceived the need for a better school climate. They cited teasing, bullying and fighting in the halls as problems in their school. However, they thought the work they were doing with Project UNIFY and R-Word awareness was making a difference in their school climate. Although the students in the YAC did not all perceive themselves to be “leaders,” they described their Project UNIFY work and their impact in terms that

represent leadership qualities, and they felt they had the power to make some difference in their school. The students spend their YAC meetings planning many inclusive activities (field trips, Unified Sports events and outings, Spread the Word, and dances/parties) to engage students throughout the school. They believe there is a lack of understanding and awareness of students with disabilities, and they view the Project UNIFY activities as a way for students to break down stereotypes and misconceptions.

Students cited both benefits and challenges in continuing this work. One of the partners said that before Project UNIFY she was a wallflower, but since joining this group she feels empowered and advocates for herself and others. Another student who is in both general education and special education classes said his general education teachers need to have a better understanding of various disabilities in order to best teach all students. Asked what help they need to continue their work, one student simply stated, "Money." Finally, another student said that the Special Olympics national office could help by making sure there is more national awareness of Project UNIFY.



### Hilo High School Hilo, Hawaii

*Faculty ownership, Leo Club and Unified Sports*

- ✓ Unified Sports
- ✓ Socially inclusive student clubs
- ✓ Socially inclusive classes
- ✓ Student engagement and leadership

#### Overview

Hilo High School has been a Project UNIFY school for three years and has focused on sports, student engagement/leadership and social inclusion across courses and student clubs. By providing high-quality social inclusion activities through classrooms, student clubs and sports, these efforts are having positive impacts on special and general education students, teachers, administrators, parents and the school climate. While led by one of the special education teachers at the school, Project UNIFY engages many other teachers in the variety of quality social inclusion strategies.

#### Social Inclusion Strategies

Hilo High School employs a wide range of strategies through shared leadership, student engagement, and whole-school support as it works to create a socially inclusive learning environment. Unified Sports, inclusive classes, and student clubs all provide opportunities for students of diverse abilities to interact and learn from each other. Specific examples include:

#### Food Science Class:

Special and general education students participate in the Food Lab activity, sharing responsibility for following a recipe, preparing the ingredients, and cooking. The general education students encourage and coach the special education students to take on the various tasks.

#### Journalistic Writing Class:

Students created a set of public service announcements about Unified Sports strategies. The class focuses on ethics and on a commitment to learning together. The class comes up with new ideas for projects they can develop. There is a great sense of trust among the students, and they have created mutually beneficial relationships that recognize the positive aspects of diversity.

#### Leo Club:

As part of this club, which is dedicated to providing leadership and community service opportunities, general education students engage in activities with students with special education needs. They understand how important it is to recognize and celebrate our differences, and they appreciate that differences are positive attributes, not something to fear.

#### Blue and Gold Club:

This club provides formal opportunities for student athletes to be recognized for their athletic, academic, and service attributes. Essentially an athletic honor society, it is based on athletics, GPA, lack of disciplinary issues and participation in service work. The Blue and Gold club coordinated a three-day Athletes Unite acceptance campaign which included a lunchtime rally recognizing Special Olympics athletes, a poster signing to show support, distribution of healthy snacks, and a mass Zumba event. In addition, Unified Sports participants receive awards at the Athletic Department Awards Ceremony, and the department is also planning to develop opportunities for Unified Sports participants to gain varsity letters for their athletic contributions.

#### Unified Partners:

The Unified Partners are members of the girls' basketball team. The team participated in Unified recreation, playing basketball with special education students every Wednesday during their season. They also acknowledged the Special Olympics athletes at two of their basketball games. The Unified Partners use social media to share their efforts and inform other students of activities and impacts.

#### Unique Highlights

Project UNIFY activities, - student leadership, sports and school-wide social inclusion efforts align with Hilo High School's commitment to ensure each student *values self and others* and *has an understanding that it is essential for human beings to work together*. These efforts manifest positive relationships among students and among teachers, demonstrating the advantages of working together on behalf of all students. Project UNIFY is also seen as an important strategy for making students feel connected to the school, which is sometimes difficult because the school serves a large area of the island.

Another unique feature of Hilo High School's social inclusion work is the partnership they have developed with Key Club. Special Olympics is an essential partner for mutual benefit with 22 Key Clubs. Members help, support and love the Special Olympics athletes and feel they make each other happy through their interactions.

#### Outcomes

Hilo High School has created a quality set of opportunities for special and general education students to engage together through classroom, sports, extra-curricular and school-wide activities. A special education teacher coordinates these activities, but the collaborating teachers, coaches and student leaders take leadership in their social inclusive activities. Teachers and coaches value social inclusion and create formal classroom, sports and school-wide activities that reflect social inclusion.

There is a genuine feeling among students that they are learning together, playing sports together and developing positive relationships together so that everyone is expected to lead and learn.

The school's climate is respectful of diversity, building on the overall respect for ethnic diversity that exists in Hawaii. The climate moves from respect to engagement and collaboration, ensuring fair and equitable opportunities for all students to be part of multiple opportunities for progress and success.

### Raymond Kellis High School Glendale, Arizona

*Unified Sports, school-wide inclusive activities, school climate and administrative support*

- ✓ Socially inclusive school climate
- ✓ Unified sports
- ✓ Inclusive curriculum
- ✓ Best Buddies
- ✓ Principal leadership and support

#### Overview

Raymond S. Kellis High School is located in Glendale, Arizona. The school serves 1,785 students in grades 9-12.

#### Social Inclusion Strategies

Kellis High School provides a variety of quality opportunities for special and general education students to join together through sports and classroom activities.

Social inclusion strategies include:

- Unified Sports®
- Inclusive curriculum
- Best Buddies®

Faculty members said that the school administration encourages students to develop personal relationships with students who are different from them, and that those inclusive relationships make a tremendous difference at the school. Curriculum and student leadership focus on inclusion, and there are frequent communications among students, teachers and administration about the importance and impact of inclusion at Kellis.

#### Unique Highlights

Kellis High School has attracted staff interested in working in a socially inclusive school. According to the school principal, Mr. Wooten, one of the factors that led him to apply for the position two years ago was an essay by a Kellis High School student on his experiences as a Unified team member on campus and at the 2010 Special Olympics USA

National Games in Omaha, Nebraska. The principal said the school is committed to every student every day, a commitment shared by students, parents, teachers, staff and administrators.

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*“There is an exciting climate in the school that is influenced by many curricular and extra-curricular activities, including Unified Sports and Best Buddies.”*  
— Principal Wooten

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A Kellis High School graduate and former Unified partner is now back student teaching in the Special Education Department due to experiences in Unified Sports® at the school.

It is also significant that teachers at the school noted Unified Sports as a highlight of the school environment on a recent survey.

#### Outcomes

Students report many personal gains from the social inclusion efforts at Kellis High School, including patience, friendship, and feelings of self-efficacy. They recognize that these efforts benefit both general and special education students.

These outcomes are supported and sustained by ensuring:

- Strong administrative support
- Quality professional development
- Finding the right people
- Effective inclusive curriculum
- Ensuring co-ownership
- Quality guidance counselors
- Quality with flexibility
- District recognition of the importance of inclusion
- Student leadership
- Understanding the benefits to both individuals and the school

### Los Angeles High School Los Angeles, California

*Unified Sports, adaptive PE and district support*

- ✓ Socially inclusive school climate
- ✓ Unified sports
- ✓ Inclusive curriculum
- ✓ Best Buddies
- ✓ Principal leadership and support

#### Overview

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is dedicated to providing high-quality instruction and a coherent and rigorous curriculum in every classroom to facilitate student learning and achievement. Within this district context, the Los Angeles High School community is committed to producing self-directed, lifelong learners by providing its diverse student body with the skills they need to become critical thinkers, collaborative workers, effective communicators, and technologically literate individuals. The school's vision is to promote strength of character through the development of personal responsibility, integrity, and the ability to learn and grow in a culturally diverse and technologically advanced society.

The 2011-2012 enrollment at Los Angeles High School was 1,959 students. Of these, 76.7 percent were Hispanic, 11.7 percent black, 6.3 percent Asian and 3 percent were white. Within the student population, 79.7 percent participated in the Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program. About 32 percent were English Language Learners, and fewer than 45 percent of the students' parents had completed high school.

#### Social Inclusion Strategies

Los Angeles High School offers a number of Unified Sports opportunities, including Unified Basketball and Unified Cheerleading. Observations and interactions with teachers and students at Unified basketball practice found athletes being joined by partners from general education and the ROTC program, with

the group being team taught by the adaptive physical education teacher and ROTC instructor.

In the gym, the athletes and partners teamed up for scrimmages as they prepared for a Unified Basketball Tournament scheduled for the week after the visit. The students were interacting and enjoying themselves within this socially inclusive setting.

#### Unique Highlights

The Los Angeles Unified School District as a whole is committed to Project UNIFY, and has a strong partnership with Special Olympics Southern California. Within minutes of sitting down with the school visit team, Dr. Deasy, LAUSD Superintendent, said, “You don’t need to sell me. I support Special Olympics. Tell me what you need.” The relationship with a school district of this size is a model for other districts.

Staff at SO Southern California is excited about Project UNIFY and its impact on the State Program. The district administrators and teachers are passionate about the program and invested in the success of the students involved. They noted significant commitment on the part of teachers in the school, who work to sustain and grow the program.

#### Outcomes

Coach Lytie knows each of the students well and was well versed in their individual diagnoses and the impact that Unified Sports had on the students with IEPs.

The coach pointed out several students she thought had benefited most from Project UNIFY. One student with a history of poor school attendance had been told that he could not play Unified Basketball unless he attended school. His attendance has improved dramatically.

Another girl practicing with the Unified Cheer Team walked up and introduced herself as soon as the visitors entered the room, and then went on to lead the cheers. Coach Lytie noted the girl had never spoken to anyone prior to joining the Cheer Squad.

Another student playing basketball as a partner previously experienced behavioral problems that led to her being frequently in trouble at school. Participation in Unified Basketball has helped her work better with other students. Shortly after Coach Lytie pointed her out, a counselor arrived to meet with the girl. The counselor said she thought Project UNIFY had been a great experience for this student because she had opportunities to interact with others who had challenges of their own.

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### Mt. Horeb High School Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin

*Inclusive school climate, student leadership and student clubs*

- ✓ Socially inclusive school climate
- ✓ Club UNIFY
- ✓ Student leadership
- ✓ Collaboration with other school clubs

### Overview

The Mount Horeb Area School District is located in Dane County, Wisconsin, in the Village of Mount Horeb. It serves 2,300 students in grades PK through 12.

Social inclusiveness is a key school climate characteristic at Mount Horeb High School. Students are the true engaged leaders with high-level teacher, administrator and parent support. School staff report feeling the school is unique in the many opportunities for students to be engaged, with inclusiveness being a core part of that uniqueness. They believe their model is one that can be adapted and implemented by other schools.

### Social Inclusion Strategies

Mount Horeb High School offers a school club-based model with a focus on social inclusiveness that can be effective in engaging students. Its strategies focus on creating and sustaining a socially inclusive school climate with students at the core and shared leadership as the guiding principals.

Students in special and general education are meaningfully engaged through Club UNIFY. While implementation is in a club setting, the activities and outcomes have permeated the entire school and community. Through a focus on school-wide activities, students in Club UNIFY share leadership to engage their community and raise funds for social inclusion. Their work as engaged leaders involves creating and sustaining a team focus; effectively designing, implementing, evaluating and improving activities that focus on raising awareness and building a socially inclusive school climate; seeking and receiving teacher, parent, and administrator support, and collaborating with other school clubs.

### Unique Highlights

Every student at Mount Horeb High School understands the importance of and value the great relationships they have with teachers and their principal, who support their work and help to create an inclusive environment.

Clearly, there is an energy and commitment at Mount Horeb High School that spreads far beyond the students directly involved in Club UNIFY at this school. Students find it easy to get other students involved in their work. They are able to enhance awareness and engage others in making their school socially inclusive through their rallies, fundraisers, and activities, making this what is considered a “cool club.”

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*Students said other schools recognize that there is a special spirit at Mount Horeb High School, and they are looking to expand their reach into the middle-school level to get students involved with creating a socially inclusive school at a younger age.*

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### Outcomes

Students are gaining critical skills in leadership, communication, teamwork, marketing, social media and evaluation. They have the capacity to design, implement, evaluate and continuously improve social inclusion in their school and community. They are eager to learn from their experiences.

Parents and the wider community are crucial to Mount Horeb High School's social inclusion activities, helping students to be leaders through their ongoing encouragement and support of Club UNIFY activities.

Teachers view their role as facilitators of the process. They take responsibility for supporting students, encouraging them to trust their instincts, take risks and try new ways of integrating social inclusion in their school and community.

The principal, Ms. Spoehr, understands these efforts as being a shared responsibility for the

entire school. Credit for their inclusive success is given to the teachers and students, who know they have the principal's 100% support. Providing space and time for this work are key ways the principal supports their efforts.

Words that students use to define their inclusive work include:

- **Acceptance**
- **Inclusion**
- **Supportive**
  - Peers
  - Teachers
  - Principal
  - Parents
  - Community
- **Across school activities**
- **Other clubs engaged (DECA, etc.)**
- **Awareness**
- **We all show up**
- **Excited to see success**



### New Iberia Senior High School New Iberia, Louisiana

*Unified Sports, after-school activities and assemblies*

- ✓ Unified Sports
- ✓ Inclusive PE
- ✓ Socially inclusive activities after school
- ✓ Support for qualified students to try out and participate in mainstream sports

#### Overview

New Iberia Senior High School is located in New Iberia, Louisiana and is one of six high schools in Iberia Parish School District. It is a public school that serves 1,591 students in grades 9-12. In 2011, New Iberia Senior High School had 16 students for every full-time equivalent teacher. The Louisiana average is 14 students per full-time equivalent teacher.

The Iberia Schools had a 6% dropout rate for grades 9-12 in 2009; the 2007 national average was 4.4%. In the Iberia Parish School District, 13% of students have been identified as in need of special education services. The Iberia Parish School District serves 2% English Language Learners (ELL), students who are in the process of acquiring and learning English Language skills.

Within this district context, New Iberia High School pursues the following mission: "NIHS, together with families and the community, will create a superior educational experience for all students by offering a positive and innovative learning environment." The school made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2010, meaning it achieved minimum levels of improvement as determined by the state of Louisiana in terms of student performance and other accountability measures.

#### Social Inclusion Strategies

The following social inclusion strategies are present in New Iberia Parish School District:

- **Unified Sports**
- **Project UNIFY**
- **Inclusive PE**
- **Socially inclusive activities after school**

- **Support for qualified students to try out and participate in mainstream sports**
- **R-Word Campaign**

New Iberia High School has engaged its football students and coaches in Project UNIFY. Some of the JV/varsity athletes also participate as Unified Partners in Flag Football. While it was noted this has caused some scheduling conflicts with the JV/varsity football season, the engagement of student athletes make Project UNIFY a "cool" thing to do and elevates the status of the Special Olympics athletes in the school. These partners were asked, "Do you know that you are leaders in creating an atmosphere of acceptance and inclusion?" They responded, "We didn't realize that we were leaders, we just do it." One of the teachers noted, "Inclusion is contagious, and the football team sets the trend."

#### Unique Highlights

A unique feature of the social inclusion efforts at New Iberia High School is the partnership that has been developed between the special education and athletic departments. This mutually beneficial relationship supports students with and without disabilities on both traditional and Unified Sports teams. This provides an important real-life example of how a school can make accommodations that allow student athletes with disabilities to participate in traditional athletics.

#### Outcomes

New Iberia High School clearly has an established foundation for inclusion. Project UNIFY provides new opportunities to further develop social inclusion throughout the school.

Students involved in Project UNIFY report feeling that they are doing something important and having an effect, even if they are not necessarily considered leaders in their school in other areas. There is a distinct feeling of unity, with a positive response and support from teachers. The Project UNIFY activities they plan are well-accepted and gaining popularity; whenever possible, they should be leveraged for more school-wide impact. Schools could also develop additional strategies to ensure sustainability of the activities and embed Project UNIFY more deeply into the fabric of the school culture.

### North Canyon High School Phoenix, Arizona

*Student leadership, Unified Sports and inclusive curriculum*

- ✓ Student leadership
- ✓ Integration of social inclusion with PBIS
- ✓ Unified Sports
- ✓ Get Into It
- ✓ R-word Campaign

#### Overview

North Canyon High School's mission statement says that the school "is committed to success. Our mission is to establish and maintain a caring, positive and safe environment in which students may maximize their academic growth." It goes on to describe the school as "an inclusive community that embraces diversity and celebrates the individual interests and talents students bring to the school."

A clear vision for social inclusion is distinctly imbedded in North Canyon High School's identified mission. The school has intentionally moved from a focus on differences in programs and populations to a place where *all kids want to be and where learning occurs*. This builds on the values of inclusion and the expectation that everyone will *go the extra mile*.

North Canyon High School creates programs and interventions to identify and solve problems so that students can be successful. To address student needs, the school uses tools and interventions that focus on cohesiveness and a *craving for unified strategies*. Special Olympics Project UNIFY® programs are used as a platform for engagement. As a result, the school respects, accepts and unifies special and general education students through quality activities.

#### Social Inclusion Strategies

North Canyon began with a grand vision for social inclusion but intentionally started small and went slowly in order to measure progress and identify challenges to fuller integration. With respect and

responsibility being key to student success, North Canyon integrates Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and views social inclusion as a core component of this intervention. There are many opportunities to identify progress and success and to reward faculty and students for being effective. Among others, these incentives include scratch cards to reward good deeds and behavior, Collegiality Month to demonstrate connectedness, and use of social media to celebrate success.

Special social inclusion activities include an R-Word Campaign, Unified Sports®, class helpers and Best Buddies programs. Individually and collectively, these activities rely on an inclusive school structure of support and engagement.

The North Canyon Student Council implements several inclusive activities with general education classes and students with special education needs. These activities include specific agendas and anticipated outcomes for both general and special education students. There are other student leadership opportunities through clubs and student organizations and Best Buddies; each club is required to focus on social inclusion and report on activities, progress and outcomes.

Unified Sports "fit" into the core of North Canyon's focus on the whole child approach and help students define who they are and how they fit in the school.. Unified Sports is defined as the *heart of diversity* at North Canyon. The Paradise Valley Unified School District supports North Canyon's Unified Sports by providing connections and transportation.

Teachers use Get Into It® materials, Movies that Move and other Special Olympics Project UNIFY tools for student engagement in the classroom.

North Canyon uses social media and PSAs to share information on social inclusion with the whole school. Further, there has been TV news coverage of North Canyon Unified Sports; it can be viewed at <http://bcove.me/e04y9ldm>.

## School Accomplishments

The following elements ensure social inclusion efforts are sustainable at the school:

- **Social inclusion is part of the school's constitution.**
- **Freshman leadership opportunities are provided to engage students their first year in high school.**
- **The student handbook includes monthly goals.**
- **Unified Sports are offered year-round.**
- **Support is provided from Special Olympics Arizona.**
- **Administrative support at the school and district level is concrete and visible.**

### Unique Highlights

There is a unique relationship between the North Canyon principal, Ms. Jacobs, and a student leader that advances social inclusion at North Canyon High School. The relationship is built on respect, trust, values, outcomes, and impacts.

As a result, North Canyon has integrated several social inclusion activities that *inspire* and *change lives* for general education students and builds *confidence* in special education students.

### Outcomes

Social inclusion strategies are viewed as engaging students in knowledge and skill development that enhances teaching rather than detracts from it. This view is critical in maintaining social inclusion as a core value and expected practice for all teachers and students in the school.

North Canyon High School is piloting the district's first ever Unified Sports PE class in the 2013-2014 school year. The school views this as the ultimate sustainability plan for Unified Sports, as it provides a structure and place for social inclusion to take place within the curriculum. Strategies for ensuring long-term success include proceeding slowly, maintaining a manageable class size, and carefully selecting the most appropriate teacher and students.



### Northland Pines High School Eagle River, Wisconsin

*Student clubs, community-based activities and Project UNIFY scholarships*

- ✓ Socially inclusive student clubs
- ✓ Project UNIFY scholarships
- ✓ Assemblies and rallies
- ✓ Community-based socially inclusive activities

### Overview

Northland Pines High School is located in Eagle River, Wisconsin, and is part of the Northland Pines School District.

Northland Pines High School Project UNIFY program design and implementation provides a great model:

- start with existing student clubs,**
- use assemblies/rallies to kick off the focus on social inclusion,**
- ensure shared leadership among the student leaders,**
- ensure teacher support,**
- build on success,**
- ensure diverse activities so each student can find something he or she feels comfortable engaging in,**
- offer Project UNIFY scholarships to demonstrate how social inclusion is a core school value and**
- ensure Project UNIFY aligns with the district's mission statement and demonstrates the attributes expected of each student.**

### Social Inclusion Strategies

Northland Pines High School has integrated and sustained a comprehensive set of work that engage students in a full set of inclusive activities led by students to enhance social inclusiveness as a key school climate characteristic.

Project UNIFY began when members of the National Honor Society, student council and Students with Intellectual Impairments developed Project UNIFY as a new club. This club engages in a broad range of strategies designed to address social inclusion in their school, including:

- **Unified Sports**
- **Fans in the Stands Club**
- **Spread the Word Rally**
- **Get Into It Classroom Activities**
- **Polar Plunge**
- **Talent Show**
- **Annual Outdoor Games**
- **Club Outings**

Northland Pines High School uses a variety of effective strategies to implement and sustain Project UNIFY and social inclusiveness. The combination of these strategies provides the broad platform for student engagement.

By beginning with existing clubs and activities, the school has a solid framework for Project UNIFY, which is supported by teachers who understand the value and commitment to social inclusion. Specific social inclusion activities engage the Project UNIFY student leaders to motivate other students through assemblies, sports activities, talent shows and other school and community-wide activities.

Each of the Project UNIFY activities is well designed and implemented, well communicated to the student body, and planned with diverse options to allow all students to find activities that let them engage, learn and have fun.

### Unique Highlights

Northland Pines High School has developed and implemented a comprehensive series of socially inclusive activities that engage many students in school and community-based socially inclusive activities. Project UNIFY aligns with the district's mission statement and builds on existing student club, service and sports activities.

## School Accomplishments

The Northland Pines School District Mission Statement states:

***Northland Pines School District is dedicated to empowering all individuals to reach their potential. We will be accountable and work together to:***

- Model what is expected
- Nurture a safe, healthy and trusting environment
- Provide a challenging and engaging curriculum
- Promote life-long learning
- Build school, family and community partnerships
- Celebrate cultural diversity, talents and strengths
- Thrive in a global society
- Foster continuous improvement

Efforts to become a socially inclusive school have been noticed. After a home basketball game, the school received a letter from a group of parents from the opposing team's district. In the letter, the parents lauded the school for creating a socially inclusive athletic event in which all students were an integral part of the program, from the dance team to singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" using sign language.

The Project UNIFY Scholarship Program is an exciting opportunity that can be implemented in other Project UNIFY schools.

### Outcomes

Teachers provide the opportunity for students to be leaders and offer choices for students to determine how to best implement and sustain socially inclusive activities. The students broaden their thinking by making leadership commitments, and they learn that leading also means getting out of the way.

Students understand the impact this work has on their personal development. They gain new skills and dispositions through drama opportunities, clubs and fund development, and

they see the connection to health occupations and other post-secondary opportunities. Social inclusiveness through Project UNIFY has increasingly engaged more students and developed more activities to ensure every student has an opportunity to participate and contribute.

### Roybal Learning Center Los Angeles, California

*Unified Sports and district support*

- ✓ Unified Sports
- ✓ District Unified Sports Committee
- ✓ District leadership and support

### Overview

Completed in September 2008, the Edward R. Roybal Learning Center is a 610,000 square-foot, 2,500-seat year-round high school serving students in grades 9 through 12. The campus consists of four small learning communities (SLCs) and two independent pilot schools. The small learning communities are the International School of Languages, the Activists for Educational Empowerment, the Business and Finance Academy, and the Computer Science Academy. The two independent pilot schools are Civitas School of Leadership and the School for Visual Arts and Humanities (SVAH).

The 2011-2012 enrollment at Roybal Learning Center was 1,568 students. Within the student population, 86.3% were Hispanic, 5.2% Filipino, 3.4% Asian, 2.8% white, and 1.7% black. In addition, 81% participated in the Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program, about 33% were English Language Learners and 52 percent of the students' parents had not completed high school.

### Social Inclusion Strategies

Roybal Learning Center offers a number of Unified Sports opportunities, including Unified Basketball and Unified Cheerleading. The coach for Unified Basketball at the school is Ms. Villagran, who is a leader in the LAUSD Project UNIFY

efforts. She is the chair of the LAUSD Unified Sports Committee that was established this school year. In that role, she is given a reduced workload to serve as the committee chair.

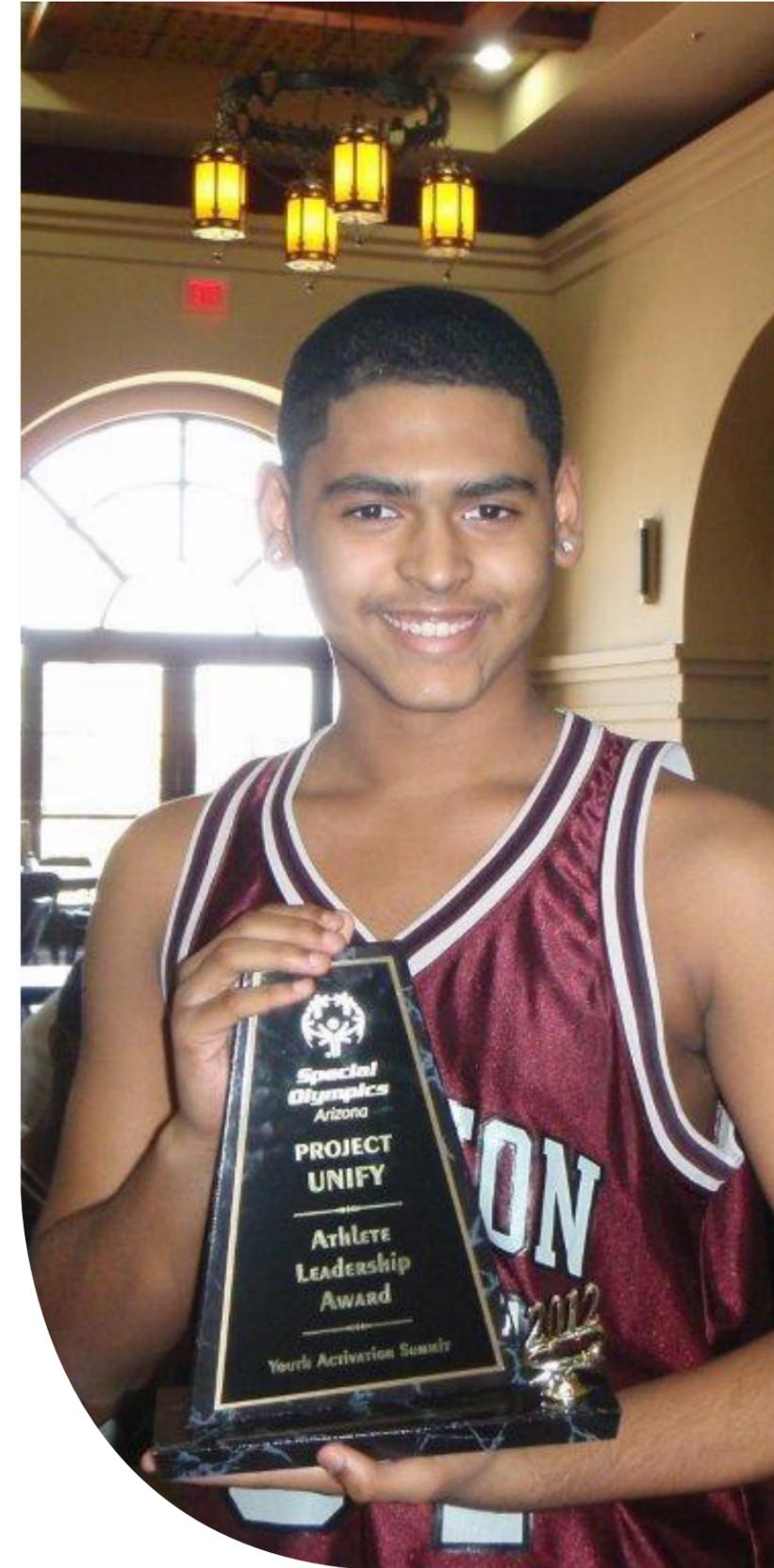
### Unique Highlights

The Los Angeles Unified School District as a whole is committed to Project UNIFY, and has a strong partnership with Special Olympics Southern California. Within minutes of sitting down with the school visit team Dr. Deasy, LAUSD Superintendent, said, "You don't need to sell me. I support Special Olympics. Tell me what you need." The relationship with a school district of this size is a model for other districts.

Staff at SO Southern California is excited about Project UNIFY and its impact on the State Program. The district administrators and teachers are passionate about the program and invested in the success of the students involved. They noted significant commitment on the part of teachers in the school, who work to sustain and grow the program.

### Outcomes

Students with and without disabilities benefit from the inclusive opportunities afforded by Unified Sports at Roybal Learning Center. Unified Basketball team partners reported that they enjoyed playing Unified Basketball and hadn't previously been involved with Special Olympics. Two of the partners played soccer for the school teams and two were not involved in other sports. Other students find ways to be involved in the activities as well. At the end of the site visit, two of the Roybal cheerleaders came in to make signs for the Unified Basketball team.



## School Accomplishments

### School Visit Report: School Activities Across Three Major Project UNIFY Components

Special Olympics Project UNIFY® is comprised of three major school-based components\* that work in combination to successfully integrate and sustain social inclusion in schools throughout the US.

It was not expected at the time of the school visits that each school would implement activities in all three components. Thus, the following table analyzes the activities in 21 Special Olympics Project UNIFY schools to demonstrate specific strategies implemented across all grade levels. In fact, the integration and sustainability of socially inclusive activities reported and observed in the 21 Special Olympics Project UNIFY schools informed the decision to encourage all Project UNIFY schools to implement activities across the three components.

#### \*Project UNIFY Components

##### Inclusive Sports and Skill Development

Opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities (athletes) and individuals without intellectual disabilities (partners) to participate together on sports teams for training and competition and/or skill development.

**Examples:** Unified Sports®, Unified Sports Player Development®, Unified Sports Recreation®, Young Athletes™.

##### Inclusive Youth Leadership and Youth Activation

Inclusive opportunities in which youth plan and conduct Project UNIFY and social inclusion activities.

**Examples:** Partners Clubs, Inclusive Student Council, Best Buddies, etc.

##### School Community Awareness and Education Elements

An activity, event, rally, etc., that offers the entire student body the opportunity to participate in and or be a part of Project UNIFY; includes the use of educational and community resources, as well as volunteerism in schools and communities.

**Examples:** Use of Get into It, Fans in the Stands, School Wide R-Word Pledge Drive, Unified Sports®, Pep Rally, Polar Plunge, service-learning etc.

School	Inclusive Sports & Skill Development	Inclusive Youth Leadership & Activation	School Community Awareness & Education Elements
<b>Dodson Elementary School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inclusive PE classes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partners Club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>R-Word Assembly</li> <li>District-wide support</li> </ul>
<b>Forest View Elementary School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adaptive PE classes</li> <li>Young Athletes</li> </ul>		
<b>Frances Rhodes Elementary School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sports Day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Buddies Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shared leadership</li> <li>Parent engagement</li> </ul>
<b>Heritage Preschool</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unified Yoga</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student leadership in classroom</li> </ul>	
<b>White Pine Elementary School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PE Buddies</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading and lunchroom Buddies</li> </ul>
<b>South Junior High School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unified Sports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builders Club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After-school student clubs</li> </ul>
<b>Wright Middle School</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unified Leadership Club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community service</li> <li>Get Into It</li> </ul>
<b>Brophy Preparatory Academy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Special Olympics Game Day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student Special Olympics Club</li> </ul>	
<b>Trevor C. Browne High School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unified PE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elective leadership course</li> <li>Student council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assemblies</li> <li>Student clubs</li> <li>Advisory</li> </ul>
<b>Cactus Shadows High School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unified Sports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student council</li> </ul>	
<b>Partners Club</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on inclusive school climate</li> </ul>		
<b>Chandler High School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unified Sports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elective leadership course</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chandler Buddies</li> <li>Assemblies</li> <li>District-wide support</li> </ul>
<b>Eastside High School</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partners Club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Socially inclusive school climate</li> <li>Shared leadership</li> </ul>
<b>Everett High School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adaptive PE</li> <li>Unified Sports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth Activation Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District-wide support</li> <li>Socially inclusive school climate</li> </ul>
<b>Hilo High School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unified Sports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inclusive leadership through Key Club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inclusive classes</li> <li>Socially inclusive student clubs</li> </ul>
<b>Raymond Kellis High School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unified Sports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Best Buddies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inclusive curriculum</li> <li>Inclusive school ceremonies/events</li> </ul>
<b>Los Angeles High School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unified Sports</li> <li>Adaptive PE</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ROTC collaboration</li> </ul>
<b>Mt. Horeb High School</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Club UNIFY</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaboration with school clubs</li> <li>Socially inclusive school climate</li> <li>Community service</li> </ul>
<b>New Iberia Senior High School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inclusive PE</li> <li>Unified Sports</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After-school inclusive activities</li> <li>R-Word campaigns</li> </ul>
<b>North Canyon High School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unified Sports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student Council</li> <li>Freshman leadership opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Get Into IT</li> <li>Social inclusion included in PBIS</li> <li>Community service</li> </ul>
<b>Northland Pines High School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unified Sports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiple classrooms provide socially inclusive leadership opportunities</li> <li>Fans in the Stands Club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Socially inclusive student clubs</li> <li>Assemblies/rallies</li> <li>Community service</li> <li>Project UNIFY scholarship</li> <li>Get Into It</li> <li>Polar Plunge</li> </ul>
<b>Roybal Learning Center</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unified Sports</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District-Level support</li> </ul>

# Implications

Using the Common Characteristics of Success as a guide, states, districts and schools can build a vision for their social inclusion efforts. These are the elements that were determined to be foundational to success and important to intentionally develop as a school's work deepens. Following the Common Characteristics of Success is a set of questions to consider in forming a plan for taking the next steps in this work. These questions will assist with crafting a set of strategies for personalizing and enhancing your local social inclusion tapestry, weaving the next layers of colors into the fabric of your work, whether at the school, district, or state level.

## Common Characteristics of Success

1. Social inclusion is a purposeful process and is woven into the fabric of the school.
2. Efforts are student-centered.
3. Social inclusion is valued, nurtured and supported across formal and informal settings.
4. Consistent opportunities are provided to engage students in developing, implementing, and sustaining a wide range of inclusive activities.
5. Shared leadership is embraced, and includes a broad range of stakeholders.
6. Leaders are intentionally cultivated beyond a passionate few.
7. There is a vision and purpose for social inclusion that is understood and shared by the school community as work that is core to the school/district's mission.
8. Social inclusion is about all students being supported in contributing in meaningful ways, not some being the "helped" and others being the "helpers."

9. Students, teachers, and administrators value and engage in ongoing reflection to guide continuous improvement.
10. Administrative support is concrete, visible, and active at both school and district levels.

## Common Challenges

Along with the positive findings among the 21 schools visited, we also found consistent challenges that schools often experience. These include:

1. A lack of leadership expansion; a small group initiates social inclusiveness and too often remains the leadership team without growing and sharing leadership with other adults and students.
2. A lack of intentionality in developing a systematic approach to social inclusion; new efforts are added piecemeal rather than via a long-term strategic plan for developing a continuum of both formal and informal socially inclusive opportunities.

3. A lack of communication and collaborations within and between schools to develop social inclusion across the district.
4. A focus on engaging certain parents and certain community members rather engaging a broad range of stakeholders.
5. Limiting the context in which strategies are implemented, e.g., addressing social inclusion in after-school clubs without building student awareness, teaching, and expecting socially inclusive behaviors in the halls or working toward socially inclusive classrooms.

These challenges are not new to school innovations, and after five years implementing Project UNIFY in schools, we have strategies to help schools address and overcome them. Again, this report and the Special Olympics Project UNIFY social inclusion resources greatly assist advocates in integrating and sustaining social inclusiveness.



# Summary

## Considerations for Next Steps

Efforts to advance social inclusion at the state and local level must be intentional, strategic, and mindful of the local context, culture, and political will. A process or set of activities that work in one setting may present different challenges in another. The Common Characteristics of Success and School Visit Report will help to guide planning and identify successful strategies. The considerations provided below offer additional questions to consider in developing a plan for taking the next steps toward creating a more socially inclusive school or district. Wherever your plan begins, remember to:

### Start Small

#### Start From Where You Are

#### Seek Continuous Improvement

- What is our local context?
  - Are our efforts best aimed at the school, district, or state level?
  - How deeply imbedded is social inclusion now?
  - How widespread is the support for these efforts?
  - What evidence do we have that there is political will to create a socially inclusive environment? If the political will is lacking, what steps can we take to increase awareness and strengthen commitment to this work?
  - What strategies from other schools, districts, or states could we incorporate?
  - Who is involved now? Who might we be able to encourage to join our efforts?
  - What is the level of readiness within the student body to become a more socially inclusive community?
- How can we engage a diverse group of students as co-leaders in planning, implementing and sustaining social inclusion strategies?
  - What strategies can we use to ensure this is a school-wide effort across both formal and informal settings?
  - Will current policies make social inclusion strategies easier or more difficult to implement? What can we do to change or enhance them?
  - What do we need administrators to do for this work to be successful? Think about needs such as time for planning and communication, parent and community engagement, recognizing success, space for activities, visibility in the school, engaging in shared leadership with staff and students, etc.
  - What structures can we use to increase awareness of social inclusion? Can we get this added to meeting agendas on a regular basis? Are there professional development opportunities that would help increase knowledge and skills?
  - What are the gaps between where we are now and where we would like to be?
  - What settings or activities do students and staff seem most ready to change?
  - What resources already exist to help us introduce new social inclusion strategies?
  - How can we create opportunities for all students to contribute in meaningful ways?
  - What data will we collect to help us determine if our efforts are successful and reflect on how we can improve our work?

From December 2011 to March 2013, Special Olympics Project UNIFY visited 21 schools to better understand the various strategies to successfully implement and integrate social inclusiveness in schools throughout the US.

This School Visit Report identifies specific social inclusion strategies and their impacts on students, teachers, staff, administrators, schools and communities. While there are varying pathways to social inclusiveness in schools, there are also a set of consistent practices that schools find most effective to ensure every student is engaged in an equitable, safe and quality school climate.

There is also evidence that schools are advancing from successfully integrating social inclusive strategies and practices to sustaining an intentional, quality social inclusion initiative that enhances student and staff interactions in both formal and informal settings and builds an inclusive school climate.

While there are challenges that schools encounter, this report and other Special Olympics Project UNIFY resources help advocates successfully integrate social inclusiveness in schools.

### For more information, please contact:

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# Appendices

## Appendix A List of Schools and Contact Information

### Elementary Schools

1. Dodson Elementary School New Iberia, Louisiana (Cindy Landry cilandry@iberia.k12.la.us)
2. Forestview Elementary School Lansing, Michigan (Anne Goudie anne.goudie@lansingschools.net)
3. Frances Rhodes Elementary School San Antonio, Texas (Becky Brauchle Rebecca.Brauchle@nsid.net)
4. Heritage Preschool Denver, Colorado (Diana Gassen dgassen@cherrycreekschools.org)
5. White Pine Elementary School Boise, Idaho (Becca Anderson becca.anderson@boiseschools.org)

### Middle/Junior High Schools

6. South Junior High School Boise, Idaho (John Hooper jhooper@boiseschools.org)
7. Wright Middle School Madison, Wisconsin (Diana Miller dimiller@madison.k12.wi.us)

### High Schools

8. Brophy Preparatory Academy Phoenix, Arizona (Christopher Calderon ccalderon@brophyprep.org)
9. Trevor C. Browne High School Phoenix, Arizona (Stephanie Nelson snelson@phxhs.k12.az.us)
10. Chandler High School Chandler, Arizona (Jessica Peacock Peacock.jessica@cusd80.com)

11. Cactus Shadows High School Cave, Creek Arizona (Janelle Perrin jperrin@ccusd93.org)
12. Eastside High School Taylors, South Carolina (Michael Thorne mthorne@greenville.k12.sc.us)
13. Everett High School Lansing, Michigan (Amy Robinson amy.robinson@lansingschools.net; Anne Goudie anne.goudie@lansingschools.net)
14. Hilo High School Hilo, Hawaii (Jo Ann Nishimoto Jo\_Ann\_Nishimoto/HILOH/HIDOE@notes.k12.hi.us)
15. Raymond Kellis High School Glendale, Arizona (Michael Wakeford mwakeford@pusd11.org)
16. Los Angeles High School Los Angeles, California (Candice Villigran candice.villagran@lausd.net)
17. Mt. Horeb High School Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin (Mary McDonough-Sutter mcsutter@mhtc.net)
18. New Iberia Senior High School New Iberia, Louisiana (Cindy Landry cilandry@iberia.k12.la.us)
19. North Canyon High School Phoenix, Arizona (Elaine Jacobs ejacobs@pvlearners.net)
20. Northland Pines High School Eagle River, Wisconsin (Emily Rhode erhode@npsd.k12.wi.us)
21. Roybal Learning Center Los Angeles, California Candice Villigran candice.villagran@lausd.net)

## Appendix B: Schools Organized by Special Olympics State Programs

### Special Olympics Arizona

- Brophy Preparatory Academy
- Trevor G. Browne High School
- Chandler High School
- North Canyon High School
- Kellis High School
- Cactus Shadows High School

### Special Olympics Colorado

- Heritage Pre-School

### Special Olympics Hawaii

- Hilo High School

### Special Olympics Idaho

- South Junior School
- White Pine Elementary

### Special Olympics Louisiana

- New Iberia Senior High School
- Dodson Elementary

### Special Olympics Michigan

- Everett High School
- Forest View Elementary

### Special Olympics South Carolina

- Eastside High School

### Special Olympics Southern California

- Los Angeles High School
- Roybal Learning Center

### Special Olympics Wisconsin

- Mt. Horeb High School
- Northland Pines High School
- Wright Middle School

### Special Olympics Texas

- Frances M. Rhodes Elementary School

## Appendix C: Special Olympics Project UNIFY School Visit Protocol and Prompts

### SO Project Unify School Visit Observations:

The following prompts provide opportunities to capture observations of school inclusive activities.

1. What activity is being observed?
2. Who is participating in the activity?
3. How frequently does the activity occur?
4. Who is leading the activity?
5. What socially inclusive characteristics are present in the activity?
  - a. Youth Leadership
  - b. School-Community Collaborations
  - c. Continuous Improvement
  - d. Communication
  - e. Professional Development
  - f. Unifying Programming
  - g. Creating and Sustaining Relationships
6. What learning is taking place among the participants in the activity?

7. What challenges are addressed during the activity?
8. How is the activity assessed to determine progress and success?
9. How are students motivated to fully engage in the activity?
10. Other observations

**SO Project Unify School Visit Focus Group Questions/Prompts Students:**

1. What things are you most proud of about your school?
2. What motivates you to perform well in school? Are these things present regularly in your school? Explain.
3. Are you familiar with the term social inclusion? If yes, what does it mean to you?
4. How do student experience academic, physical and social inclusion?
5. Are you familiar with the name Project UNIFY? If yes, describe the project.

6. How often do you have opportunities to interact with special education/general education students?
7. What activities do you engage in with special education/general education students?
8. Do you believe students have an opportunity to be leaders in your school? In what ways?
9. What things do you want your teachers and principal to know about you and your abilities?
10. What type of opportunities do your parents have to be engaged in your school?
11. In what ways are community members and groups engaged in your school?
12. In what ways is “health” and “healthy living” addressed in your school or your community?
13. If there was anything you could change in your school what one thing would you not change?
14. What advice do you have for other students here in your school and in schools throughout the nation to be more socially inclusive?

**SO Project Unify School Visit Focus Group Questions/Prompts Teachers:**

1. What things are you most proud of about your school?
2. Are you familiar with the term social inclusion? If yes, what does it mean to you?
3. Are you familiar with the name Project UNIFY? If yes, describe the Project.
4. What activities do you create or co-create that engage special education/general education students?
5. What resources do you find most useful to engage students in inclusive activities/opportunities?
6. What challenges do you find to engage students in socially inclusive activities?
7. What suggestions do you have to share your commitment to social inclusion with other teachers?
8. In what ways do students have an opportunity to be leaders in your school?
9. What type of opportunities do parents have to be engaged in socially inclusive activities in your school?
10. In what ways are community members and groups engaged in your school?
11. In what ways is “health” and “healthy living” addressed in your school?
12. What evidence exists that social inclusiveness is sustained in your school?

**SO Project Unify School Visit Principal Conversation:**

1. How long have you been the principal in this school? What are some of the things you are most proud of?
2. Are you familiar with Special Olympics? If so, what does it mean to you?
3. Are you familiar with Project UNIFY? If so, what does it mean to you?
4. How do you describe efforts to create socially inclusive opportunities in your school? (e.g., classes, sports, extra-curricular, student leadership, professional development, etc.)
5. How do you see the elements of Project UNIFY and social inclusion contributing to achieving the school’s vision and expected outcomes/impacts?
6. What strategies do you use and encourage others to use to integrate and sustain social inclusion in the school? How do you think these strategies can be most effectively shared with your peers locally, statewide and nationally?
7. What challenges do you encounter to integrate and sustain a socially inclusive climate (the quality and character of your school) in your school?
8. What evidence exists that social inclusiveness is sustained in your school?
9. What information/resources would you find helpful to assist you to address these challenges?



# Notes:

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