# Evaluation Report

# 2009-2010

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**Introduction**

2009-2010 marked the second year of Project UNIFY, a National Youth Activation Demonstration program funded by the US Department of Education. The primary goal of Project UNIFY is to create more inclusive school communities where “all young people are agents of change - fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities (ID).” Project UNIFY has been conceived as a strategy for State Special Olympics (SO) Programs to work with schools in incorporating Special Olympics programming into the framework of the school in order to foster social inclusion and more accepting school environments for all students. Project UNIFY was developed out of a growing recognition that while students with ID today are more likely to be afforded the opportunity to participate in school alongside their peers without disabilities, these students continue to be marginalized and socially isolated (Siperstein, Norins, & Mohler, 2004; Siperstein, Parker, Norins Bardon & Widaman, 2007).

In the first year of Project UNIFY, in was expected that State SO Programs would work with schools to create opportunities for youth with and without ID to come together and engage in meaningful and mutually beneficial experiences. The hope was that the key aspects of Unified Sports **–** teamwork, team building, leadership, as well as sportsmanship – would form the center of Project UNIFY activities and be applied to a broader set of contexts in which students with and without ID interact. However, while Special Olympics provided State SO Programs with suggested initiatives that could take place as part of Project UNIFY, each State was given latitude in developing their specific Project UNIFY program. This resulted in considerable variation across and within states in terms of what Project UNIFY looked like in schools. Specifically, States differed in the types of relationships that they had with schools and school districts, the process by which they worked with schools, and the way in which Project UNIFY was conceived and promoted to schools.

The evaluation of Project UNIFY in Year 1 was formative in nature and sought to collect broad-level information from State SO Programs about the nature of Project UNIFY at the state level. Specifically, the evaluation sought to document how Project UNIFY unfolded in school and to identify key components that would help to better define Project UNIFY as a program in the future. The results revealed that there was little uniformity in what State Programs chose to implement as Project UNIFY in their schools. For example, while Unified Sports was the most commonly implemented initiative, it was implemented in less than half of the participating schools (45%). In addition, the evaluation demonstrated that State SO Programs varied considerably in the number and nature of relationships with schools, as well as in the approach they took to introducing Project UNIFY to schools. Some State SO Programs viewed Project UNIFY as a means of expanding their traditional and Unified sports programming in schools, while other Programs recognized Project UNIFY provided them with an opportunity to collaborate with schools in creating broader school-wide programming that focused on promoting respect and inclusion.

As Project UNIFY moved into its second year, Special Olympics provided more specific guidelines to State SO Programs. States were asked to include several basic elements in their Project UNIFY program design; specifically, a sport component (e.g. Unified Sports, Traditional Special Olympics sports, or Young Athletes) and a youth leadership/education component (e.g. ALPs, Partner’s Clubs, SOGII). It was expected that State Programs would be able to build off of the partnerships established in the first year to implement more initiatives and involve greater numbers of youth, while also reaching out to new schools and other stakeholders. In the proposal to the Department of Education, Special Olympics dedicated their efforts toward developing programming that would “facilitate a culture that routinely serves up experiences and opportunities for youth in schools and communities to practice respect, dignity and advocacy for all students, including those with ID.”

With the priority of Project UNIFY in Year 2 focused on expansion and deepening of programming, the focus of the evaluation shifted as well. In the second year, we designed our evaluation to assess how Project UNIFY matured in its assimilation into the values and organizational structure of the participating schools. To this end, the evaluation involved two levels. The first level (Level 1) of the evaluation focused on obtaining formative data from State SO staff and school liaisons about the people involved in planning and implementing Project UNIFY, the initiatives that took place in the schools as part of Project UNIFY, and the quality of the partnership between schools and Programs. This focus allowed us to continue to describe the implementation of Project UNIFY in schools and the collaboration between Special Olympics staff and school staff in carrying out Project UNIFY. The second level (Level 2) was a more in-depth evaluation of specific schools, designed to document the impacts of Project UNIFY on participating schools and students. By directly surveying students and liaisons within selected schools, we were able to collect information about the potential impacts of Project UNIFY on school climate, interpersonal relationships and youth attitudes. Specifically, the Level 2 evaluation attempted to identify the circumstances under which Project UNIFY would be considered most successful.

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**DESIGN**

In the evaluation of Project UNIFY Year 1, we collected broad-level information from Special Olympics Program staff about Project UNIFY initiatives in each school. While we obtained a descriptive understanding of how Project UNIFY was implemented, we recognized that these results were limited because they did not include the perspective of school personnel. For the Year 2 evaluation, we decided to collect information about Project UNIFY from multiple sources, including State SO Staff, a school liaison, and students. The multi-method, multi-source design aimed to document the value and benefit of Project UNIFY for all constituents, particularly students and schools

In Year 2 the evaluation was comprised of two levels, simply known as Level 1 and Level 2. The Level 1 evaluation, similar to that conducted in Year 1, sought to collect information from each State SO Program receiving Project UNIFY sub-awards, as well as from each participating school in those states, to gather information about how Project UNIFY was implemented. The Level 2 evaluation was more intense in that it involved following selected schools from a subsample of states over the course of the year. We will first discuss the methods and results for Level 1 followed by a discussion of Level 2.

**LEVEL 1**

 **Methods**

**Participants**

State SO Programs. In Year 2 (2009 – 2010), 44 State SO Programs received Project UNIFY sub-awards, representing 85% of the 52 State SO Programs in the United States. Evaluation data were received from 41 State Programs, 35 of which had also received sub-awards in Year 1 of Project UNIFY (2008-2009).

Schools implementing Project UNIFY. In Year 2, SO State Programs reached out to 1,895 schools representing all grade levels: 43% were elementary schools, 21% were middle schools, and 36% were high schools. Most States involved schools from all three grade levels (68%), while only two State SO Programs focused on implementing Project UNIFY in one specific grade level (high school). When comparing this distribution to the national average, it is apparent that Project UNIFY was implemented in a representative sample of elementary, middle, and high schools across the country, with a slightly higher representation of high schools (See Table 1). Furthermore, this distribution of grade level is similar to the schools involved in Project UNIFY in Year 1, in which 42% of the participating schools were elementary schools, 17% were middle school, and 34% were high schools.

**Table 1.**Grade level of schools in which Project UNIFY was implemented compared to national distribution

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Project UNIFY Year 1** | **Project UNIFY Year 2** | **National Distribution** |
| **Type of School** |  |  |  |
|  Elementary School | 42% | 43% | 56% |
|  Middle School | 17% | 21% | 21% |
|  High School | 34% | 36% | 24% |

Many State SO Programs made efforts in Year 2 to expand their reach into new schools districts within the regions they worked. Specifically, almost two-thirds of the State Programs (64%) reported recruiting schools from new school districts in Year 2. In addition, while over half of the schools (52%) were identified as participating in Project UNIFY in the first year, of the schools new to Project UNIFY in Year 2, just under half (40%) were from new school districts. (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Changein the distribution of grade levels from Year 1 to Year 2

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of schools** **in Year 1** | **Number of schools in Year 2** | **Percent Increase** **Year 1 to Year 2** |
| Preschool-Elementary school | 487 | 808 | 66% |
| Middle school | 271 | 403 | 49% |
| High school | 364 | 684 | 88% |
| **Total** | **1122** | **1895** | **69%** |

Liaisons. Of the 1,895 schools that State SO coordinators reported were participating in Project UNIFY, we received contact information for 1,558 schools to participate in the evaluation. Each of these schools identified a *liaison* that would coordinate the Project UNIFY activities at the school level. Of the 1,558 liaisons initially contacted to participate in the evaluation, surveys were completed by 683 (44% response rate) (See Table 3). It is important to note that certain states were driving the low overall response rate. The general rate would be higher (61%) if we exclude No.CA, LA, and VA, who had a disproportionately low response rate for the high number of schools reported by the State SO Coordinator (17%, 15%, & 21% respectively). It is also important to consider that the initial list provided by State SO Programs may have included schools that Programs invited to participate in Project UNIFY but did not actually implement any activities. Consequently, surveys may have been sent to teachers that had originally expressed interest in conducting Project UNIFY in a school, but did not actually carry out the program. The low response rate of the liaison survey may also be attributed to the fact that some liaisons did not recognize the term “Project UNIFY” to be the program implemented in their school. Many schools used unique phrases to describe the Project UNIFY program in their school (such as Texas’ Meet in the Middle),while other liaisons could have simply thought they were participating in Special Olympics. Consequently, liaisons might not have recognized that they had actually done Project UNIFY, and therefore felt the survey did not relate to their program.

Finally, because the survey was sent via email there was a chance that the email was blocked by a “spam” filter, forwarded to a “spam” folder, or that the email provided by State SO Programs was incorrect. The evaluation team recognized these issues early on and therefore attempted to contact individual schools to speak directly with liaisons and further explain Project UNIFY and its relationship with Special Olympics to improve response rates.

**Table 3.** Responserate to the Liaison End of Year Survey

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of Surveys Sent** | **Number of Surveys Completed** | **Response Rate** |
| Alaska | 39 | 30 | 77% |
| Arizona | 34 | 25 | 74% |
|  So. California  | 28 | 10 | 36% |
| No. California | 260 | 43 | 17% |
| Colorado | 17 | 15 | 88% |
| Connecticut | 26 | 17 | 65% |
| Delaware | 39 | 16 | 41% |
| Florida | 13 | 9 | 69% |
| Georgia | 83 | 41 | 49% |
| Hawii | 31 | 19 | 61% |
| Idaho | 5 | 5 | 100% |
| Illinois | 30 | 13 | 43% |
| Indiana | 20 | 13 | 65% |
| Iowa | 37 | 20 | 54% |
| Kansas | 4 | 3 | 75% |
| Kentucky | 13 | 0 | 0% |
| Louisiana | 201 | 30 | 15% |
| Massachusetts | 21 | 18 | 86% |
| Maryland | 34 | 33 | 97% |
| Maine | 6 | 4 | 67% |
| Michigan | 5 | 5 | 100% |
| Missouri | 12 | 10 | 83% |
| Montana | 10 | 9 | 90% |
| North Carolina | 46 | 37 | 80% |
| North Dakota | 11 | 1 | 9% |
| Nebraska | 38 | 13 | 34% |
| New Hampshire | 30 | 13 | 43% |
|  New Jersey | 37 | 37 | 100% |
| New Mexico | 1 | 1 | 100% |
| New York | 3 | 1 | 33% |
| Ohio | 28 | 20 | 71% |
| Oklahoma | 5 | 3 | 60% |
| Oregon | 53 | 22 | 42% |
| Pennsylvania | 3 | 1 | 33% |
| Rhode Island | 20 | 18 | 90% |
| South Carolina | 31 | 28 | 90% |
| South Dakota | 1 | 1 | 100% |
| Texas | 54 | 40 | 74% |
| Utah | 6 | 2 | 33% |
| Virginia | 156 | 32 | 21% |
| Vermont | 11 | 9 | 82% |
| Washington | 35 | 10 | 29% |
| Wisconsin | 2 | 1 | 50% |
| Wyoming | 19 | 5 | 26% |
| **Total** | **1558** | **683** | **44%** |

Of those liaisons who completed the survey, the majority were female (80%), special education or adapted PE teachers (65%), with an average age of 43 years (range 17-81) (see Table 4). Not surprisingly, most liaisons (66%) had previous involvement with SO; the majority had been a coach (69%) or volunteer (56%) in the past. Furthermore, 13% of liaisons reported having a family member who was an athlete in SO. Most of the respondents that were involved in SO in some other way were involved as a district or local coordinator for SO, an organizer for SO events at the school, an area coordinator or SO Program coordinator, or the head of a delegation. Less frequently liaisons reported helping with fundraising, being a Board Member, being on a local committee, or being the parent of a SO Unified Sports partner. (In addition, 31% of the liaisons in Year 2 also served as liaison in Year 1.)

**Table 4.** Characteristics of school liaison (N= 683)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Mean** | **Percent of Liaisons** |
| **Gender**  |   |  |
| Male  |  | 20% |
| Female  |  | 80% |
| **Mean age (years)** | 43 |  |
| **Type of teacher** |   |  |
| Special Ed  |  | 65% |
| General Ed  |  | 17% |
| Administration |  | 18% |
| **Previous involvement in SO**  |  | 66% |
| **Type of previous involvement** |   |  |
| coach  |  | 69% |
| volunteer  |  | 56% |
| family member of athlete  |  | 13% |
| other  |  | 47% |

**Instruments**

Several instruments were developed for use in Level 1 of the evaluation. Information was collected to describe and document the implementation of Project UNIFY in the schools from both the State SO coordinator and the liaisons in each school. A brief description of the instruments employed is provided below.

State SO Coordinator Survey.To assess how Project UNIFY was shaped at the state level, a survey was developed that focused on the interaction between the State SO Program and the educational community in their state. This 165-item online survey was used to collect information from each state related to: the organizational structure of Project UNIFY; the personnel and management involved in Project UNIFY; the various approaches utilized for recruiting schools; the various approaches utilized for establishing relationships between SO and schools; and the challenges faced in implementing Project UNIFY.

School Liaison Survey*.* To assess the scope of Project UNIFY at the local level, we developed a survey that focused on the breadth of the Project UNIFY program in each school. This 322-item online survey was used to collect information from each school related to: the liaison’s role in the school; the school’s prior involvement with Project UNIFY; the initiatives that took place during the 2009-2010 school year as part of Project UNIFY including the type of initiative or activities and who was involved in program planning and implementation; and the challenges schools faced in implementing the program.

**Procedures**

In the fall 2009, after State SO Programs had received notice of their Project UNIFY sub-awards, Special Olympics arranged a conference call for the UMass Boston evaluation team to talk with the State SO Programs about the Project UNIFY evaluation. During this conference call, the evaluation team explained the evaluation methods that would be employed. It was emphasized that both State SO Programs and a representative (liaison) from each school involved in Project UNIFY would be surveyed. We also explained that online surveys would be disseminated to State SO Programs and their school liaisons in Spring 2010.

Between January 2010 and April 2010, we worked with the Center for Survey Research (CSR) on developing questionnaires for SO Program staff and school liaisons. The questionnaires were put into an online survey collector system, in which each school would have its own unique identifier. (Note: Throughout the evaluation period, the distribution and management of the online surveys were coordinated by CSR).

As we prepared to send the online survey to school liaisons, all participating SO Programs were emailed and asked to provide the name and contact information (school name and email address) for the one person in each of their participating schools who was most knowledgeable about the Project UNIFY activities (i.e. the Project UNIFY liaison). It was expected that the identified person, or liaison, would have the most in-depth knowledge as to what took place in their school as part of Project UNIFY and how these activities fit within the broader structure of the school. We encouraged the SO Programs to inform the liaisons about the evaluation and provided an email that Programs could send to liaisons further explaining the evaluation and the survey. With the school lists from each state, schools were assigned separate ID #s that the liaison would use when accessing their survey. The links for the liaison survey were emailed in April 2010 and liaisons were given until the end of May 2010 to complete the survey. Six reminder emails were sent out to respondents during the liaison survey period.

As emails were being prepared for dissemination, several State SO Programs informed us that they anticipated challenges with using emailed survey links, as some of the schools with which they work have highly restrictive spam filters. We worked with these Programs individually to create alternative processes for administering the surveys that would be consistent with the other state Programs. In one instance for example, an email with the survey links was sent directly to the State SO Program coordinator who then forwarded the emails to the respective liaisons. In another instance, we created a separate link that would be used by all schools within a specific State Program. In this case, this link was sent to the SO Program coordinator, who distributed the link to Regional coordinators. Liaisons were then directed go to the Regional SO office in their area to complete the survey, entering the name of their school and a special ID number.

As with the liaison survey, links to the State SO Coordinator Survey were emailed in the middle of March 2010 to the staff person identified as most knowledgeable about Project UNIFY activities. The end date for the coordinator survey was the end of June 2010. Approximately 5 reminder emails were sent out to respondents over the course of the three months the survey was “open” for completion.

**Results**

**Management of Project UNIFY**

To begin the evaluation of the second year of Project UNIFY, we first examined the characteristics of the State SO Programs that received Project UNIFY funding from SOI. First, it was important to understand the size and organizational structure of these Programs and also how State SO Programs collaborated with educational communities in general (irrespective of Project UNIFY). Given Project UNIFY’s emphasis on youth leadership, it was also important to determine the extent to which State SO Programs included youth in leadership positions in their organization.

***State SO Program Structure***. The State SO Programs that participated in Project UNIFY in Year 2 ranged widely with regard to the size of the Program. For example, when looking at the number of regions, or areas, into which Programs were divided, State SO programs ranged widely from having no regional breakdown (or 1 region) to having 63 regions (see Table 5). While most Programs (61%) had less than 10 regions or areas, nearly one-third of the Programs (29%) had between 11 and 20 regions.

Because State SO Programs varied so widely in size, we were also interested if they varied in their organizational structure. As with regional size, Programs had varying numbers of staff who were employed in their main state office, ranging from 5 people to 69 people. Most of the Programs had between 11 and 20 staff working in their main office (42%), though seven had more than 30 employees in the state office (17%).

**Table 5.** Characteristics of State SO Programs

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of States** | **Percent of States** |
| **State Program entry into Project UNIFY** |  |  |
| Started in 2008-2009 | 35 | 85% |
| Started in 2009-2010 | 6 | 15% |
| **Number of regions or areas in State Program**  |  |  |
| 1-4 | 11 | 27% |
| 5-10 | 14 | 34% |
| 11-20 | 12 | 29% |
| 20+ | 4 | 10% |
| **Number of paid staff working** **in the main Program office** |  |  |
| 1-10 | 11 | 27% |
| 11-20 | 17 | 42% |
| 21-30 | 6 | 15% |
| 30+ | 7 | 17% |

***Involvement of Youth and the Educational Community Strategic Planning.*** Given Project UNIFY’s emphasis on youth leadership, a critical question we asked addressed the extent to which State SO Programs included youth in leadership positions in their organization prior to Project UNIFY. Overall, less than one third of the Programs reported the involvement of youth in state level or regional level planning before Project UNIFY. Since starting Project UNIFY however, half of the Programs now include youth leaders on state and regional boards or planning committees (See Table 6).

**Table 6.** Involvement of youth in State SO Programs

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Prior to Project UNIFY** | **Since Project UNIFY** |
| Youth representation on state level boards or committees | 7% | 49% |
| Youth involvement in regional planning | 29% | 54% |

Next, because Project UNIFY is meant to bridge the connection between State SO Programs and the educational community, we examined how the Program’s collaborated with various education organizations. Almost all of the State Programs (83%) had relationships with various educational organizations in their state. When examining the specific relationships we found that most State SO Programs had established partnerships with superintendent offices (66%) and state education agencies (59%; e.g., state departments of education). Alternately, few states had established relationships with school board associations (29%). Interestingly, approximately two-thirds of the Programs (65%) reported that they had created at least one new partnership since the beginning of Project UNIFY in 2008. Finally, in addition to partnerships with the educational organizations, about half of the Programs included school administrators and other representatives from the education community on State SO or Regional SO planning boards and committees (see Table 7).

**Table 7.** Collaboration of State SO Programs with the education community

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of States** | **% of States** |
| **Organizations SO Programs are partnered with** |  |  |
| Local superintendent office | 27 | 66% |
| State education administrative agencies such as state education department | 24 | 59% |
| State or national level student organizations | 20 | 49% |
| State level interscholastic organizations | 13 | 32% |
| School board associations | 12 | 29% |
| **Percent of State SO Programs for which these partnerships are new in 2009-2010 year** | 26 | 65% |
| **Involvement of Education Community in SO Program planning** |  |  |
| Presence of school administrators on any state-level boards or committees | 20 | 49% |
|  Presence of school administrators on regional boards or committees | 19 | 46% |

***State SO Program Implementation of Project UNIFY.*** Due to the great variation that existed in both the size and organizational structure of State SO Programs, we wanted to determine if these differences had any relation to how Project UNIFY was managed and implemented across the different Programs. Of all the State Programs with more than one region, only 17% implemented Project UNIFY in all regions. Interestingly, in those States Programs that are larger (i.e., five or more regions) there was a wide variation in the number of regions included in Project UNIFY. While almost one quarter (24%) reported that they implemented Project UNIFY in 90-100% of their regions, approximately another quarter (24%) involved only one or two of their regions[[1]](#footnote-1).

In looking at the number of staff involved in managing Project UNIFY, most of the State Programs (61%) reported that Project UNIFY was managed solely through the State SO Program office (see Table 8). On the other hand, over one third of the Programs described the management as being shared between their State Program office and Regional Program offices. In terms of personnel employed at the state level for Project UNIFY, most Programs (65%) designated two or three staff personnel to oversee Project UNIFY, while 13% reported that Project UNIFY was staffed by only one person. The types of staff that were involved included CEO’s, Vice Presidents of Sports, Directors of Outreach, Grants managers, etc; only three Programs specifically named a Project UNIFY coordinator as among the staff.

**Table 8.** Management of Project UNIFY by State SO Programs

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of States** | **Percent of States** |
| **Management approach for** **Project UNIFY at Program level** |  |  |
| Only through state SO program office | 25 | 61% |
| Only at the regional/area level | 1 | 2% |
| Managed through both the State SO office and the regional level | 14 | 34% |
| Other - through Connecticut Association of Schools | 1 | 2% |
| **Number of SO staff with some** **responsibility for Project UNIFY**1 Staff  | 5 | 13% |
| 2-3 Staff | 26 | 65% |
| 4-6 Staff | 9 | 23% |

**Implementation of Project UNIFY in Schools across the Country**

To examine the implementation of Project UNIFY in the schools, we surveyed the liaisons responsible for implementing the UNIFY initiatives within the individuals schools. Because liaisons were the most intimately involved in Project UNIFY implementation at the school level, the information they provided was key to fully understanding and appreciating the depth and breadth of Project UNIFY as it occurred across all schools. As such, the remainder of the Level 1 report will focus more on the liaisons report of Project UNIFY implementation.

***Description of Project UNIFY Schools[[2]](#footnote-2).***To obtain information about the specific characteristics of the schools that were recruited and participated in Project UNIFY, liaisons were asked to describe their school and its student population, including the size of the school, the ethnic composition, and the percentage of the students receiving special education services. Overall, the schools that implemented the program within states were quite variable suggesting that SO coordinators made an effort to implement Project UNIFY in a diverse sample of schools. With regard to school size, overall the average size of the elementary, middle, and high schools that implemented Project UNIFY was larger than the National distribution. However, there was extreme variability in school size ranging from very small schools (~60 students, CO) to very large schools (~4,500 students, MA) (see Table 9). Similar to the national distribution, the ethnic composition of most schools on average was white; aggregating across the schools, about half of the student population attending schools in which Project UNIFY was implemented were characterized as white. Finally, because one of the goals of Project UNIFY is to foster the social inclusion of youth with ID, it was important to determine the percent of the student body that received special education services within the participating schools. Therefore, liaisons were asked to indicate the number of students receiving special education services in their school. This number was then divided by the total number of students attending the school to obtain a percentage. As the national average of students receiving special education services is 13.4%, it was encouraging to find that the mean percent reported by liaisons was 13.5%, indicating we have a representative sample of schools.

As Project UNIFY was used as an avenue to increase the presence of SO in public schools, we also examined how many schools had a relationship with SO prior to implementing Project UNIFY. It was clear that SO expanded its reach into new schools as a result of Project UNIFY as about two-thirds of the liaisons reported that their school did not have previous relationship with SO. Of those schools that had a previous relationship, the number of years in which the school had been involved with SO varied widely with a median of 10 years (range of 0 to 40 years). Once beginning Project UNIFY however, there was an increase in the type of initiatives implemented in schools. For example, those schools with previous involvement with SO mostly engaged in Traditional SO Sports (66%) and much fewer engaged in Unified Sports (26%).

***Variation in the Implementation of Project UNIFY Across and Within States.*** As it is known, Project UNIFY is an umbrella program that incorporates a number of different SO initiatives which can be implemented collectively to advance the goal of creating school communities of acceptance and inclusion. In Year 2 of Project UNIFY, SO headquarters attempted to provide more stringent guidelines for what State SO Programs should carry out in schools as part of their Project UNIFY program, if funded. It was expected that states would ensure that participating schools implemented at least one sports component (e.g. Unified Sports, Traditional Special Olympics sports, or Young Athletes) and one youth leadership/education component (e.g. ALPs, Youth Rally, Partner’s Clubs, or SO Get Into It). It was also expected that in implementing Project UNIFY, states would encourage schools to include the Be a Fan branding materials and the R-Word Campaign.

To understand how Project UNIFY unfolded in Year 2, we documented the specific initiatives that took place in each school, including how these initiatives were planned and implemented within the schools, and who was involved in Project UNIFY. Given the priority placed on the collaboration between the State SO Programs and the schools, it was also critical that we explore the process of collaboration and communication between SO and the Project UNIFY schools.

Given the guidelines provided for funding described above, it was expected that there would be greater consistency in the initiatives implemented across all State SO Programs. To explore the implementation we took multiple approaches. First we examined Project UNIFY at the State Program level, then we examined those schools within each state, and finally by examining the variability of implementation of specific initiatives across all schools.

**Table 9.** Characteristics of schools that implemented Project UNIFY

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Average size** **of school** | **National Distribution** |
| **School Size** |  |  |
| Elementary School | 518.6 (230.7) | 445 |
| Middle School | 802.2 (344.2) | 581 |
| High school | 1311.6 (721.4) |  881\* |
| **Students Receiving Special** **Education Services**  |  |  13.4%\*\* |
| < 13% of student body | 59% |  |
|  14% of student body or higher | 41% |  |
| **Ethnic composition of** **student body** |  |  |
| White, not Hispanic or Latino | 50% |  53%\*\*\* |
| Hispanic or Latino | 18% | 23% |
| Black or African American | 22% | 17% |
| Other | 8% | 7% |

\*U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD),

 "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2007–08

 \*\*U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2010). *Digest of Education*

*Statistics, 2009* (NCES 2010-013) (http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=64),

 \*\*\* http://www.nces.ed.gov/ccd/bat/output.asp

When examining Project UNIFY at the state level in terms of the initiatives implemented, it is apparent that almost all states (98%) implemented at least one sports component in at least one school. Of those states that successfully incorporated a sports component, most included Unified Sports (93%), followed by Traditional Special Olympics (91%), and Young Athletes (61%). States were also successful in including at least one initiative related to youth leadership in at least one school (91% of states). Of those states that successfully incorporated a youth leadership component, most included a Youth Rally or Summit (86%) followed by Partners Club (82%). Finally, while almost all of the States (95%) included the R-Word Campaign, only three-quarters (73%) included Be A Fan branding (see Table 10).

**Table 10**. Distribution of States that implemented each Project UNIFY initiative (N = 44)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of States to Implement Initiative** | **Percent of States to** **Implement Initiative** |
| **Sports Initiatives** |  |  |
| Unified Sports | 41 | 93% |
| Traditional SO Sports | 40 | 91% |
| Young Athletes | 27 | 61% |
| **Youth Leadership/Education****Components** |  |  |
| Youth Rally or Summit | 24 | 86% |
| Partners Club | 36 | 82% |
| ALPs | 29 | 55% |
| SOGII | 19 | 43% |
| **R-word Campaign** | 42 | 95% |
| **Be A Fan Branding** | 31 | 73% |
|  |  |  |
| **Other** |  |  |
| Fans in the Stands  | 32 | 73% |
| Polar Plunge | 32 | 73% |

After determining what initiatives states included as part of Project UNIFY overall, we next looked at the specific initiatives that were implemented within the individual schools in each state. Schools varied greatly in the SO initiatives implemented as part of Project UNIFY. While Unified Sports, the R-Word campaign, and Traditional SO Sports were most consistently implemented initiatives across states, there was considerable variation in the percent of schools within those states that implemented these initiatives. For example, the percent of schools that participated in each initiative within a given state ranged from almost none to all of the schools. More specifically, with regard to Unified Sports, this initiative was only implemented in 8% of the schools in No.CA but implemented in all of the schools (100%) in CT, MA, MD. With regard to the R-Word campaign, this initiative was only implemented in 5% of the schools in LA but implemented in all of the schools (100%) in DE. Finally, Traditional SO Sports was implemented in none of the schools in CT but all of the schools (100%) in N.CA[[3]](#footnote-3).

Given the variation in the percent of individual schools to implement an initiative within a particular state, it is not surprising that when looking across all schools, the percent of schools to participate in any specific initiative drops considerably. More specifically, even though almost all States had some schools participating in Unified Sports, Traditional SO Sports and the Youth Rally or Summit (93%, 91%, and 86% respectively), when looking at the variation across all schools, only about half implemented these initiatives (56%, 51% and 33% respectively). Moreover, while just over half of the schools (54%) implemented R-Word campaign, only 16% of schools indicated they used Be A Fan branding (see Table 11). Finally, as expected from the specific data collected from State SO Programs, the fewest schools were involved in SO Get Into It (8%) and ALPs (6%).

**Table 11.** Distribution of schools that implemented each Project UNIFY initiative (N = 613)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of Schools to Implement Initiative** | **Percent of Schools to** **Implement Initiative** |
| **Sports Initiatives** |  |  |
| Unified Sports | 344 | 56% |
| Traditional SO Sports | 311 | 51% |
| Young Athletes | 135 | 22% |
| **Youth Leadership/Education****Components** |  |  |
| Youth Rally or Summit | 203 | 33% |
| Partners Club | 158 | 26% |
| SOGII | 47 | 8% |
| ALPs | 38 | 6% |
|  |  |  |
| **R-word Campaign** | 329 | 54% |
| **Be A Fan Branding** | 99 | 16% |
|  |  |  |
| **Other** |  |  |
| Fans in the Stands | 165 | 27% |
| Polar Plunge | 100 | 16% |

As a next step, given the variation across the different states, we examined the extent to which individual schools implemented a sports initiative and a youth leadership/education initiative as part of Project UNIFY. Overall less than half of the liaisons (42%) included both sports and youth leadership in their Project UNIFY initiatives. When looking at sports initiatives only, almost all of the liaisons (89%) indicated that a sports initiative was implemented as part of Project UNIFY (see Table 12). Of those liaisons who implemented a sports component, over half (63%) implemented just one sports initiative, just under a third (30%) included two initiatives (30%) and a few (7%) included all three sports initiatives. Again, Unified Sports was the most frequently implemented initiative in schools overall (56%), followed by Traditional SO Sports (51%) and Young Athletes (22%) (see Table 13).

While almost all liaisons reported the implementation of at least one sports initiative, less than half (49%) implemented at least one initiative related to youth leadership. Of those who implemented a youth leadership/education initiative, the majority of these schools only implemented one youth leadership initiative (61%), while just under a third (31%) implemented two youth leadership initiatives, and a few (8%) implemented three youth leadership initiatives or all four (1%). Again, the Youth Rally or Summit was the most frequently implemented initiative in schools overall (33%), followed by Partners Clubs (26%).

Table 12. Schools within each state that implemented at least one sports initiative, one youth leadership/education initiative, or both

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | **N** | **Sports** **Initiative** | **Youth Leadership/****Education Initiative** | **Both a Sports and Youth Leadership/Education Initiative** |
| Alaska | 27 | 85% | 56% | 41% |
| Arizona | 22 | 96% | 27% | 23% |
| Colorado | 15 | 80% | 20% | 20% |
| Connecticut | 17 | 100% | 35% | 35% |
| Delaware | 11 | 36% | 46% | 18% |
| Florida | 9 | 100% | 56% | 56% |
| Georgia | 38 | 92% | 42% | 37% |
| Hawaii | 15 | 93% | 40% | 33% |
| Idaho | 10 | 70% | 50% | 30% |
| Illinois | 13 | 100% | 23% | 23% |
| Indiana | 20 | 100% | 50% | 50% |
| Iowa | 5 | 80% | 100% | 80% |
| Kansas | 3 | 67% | 33% | 33% |
| Louisiana | 19 | 90% | 15% | 5% |
| Maine | 4 | 100% |  |  |
| Maryland | 32 | 100% | 13% | 13% |
| Massachusetts | 16 | 100% | 25% | 25% |
| Michigan | 5 | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Missouri | 9 | 100% | 44% | 44% |
| Montana | 9 | 67% | 33% | 33% |
| No. California | 13 | 100% | 23% | 23% |
| Nebraska | 11 | 82% | 27% | 18% |
| Nevada | 30 | 97% | 10% | 10% |
| New Hampshire | 11 | 82% | 55% | 46% |
| New Jersey | 35 | 77% | 49% | 46% |
| New Mexico | 1 | 100% |  |  |
| New York | 1 | 100% |  |  |
| North Carolina | 35 | 80% | 57% | 43% |
| North Dakota | 1 | 100% |  |  |
| Ohio | 20 | 100% | 15% | 15% |
| Oklahoma | 3 | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Oregon | 19 | 63% | 47% | 47% |
| Pennsylvania | 1 |  | 100% | 0% |
| Rhode Island | 15 | 87% | 27% | 20% |
| So. California | 6 | 100% |  |  |
| South Carolina | 27 | 100% | 56% | 56% |
| South Dakota | 1 | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Texas | 40 | 85% | 70% | 55% |
| Utah | 2 | 100% |  |  |
| Vermont | 7 | 100% | 14% | 14% |
| Virginia | 21 | 91% | 38% | 33% |
| Washington | 9 | 100% | 11% | 11% |
| Wisconsin | 1 | 100% |  |  |
| Wyoming | 4 | 100% | 75% | 75% |
| **TOTAL** | **613** | 89% | 49% | 42% |

**Table 13.** Distribution of schools in each state that implemented each Project UNIFY initiative (N=613)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | **Sports** **Initiatives** |  |  |  | **Youth Leadership/Education****Components** |  |  |  | **Other** |
|   | **N** | Unified Sports | Traditional SO Sports | Young Athletes | Youth Rally/ Summit | Partners Club | ALPS | SOGII | **Be A Fan Branding** | **R-word Campaign** | Fans in the Stands | Polar Plunge |
| Alaska | 27 | 67% | 30% | 7% | 22% | 56% | 7% | 3% | 11% | 37% | 15% | 19% |
| Arizona | 22 | 73% | 32% | 5% | 28% | 18% | 5% |  | 14% | 27% | 5% | 5% |
| Colorado | 15 | 27% | 13% | 60% | 33% | 13% | 13% | 11% | 13% | 40% | 13% | 13% |
| Connecticut | 17 | 100% |  | 6% | 41% | 18% | 6% |  |  | 24% | 6% | 17% |
| Delaware | 11 | 18% | 27% |  | 73% | 36% |  |  |  | 100% | 18% | 46% |
| Florida | 9 | 100% | 56% |  | 33% | 44% |  | 9% | 22% | 89% | 67% | 11% |
| Georgia | 38 | 47% | 71% | 42% | 8% | 29% |  |  | 8% | 32% | 34% | 5% |
| Hawaii | 15 | 33% | 93% | 7% |  | 33% | 13% |  | 13% | 27% | 60% | 40% |
| Idaho | 10 | 50% | 30% | 40% | 30% | 30% |  |  | 10% | 60% | 20% | 10% |
| Illinois | 13 | 23% | 54% | 100% | 54% | 8% | 8% | 5% | 8% | 31% |  | 8% |
| Indiana | 20 | 70% | 65% | 35% | 30% | 35% | 15% |  | 10% | 40% | 10% | 15% |
| Iowa | 5 | 80% | 40% |  | 100% | 80% | 20% | 6% | 40% | 100% | 40% | 20% |
| Kansas | 3 | 33% | 33% |  | 67% | 33% |  |  | 33% | 100% |  | 33% |
| Louisiana | 19 | 11% | 84% | 11% | 5% | 16% |  | 22% | 11% | 5% | 26% |  |
| Maine | 4 | 100% | 100% |  | 50% |  |  | 100% |  | 50% | 25% |  |
| Maryland | 32 | 100% | 19% |  | 6% | 9% |  | 18% | 3% | 50% | 16% | 3% |
| Massachusetts | 16 | 100% | 19% | 25% | 19% | 19% | 13% |  |  | 31% | 13% | 25% |
| Michigan | 5 | 80% | 100% |  | 80% | 60% |  |  |  | 100% | 20% | 20% |
| Missouri | 9 | 78% | 67% | 22% | 44% | 22% | 11% | 5% | 44% | 89% | 44% | 67% |
| Montana | 9 | 11% | 67% |  | 57% | 22% | 11% |  | 22% | 78% | 67% | 44% |
| N. California | 13 | 8% | 100% |  | 15% | 8% | 8% |  | 9% | 8% | 31% |  |
| Nebraska | 11 | 9% | 27% | 73% | 9% | 9% |  |  | 9% | 36% | 18% | 9% |
| **Table 13.** Con’t |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | **Sports** **Initiatives** |  |  |  | **Youth Leadership/Education Components** |  |  |  | **Other** |
|   | **N** | Unified Sports | Traditional SO Sports | Young Athletes | Youth Rally/ Summit | Partners Club | ALPS | SOGII | **Be A Fan Branding** | **R-word Campaign** | Fans in the Stands | Polar Plunge |
| Nevada | 30 | 97% | 17% | 7% | 17% | 10% | 3% | 3% | 7% | 37% | 10% | 20% |
| New Hampshire | 11 | 73% | 63% | 9% | 9% | 18% | 46% |  |  | 27% |  | 91% |
| New Jersey | 35 | 69% | 23% | 34% | 54% | 14% |  | 11% | 11% | 94% | 11% | 3% |
| New Mexico | 1 |  |  | 100% | 100% |  |  |  |  | 100% |  |  |
| New York | 1 | 100% | 100% |  |  |  |  |  |  | 100% |  | 100% |
| North Carolina | 35 | 29% | 77% | 17% | 63% | 40% | 6% | 9% | 23% | 97% | 51% | 14% |
| North Dakota | 1 | 100% | 100% |  |  |  |  |  |  | 100% |  |  |
| Ohio | 20 | 70% | 80% | 55% | 25% | 15% | 5% |  | 25% | 55% | 30% | 5% |
| Oklahoma | 3 | 100% | 100% | 33% | 67% | 100% |  |  | 67% | 100% | 67% | 100% |
| Oregon | 19 | 63% | 21% |  | 42% | 37% |  | 5% | 16% | 90% | 11% | 47% |
| Pennsylvania | 1 |  |  |  |  | 100% |  |  |  | 100% |  |  |
| Rhode Island | 15 | 73% | 53% | 13% | 20% | 20% | 7% | 6% | 13% | 60% | 40% | 7% |
| S. California | 6 |  | 100% |  |  |  |  |  | 59% |  |  |  |
| South Carolina | 27 | 63% | 63% | 33% | 48% | 26% | 4% | 22% | 59% | 59% | 41% | 7% |
| South Dakota | 1 | 100% | 100% |  | 100% |  | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |  | 100% |
| Texas | 40 | 28% | 75% | 15% | 65% | 48% | 5% | 18% | 40% | 90% | 65% | 5% |
| Utah | 2 | 50% |  | 50% | 50% |  |  |  | 50% | 50% |  |  |
| Vermont | 7 | 86% | 14% |  | 14% | 14% | 14% |  | 14% | 14% |  | 14% |
| Virginia | 21 | 19% | 71% | 14% | 19% | 29% | 14% | 5% | 14% | 29% | 52% | 19% |
| Washington | 9 | 33% | 33% | 89% | 33% | 11% | 11% |  | 11% | 33% | 11% |  |
| Wisconsin | 1 | 100% | 100% |  |  |  |  |  |  | 100% |  |  |
| Wyoming | 4 | 75% | 75% | 50% | 75% | 25% | 25% |  |  | 100% | 25% | 100% |

Looking the specific initiatives implemented across all 613 schools gives us only one perspective on the variability of Project UNIFY in those schools. We also examined the actual number of initiatives that were implemented in the schools overall regardless of whether or not they were a sports or youth leadership/education initiative. In total while one quarter (24%) of the liaisons reported the implementation of five or more initiatives as part of their Project UNIFY program, almost half of the schools implemented two or fewer initiatives (44%) (see Table 14).

**Table 14.**Distribution of schools that implemented one or more Project UNIFY initiative

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Number of** **initiatives** | **Number of schools** **that implemented** | **Percent of schools that implemented** |
| 1 | 161 | 26% |
| 2 | 121 | 18% |
| 3 | 98 | 16% |
| 4 | 87 | 14% |
|  5+ | 146 | 24% |

To further explore this variability we looked at the most common combination of initiatives to occur in schools that implemented two or more initiatives. First, because Unified Sports was the most frequently occurring initiative, we examined those schools that implemented Unified Sports in addition to other initiatives. Of the 56% of schools that implemented Unified Sports, the most common other initiative to take place in the school was the R-Word Campaign (58%), followed by Traditional SO Sports (54%). In other words, those schools that implemented a second initiative (in addition to Unified Sports) most frequently included the R-Word campaign or Traditional SO Sports.

Next, we looked at the schools in which three or more initiatives took place, and explored the various combinations of initiatives implemented. Of the schools that implemented both Unified Sports and the R-Word Campaign (the most frequent pairing overall), we found that the most common initiative to take place in addition to these two were Traditional SO Sports (75% of schools) and Partners Clubs (35%). In other words, those liaisons that implemented a third initiative (in addition to Unified Sports and the R-Word Campaign) most frequently included either Traditional SO Sports or Partner Clubs. Finally, of the schools that participated in both Unified Sports and Traditional SO Sports (the second most frequent pairing overall), we found that the most common initiative to take place in addition to these two were the R-Word Campaign (68%) and Fans in the Stands (43%).

**School Collaboration with Special Olympics**

A critical aspect of Project UNIFY is the formation and maintenance of relationships between the State SO Programs and the schools they recruit to participate in Project UNIFY. While Project UNIFY is primarily a school-based program, it was expected that there would be some collaboration between State SO Programs and the schools in terms of planning and implementation of Project UNIFY initiatives. To understand how well Programs carried out this aspect of Project UNIFY, liaisons were asked various questions about the availability of SO staff, the presence of SO staff at the schools throughout Project UNIFY, and the level of collaboration on the specific initiatives. First, however, because the initial step in building the Program-school relationship centered on the introduction of Project UNIFY to the schools, information was gathered from the State SO coordinators to determine who they first contacted at each school before starting Project UNIFY.

Many SO coordinators (51%) indicated that special education or adapted physical education teachers were their primary point of contact when recruiting new schools to become involved in Project UNIFY, followed by administrators (e.g. principal, superintendent) (23%) and to a lesser extent, general education teachers (8%; see Table 15). It is important to note however that most SO Programs indicated that prior to Project UNIFY they primarily contacted schools to participate in Traditional SO Sports through a special education or adapted physical education teacher (81%). In fact before Project UNIFY, very few Programs (4%) reported they had contact with school level administration.

**Table 15.** State SO Programs’ primary point of contact for Project UNIFY initiatives

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **SO Program contact for Traditional SO Sports** | **SO Program contact for** **Project UNIFY initiatives** |
| Superintendent | 2% | 0% |
| Principal | 2% | 23% |
| Curriculum Director | 0% | 8% |
| Special Ed/Adaptive PE | 81% | 51% |
| General Ed Teacher | 0% | 8% |
| Other | 14% | 10% |

Just over a third (38%) reported that someone from Special Olympics came to their school to speak with an administrator about implementing Project UNIFY. Few liaisons (15%) indicated that a SO staff member presented information about Project UNIFY at a staff meeting. As expected, these percentages varied by state, however, in that the percent of liaisons that reported having a SO Program staff member speak to a school administrator ranged from 9% (NH) to 100% (KS, ND, NM, NY, OK, PA, SD, UT). Understandably, states with fewer numbers of schools reported better presence of SO staff in the schools. In fact, as the number of schools in a state increased, there was less State SO presence in individual schools. For example, in nine of the states with more than 10 participating schools, less than half of the liaisons indicated that someone came to their school to talk with an administrator.

Considering the variation we found in the involvement of SO within schools across the different states, it is not surprising that the State SO Programs took different approaches to working with schools on the development and implementation of Project UNIFY initiatives as well. Overall while some liaisons worked with their State SO Program to adapt initiatives for their schools, others simply took initiatives developed by SO and implemented them unchanged. For example, over one third of the liaisons (35%) reported that all or most of the initiatives that they implemented in their schools were developed by SO and implemented without any changes. In fact, there were some states in which all schools implemented activities developed primarily by SO. On the other hand, almost half of the liaisons (48%) indicated that they collaborated with their State SO Program to create Project UNIFY initiatives to meet the unique needs of their school. That is, these schools adapted the initiatives developed by SO to better fit their school.

When examining the type and frequency of communication that took place between the school and the State SO Program, it is apparent that most had regular contact. The majority of liaisons across all schools reported that they had regular communication with their State SO Program, primarily through emails (83%), personal meetings (70%), or regular phone calls (52%). When looking at schools within states, it is apparent that some State SO Programs maintained closer communication with the schools than other State SO Programs. Specifically, in those states with 10 or more schools participating, at least 60% of the liaisons indicated that they had regular communication with staff at the State Program office through a number of different means (e.g. email, phone calls, etc,). A smaller number of states however, did not have regular communication; for example in LA and NJ, less than half of the liaisons reported having personal meetings with SO (33% and 41% respectively) or even having email communication (40% and 45% respectively).

Interestingly, about one third of all liaisons indicated that they communicated with other liaisons in their state; 33% reported that they had in-person meetings and 37% reported that their State SO coordinator organized phone or web-based meetings for all the liaisons in their states. This form of communication was certainly more prominent in some states than others; the majority of liaisons in MA, CT and AZ reported that their state SO office organized in person meetings (65%, 75% and 78% respectively) and phone meetings (65%, 75%, and 83% respectively).

In addition to describing the level of involvement of State SO Programs in the development of initiatives for the schools, and the frequency and type of communication, liaisons were asked to indicate how much support they received from SO staff in carrying out the different initiatives in the school. Overall half of the liaisons (50%) indicated that State SO staff members showed their support by attending at least one Project UNIFY event at their school. Again, there was considerable variation across states in terms of the presence of SO staff in the schools. Specifically, while the liaisons in some states reported the minimal presence of SO staff in the schools, others reported a lot of involvement (a low of 12% of the liaisons in LA to a high of 100% of the liaisons in No.CA).

Despite the variations across states, liaisons generally expressed satisfaction with the level of collaboration and support they received from the State SO Programs. Almost half of the liaisons across all schools (44%) noted that the State SO Program in their state was “extremely” or “very involved” in the implementation of Project UNIFY at their school, and a quarter (24%) reported that they were somewhat involved (see Table 16). It is interesting to note that the liaisons’ perceptions of involvement of the State Program seems to be driven in part by whether or not the initiatives carried out at their school were adapted for Project UNIFY or implemented as developed. Specifically, the perceptions of SO staff involvement were lower in those schools that *did not* adapt the initiatives (45% of schools that did not adapt initiatives indicated that SO staff were not involved), than in those schools that *did* adapt the initiatives (22% of schools that adapted initiatives indicated that SO staff were not involved). Related to this finding is that over half of the liaisons (55%) that worked with their State SO Program to adapt initiatives to meet the specific needs of their school reported that the SO Program was very or extremely involved. It is important to point out however that the level of involvement of State SO Program staff was highly variable across the states, with 18% of the liaisons in some states (LA and NH) indicating that their State Program was very or extremely involved compared to 85% of the liaisons in another (N.CA) that reported the same. While level of involvement is certainly subjective on the part of the liaison, it is evident that there is greater variability among the liaisons within those states that have the greatest number of schools.

With regard to the amount of support needed by the liaisons from the State SO Program, most (78%) reported that they received as much assistance from State SO staff as they wanted. In fact across those states with more than 10 schools implementing Project UNIFY, more than 70% of the liaisons from these schools felt they had as much support as they needed from SO. However at least one third of the liaisons reported not receiving as much help as they wanted from their State SO Program. Interestingly, of the liaisons who reported minimal involvement, 14% reported dissatisfaction with this minimal support. On the other hand, of the liaisons that reported that SO staff was very or extremely involved, almost all (92%) reported satisfaction with their support. Again, satisfaction with involvement is subjective on the part of the liaison.

**Table 16.** State SO Program staffs’ involvement in Project UNIFY initiatives in the school

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **State** | **N** | **Not at all involved** | **A little involved** | **Somewhat involved** | **Very involved** | **Extremely involved** |
| Alaska | 28 | 4%  | 7%  | 21%  | 29%  | 39%  |
| Arizona | 21 | 24%  | 10%  | 38%  | 14%  | 14% |
| Colorado | 15 |  | 7%  | 33%  | 40%  | 20%  |
| Connecticut | 17 | 24%  | 18%  | 29%  | 24%  | 6%  |
| Delaware | 11 | 9%  | 36%  | 27%  | 18% | 9%  |
| Florida | 9 |  | 22%  | 11%  | 67%  |  |
| Georgia | 38 | 3%  | 18%  | 34%  | 21%  | 24%  |
| Hawaii | 16 | 31%  | 13%  | 25%  | 19%  | 13%  |
| Iowa | 5 |  |  | 20%  | 40%  | 40%  |
| Idaho | 9 | 33%  |  | 22%  | 22%  | 22% |
| Illinois | 13 |  | 15%  | 8%  | 46%  | 31%  |
| Indiana | 19 | 5% | 21%  | 26%  | 32%  | 16%  |
| Kansas | 3 |  |  |  | 33% | 67% |
| Louisiana | 23 | 48%  | 22%  | 13%  | 9% | 9% |
| Massachusetts | 17 | 18%  | 6%  | 18%  | 41% | 18% |
| Maryland | 32 | 3%  | 13%  | 47%  | 34%  | 3% |
| Maine | 4 |  | 50%  | 50%  |  |  |
| Michigan | 5 |  |  | 20%  | 20%  | 60%  |
| Missouri | 9 |  | 11%  | 44%  | 33%  | 11%  |
| Montana | 9 | 11%  | 22%  | 33%  | 33%  |  |
| North Carolina | 34 | 3%  | 21% | 18%  | 44%  | 15%  |
| North Dakota | 1 |  |  | 100%  |  |  |
| Nebraska | 11 | 27%  | 36% | 9%  | 27%  |  |
| New Hampshire | 11 | 27%  | 27% | 27%  | 18%  |  |
| New Jersey | 34 | 44%  | 18%  | 15%  | 18%  | 6%  |
| New Mexico | 1 |  |  |  |  | 100%  |
| New York | 1 |  |  | 100%  |  |  |
| Nevada | 30 | 13%  | 10%  | 30%  | 33%  | 13%  |
| Ohio | 20 | 10% | 10%  | 30%  | 25%  | 25%  |
| Oklahoma | 3 |  |  | 33%  | 67%  |  |
| Oregon | 21 | 14%  | 38%  | 19%  | 19%  | 10%  |
| Pennsylvania | 1 |  | 100%  |  |  |  |
| Rhode Island | 14 | 14%  |  | 36%  | 21% | 29%  |
| South Carolina | 27 | 11%  | 26%  | 15%  | 30%  | 19%  |
| South Dakota | 1 |  |  |  | 100%  |  |
| Texas | 40 | 8%  | 28%  | 33%  | 18%  | 15%  |
| Utah | 2 |  | 50%  |  | 50%  |  |
| Virginia | 27 | 26%  | 22%  | 4%  | 15%  | 33%  |
| Vermont | 7 | 29%  | 14%  | 29%  | 29%  |  |
| Washington | 9 |  | 22% |  | 22%  | 56%  |
| Wisconsin | 1 |  |  | 100%  |  |  |
| Wyoming | 4 | 25%  |  |  | 75%  |  |
| South CA | 6 | 33%  | 33%  | 17%  |  | 17%  |
| North CA | 13 | 8%  |  | 8%  | 8% | 77%  |
| **Overall** | **622** | **14%**  | **17%**  | **24%**  | **26%**  | **18%** |

**Implementation of Project UNIFY in the Schools**

After determining the level of collaboration and support liaisons received from the State SO Programs, we were interested in determining how liaisons implemented Project UNIFY in the schools. To do so, liaisons were asked questions about the steps they took to carry out Project UNIFY in the school. First, liaisons were asked about how they introduced Project UNIFY to their school. Second, liaisons were asked if they received help and support from others within the school; and third, they were asked about any support they received for Project UNIFY from stakeholders in the community. Finally, liaisons were asked about the types of publicity that were used to raise awareness about Project UNIFY and to recruit participants.

With regard to introducing Project UNIFY to the school we found that few liaisons used any formal means (e.g. presentation) to present the program to the school administration, staff, or students. In fact less than a third of the liaisons (30%) reported that a formal meeting was held at their school to introduce Project UNIFY to school staff and to obtain their support and involvement. At those schools where there was a staff meeting on Project UNIFY, most liaison indicated that they spoke to school staff (85%). Fewer liaisons reported that presentations were made by a school administrator (44%) or by students (27%).

Because implementing Project UNIFY in a school is a large undertaking for a single person, liaisons were asked about the help and support they received from others within the school. The majority of liaisons across all schools (58%) indicated that they received help from a group of individuals in their school to plan and implement Project UNIFY. Another 18% had at least one person to help. It is important to point out then that 24% of the sample (141 liaisons out of the 613 surveyed) primarily implemented Project UNIFY by themselves. It is interesting to note that in ND, PA, and So.CA none of the liaisons in any of the schools reported receiving help from others in their school.

When liaisons received help from other individuals, this help could either be in the form of working with the liaison on an initiative, or taking the lead on planning an initiative with the liaison. Overall, the majority of liaisons (78%) who received help from others in their school reported a more centralized approach to planning and implementing Project UNIFY initiatives; that is, the same group of individuals was responsible for all aspects of Project UNIFY. Only a small percent of liaisons reported that different people planned different activities within a school (22%). This finding was fairly consistent across the different states as well.

The liaisons were also asked to describe those individuals who provided the help ; whether they received help from special education teachers in their school (including adaptive PE) and/or general education teachers (including physical education teachers). Of those liaisons who reported receiving help, most received help from special education teachers (73%) in their school. This is not surprising considering that the majority of the liaisons were special education teachers themselves. Of course, involving the entire school community and not only those involved in special education is an important aspect of Project UNIFY, particularly in Year 2. Therefore it is encouraging that half of the liaisons (55%) received help from general education teachers as well (see Table 17).

**Table 17. S**pecial and general education teachers’ involvement in Project UNIFY initiatives

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of Schools reporting** |  **Percent of schools reporting** | **Special Ed**  | **General Ed** |
| Alaska | 20/30 | 66% | 85% | 15% |
| Arizona | 6/25 | 24% | 83% | 33% |
| Colorado | 15/15 | 100% | 47% | 47% |
| Connecticut | 16/17 | 94% | 56% | 75% |
| Delaware | 9/16 | 56% | 44% | 67% |
| Florida | 8/9 | 89% | 75% | 63% |
| Georgia | 31/41 | 76% | 90% | 58% |
| Hawaii | 9/19 | 47% | 67% | 33% |
| Iowa | 5/5 | 100% | 60% | 40% |
| Idaho | 6/13 | 46% | 67% | 0% |
| Illinois | 11/13 | 85% | 73% | 54% |
| Indiana | 17/20 | 85% | 88% | 59% |
| Kansas | 3/3 | 100% | 0% | 100% |
| Louisiana | 14/30 | 47% | 86% | 50% |
| Massachusetts | 10/18 | 56% | 40% | 50% |
| Maryland | 27/33 | 82% | 78% | 52% |
| Maine | 3/4 | 75% | 33% | 0% |
| Michigan | 4/5 | 80% | 50% | 75% |
| Missouri | 7/10 | 70% | 57% | 29% |
| Montana | 8/9 | 89% | 38% | 75% |
| North Carolina | 33/37 | 89% | 58% | 48% |
| Nebraska | 6/13 | 46% | 67% | 83% |
| New Hampshire | 7/12 | 58% | 57% | 43% |
| New Jersey | 34/37 | 92% | 91% | 68% |
| New Mexico | 1/1 | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| New York | 1/1 | 100% | 0% | 100% |
| Nevada | 22/30 | 73% | 91% | 68% |
| Ohio | 15/20 | 75% | 93% | 73% |
| Oklahoma | 3/3 | 100% | 33% | 33% |
| Oregon | 16/22 | 73% | 56% | 25% |
| Rhode Island | 12/17 | 71% | 75% | 75% |
| South Carolina | 24/28 | 86% | 88% | 71% |
| South Dakota | 1/1 | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| Texas | 35/40 | 88% | 86% | 57% |
| Utah | 1/1 | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| Virginia | 19/32 | 59% | 79% | 63% |
| Vermont | 6/8 | 75% | 50% | 67% |
| Washington | 8/10 | 80% | 63% | 63% |
| Wisconsin | 1/1 | 100% | 100% | 0% |
| Wyoming | 4/5 | 80% | 25% | 0% |
| N. California | 8/13 | 62% | 100% | 75% |
| S. California | 2/9 | 22% | 50% | 0% |

Because Project UNIFY was so variable in its development and implementation across the individual schools, we wanted to examine how the different states varied in the amount of support liaisons received within their schools. Looking at those states with more than 10 schools participating in Project UNIFY, the percent of schools within each state for which liaisons indicated they received help from other special education teachers ranged from as few as 40% (MA) to as much as 93% (OH). While fewer liaisons received help from general education teachers in general, when looking across states the percent of liaisons to report help from general education teachers ranged from 15% (AK) to 75% (RI and CT). It is also important to point out that overall (regardless of how many schools were implementing Project UNIFY) there were 7 states in which *no* liaisons received help from general education teachers (ID, ME, SD, UT, WI, WY, and So. CA)[[4]](#footnote-4).

Other than teachers, it was also possible for liaisons to receive help for Project UNIFY from other school-based organizations or programs (i.e., Best Buddies, National Honor Society, Key Club, athletic programs, and student government) as well. Overall, 38% of the liaisons reported that they had assistance from school-based organizations or programs when planning or implementing a Project UNIFY initiative within their school. There was wide variation in the percent of schools within states to report support from such organizations or programs however. Looking at those states with more than 10 schools participating in Project UNIFY, the percent of schools within each state for which liaisons indicated that they received help from other school-based organizations or programs ranges from no help (IL) to 77% (NC).

**Opportunities for Youth Leadership**

One of the guiding principles of Project UNIFY is to be youth-centered, involving youth not only in initiatives but also in the decision-making processes. Furthermore, Project UNIFY aims to be an inclusive program, engaging youth with and without ID to work together. Therefore we asked questions of the liaisons to determine the extent to which youth with and without ID were involved in the planning and implementation of Project UNIFY.

Overall, when examining the involvement of youth, regardless of disability status, across all states, three could be categorized as highly youth-centered in that all of their liaisons[[5]](#footnote-5) reported the involvement of youth with and without ID (NM, OK, and SD) in planning and implementation of Project UNIFY (see Table 18). However is important to note that of these three states, only one had more than one school in the sample (OK). Wyoming also had a very high level of youth involvement as 75% of schools reported the involvement of youth with ID and 100% reported the involvement of youth without ID. Three States did not involve any youth in planning or implementing initiatives in any of their schools (NE,UT, So.CA). Looking at just those states with more than 10 schools participating in Project UNIFY, Texas indicated a high level of youth involvement overall with 66% of schools indicating youth with ID helped plan and implement activities and 89% of schools reported youth without ID helped.

Looking separately at only the involvement of youth with ID, there was wide variation of the percent of schools within a state. The liaisons in only four states reported that more youth with ID were involved than students without ID. When looking at just those states with 10 or more schools, the percent of schools within each state for which liaisons reported the involvement of youth with ID ranged from 6% (CT) to 66% (TX). Similar to youth with ID, there was wide variation in the percent of schools within a state that involved youth without ID. In this instance, the liaisons in only four states did not have any schools that included youth without ID. In fact there were five States in which all liaisons reported including youth without ID.

After determining the level of youth involvement in Project UNIFY across the different states, we next looked at the levels of involvement within the individual schools. Overall across all schools, half of the liaisons (50%) involved youth with or without ID in a planning capacity. In general, liaisons were more successful involving youth without ID (48%) compared to youth with ID (34%). To examine the specific numbers of youth involved across all schools, each liaison was asked to report the number of students with and without ID who were involved in planning and implementing Project UNIFY at their school. These responses were aggregated to create an average number of students for each state. Again, there was wide variability across and within states. Overall, the median number of students with ID involved in planning Project UNIFY activities was 6, with a range of 1 to 22. The median number of students without ID involved in planning Project UNIFY was 10, ranging from 1 to 41.

In addition to the involvement of youth in the planning and implementation of Project UNIFY overall, liaisons were asked about youth leadership. That is, liaisons were asked to indicate if youth were given the opportunity to take the lead in the planning or implementation of an activity in their school. Across all states, there was some variation in the leadership opportunities provided to youth as there were some states in which no schools provided opportunities for leadership and others in which all schools did. When looking at just those states with 10 or more schools, the percent of schools within each state that provided leadership opportunities for youth ranged from 7% (NV) to 77% (NC). Overall when looking across all schools, 33% of the liaisons indicated there was at least one activity that was mainly planned or implemented by youth.

**Table 18.**Students with and without ID involvement in planning and implementing Project

 UNIFY initiatives across all states

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **States** | **Number of Schools** | **Percent of schools that included students with ID** | **Percent of schools that included** **students w/o ID** |
| Alaska | 20 | 35% | 35% |
| Arizona | 6 | 33% | 33% |
| Colorado | 15 | 13% | 20% |
| Connecticut | 16 | 6%  | 13% |
| Delaware | 9 | 22% | 78% |
| Florida | 8 | 63% | 88% |
| Georgia | 31 | 19% | 29% |
| Hawaii | 9 | 33% | 44% |
| Iowa | 5 | 20% | 60% |
| Idaho | 6 | 50% | 50% |
| Illinois | 11 | 18% | 46% |
| Indiana | 17 | 29% | 41% |
| Kansas | 3 | 33% | 33% |
| Louisiana | 14 | 21% | 14% |
| Massachusetts | 10 | 10% | 20% |
| Maryland | 27 | 22% | 41% |
| Maine | 3 | 67% | 33% |
| Michigan | 4 | 75% | 75% |
| Missouri | 7 | 57% | 86% |
| Montana | 8 | 13% | 25% |
| North Carolina | 33 | 36% | 70% |
| Nebraska | 6 | 0% | 0% |
| New Hampshire | 7 | 29% | 71% |
| New Jersey | 34 | 41% | 50% |
| New Mexico | 1 | 100% | 100% |
| New York | 1 | 0% | 100% |
| Nevada | 22 | 23% | 23% |
| Ohio | 15 | 60% | 53% |
| Oklahoma | 3 | 100% | 100% |
| Oregon | 16 | 44% | 69% |
| Rhode Island | 12 | 42% | 42% |
| South Carolina | 24 | 33% | 63% |
| South Dakota | 1 | 100% | 100% |
| Texas | 35 | 66% | 89% |
| Utah | 1 | 0% | 0% |
| Virginia | 19 | 26% | 42% |
| Vermont | 6 | 33% | 50% |
| Washington | 8 | 25% | 25% |
| Wisconsin | 1 | 100% | 0% |
| Wyoming | 4 | 75% | 100% |
| So. California | 2 | 0% | 0% |
| No. California | 8 | 25% | 50% |
| **Overall** | **488** | **34%** | **48%** |

**Table 19.**Students with and without ID involvement in planning and implementing Project UNIFY initiatives within schools

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Students with** **Intellectual Disabilities** | **Students without** **Intellectual Disabilities** |
|  | **Number of Schools in each State** | **Mean # of** **Youth with ID** | **Number of Schools in each State** | **Mean # of Students without ID** |
| Alaska | 7 | 6.4 (5.4) | 7 | 20.3 (35.4) |
| Arizona | 2 | 22.0 (25.5) | 2 | 7.0 (4.2) |
| Colorado | 2 | 2.0 (1.4) | 3 | 7.3 (6.8) |
| Connecticut | 1 | 6.0 | 2 | 6.0 (5.7) |
| Delaware | 2 | 13.5 (16.3) | 7 | 4.6 (4.1) |
| Florida | 5 | 7.4 (5.1) | 7 | 9.6 (7.0) |
| Georgia | 6 | 12.3 (5.5) | 9 | 20.0 (26.2) |
| Hawaii | 3 | 8.0 (2.0) | 3 | 12.3 (7.1) |
| Iowa | 1 | 10.0 | 3 | 20.3 (12.7) |
| Idaho | 3 | 1.3 (1.2) | 3 | 9.7 (7.2) |
| Illinois | 2 | 1.5 (2.1) | 5 | 33.4 (23.3) |
| Indiana | 5 | 4.8 (2.1) | 7 | 12.1 (7.5) |
| Kansas | 1 | 3.0 | 1 | 21.0 |
| Louisiana | 3 | 10.0 (5.0) | 2 | 22.5 (10.6) |
| Massachusetts | 1 | 2.0 | 2 | 30.0 (14.1) |
| Maryland | 6 | 3.5 (4.0) | 11 | 7.9 (7.9) |
| Maine | 2 | 5.5 (6.4) | 1 | 1.0 |
| Michigan | 3 | 11.3 (3.5) | 3 | 10.0 (4.4) |
| Missouri | 4 | 5.5 (3.1) | 6 | 11.8 (7.8) |
| Montana | 1 | 6.0 | 2 | 15.0 |
| North Carolina | 12 | 5.4 (6.4) | 23 | 20.7 (29.4) |
| New Hampshire | 2 | 9.5 (7.8) | 5 | 6.0 (6.0) |
| New Jersey | 14 | 10.9 (7.8) | 17 | 20.9 (16.3) |
| New Mexico | 1 | 2.0 | 1 | 20.0 |
| New York | 0 |  | 1 | 12.0 |
| Nevada | 5 | 6.4 (5.5) | 5 | 7.0 (5.1) |
| Ohio | 9 | 35.6 (45.1) | 8 | 58.5 (118.8) |
| Oklahoma | 3 | 9.3 (3.8) | 3 | 41.0 (40.8) |
| Oregon | 7 | 9.6 (6.3) | 11 | 11.1 (5.9) |
| Rhode Island | 5 | 7.2 (5.7) | 5 | 7.2 (4.4) |
| South Carolina | 7 | 16.4 (12.1) | 15 | 20.9 (18.6) |
| South Dakota | 1 | 6.0 | 1 | 14.0 |
| Texas | 22 | 7.9 (7.5) | 30 | 26.0 (36.1) |
| Virginia | 4 | 9.8 (8.0) | 7 | 11.3 (17.6) |
| Vermont | 2 | 6.0 (2.8) | 3 | 8.0 (10.4) |
| Washington | 2 | 5.5 (5.0) | 2 | 3.5 (0.7) |
| Wisconsin | 1 | 20.0 | 0 |  |
| Wyoming | 3 | 2.7 (2.1) | 4 | 4.0 (1.4) |
| North California | 2 | 16.5 (12.0) | 4 | 18.0 (16.4) |
| **Overall** | **162** | **8.8 (8.3)**  | **231** | **16.6 (21.6)**  |

**Publicity of Project UNIFY in Schools**

Publicity of Project UNIFY was viewed as key to raise awareness about the initiatives and to recruit participants. While we anticipated that schools would differ in the types and extensiveness of publicity for any event, we wanted to determine how schools promoted Project UNIFY. We also used measures of publicity as a means of assessing the extent to which Project UNIFY was visibly a part of the school. As one would expect, there was extensive variation among schools both across and within States. Overall the type and level of publicity at any given school seemed to be largely reflective of the existing school culture and the amount of resources available. Because of this no general comparisons were made across states. Instead the data are presented as it pertains to all of the participating schools.

While the majority of liaisons (68%) reported that Project UNIFY was promoted in their schools, the means by which Project UNIFY was promoted varied. Some of these liaisons (39%) emphasized publicizing Project UNIFY overall, while most liaisons (61%) focused on promoting specific initiatives. As expected, the strategy of publicity differed for schools depending on how many initiatives they implemented as part of Project UNIFY (e.g. those schools that implemented one or two Project UNIFY initiatives compared to those that implemented three or more initiatives). Most of the schools that implemented only one or two initiatives reported that they publicized these specific events only (75%) (compared to publicizing specific initiatives as well as Project UNIFY in general). Alternatively, schools that implemented three or more initiatives were just as likely to use publicize activities for specific initiatives (51%) as they were for promoting Project UNIFY overall (49%). When describing the types of specific events that were promoted throughout their schools, the R-Word Campaign was most often publicized (34%), followed by Traditional Special Olympics (29%) and Unified Sports (17%).

In addition to asking liaisons about promotion overall, they were also asked about how Project UNIFY was promoted. The most popular approach was through word of mouth (78%), posters or banners that were hung up in school (57%), or through school announcements, class presentations, and other daily news updates (52%). Common sources of announcements in schools, such as bulletin boards, school newspapers or school websites were also reported by liaisons as being used to promote Project UNIFY activities (39%, 24%, and 23% respectively). In over half of the schools (53%), information about Project UNIFY was also sent to staff through email or other forms of staff announcement.

In order to assess the visibility of Project UNIFY within the school, liaisons were asked if Project UNIFY initiatives were publicized to the same extent as other school activities. Comparing the level of publicity of Project UNIFY initiatives to the level of publicity of other activities in their school, just over one third of liaisons (37%) felt that Project UNIFY was actually promoted more than other school activities. A further 35% of liaisons expressed that Project UNIFY received at least as much publicity as other activities in the school.

Despite the level of publicity in schools, a little more than a third of the liaisons (38%) believed that only some of the students in their school were aware of the Project UNIFY initiatives. As expected, the extent to which liaisons felt students in the school were aware of Project UNIFY was related to the number of initiatives implemented in the schools. Thus, liaisons in schools that implemented more initiatives were more likely to report they felt that students were aware of Project UNIFY. Specifically, over half of the liaisons (58%) felt that all or most of their students were aware of Project UNIFY in schools that implemented five or more initiatives, compared to 42% of the liaisons who felt that only a few students were aware of activities in schools that implemented only one initiative.

While it was most important for students in the school to be aware of Project UNIFY, the success of Project UNIFY also depended on teacher awareness of the initiatives occurring in the school. Less than half of the liaisons (45%) across all schools felt that all or most of the other teachers in their schools were aware of Project UNIFY. Not surprisingly, liaisons reported more awareness among staff in those schools where emails and other announcements were disseminated to school staff. In fact, 76% of the liaisons who sent out emails promoting Project UNIFY believed that all or most of the staff were aware the program. In contrast, less than a quarter of the liaisons (24%) who said no emails had been sent reported that all or most of the staff were aware of Project UNIFY (see Table 20).

**Table 20.** Students’ and teachers’ awareness of Project UNIFY initiatives

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | **All knew** | **Some knew** | **Only a few knew** |
| **Student awareness about Project UNIFY** | 36% | 38% | 27% |
| **Teacher awareness about Project UNIFY** | 45% | 29% | 26% |

**LEVEL 2**

**Methods**

One of the primary objectives of the evaluation of Project UNIFY Year 2 was to explore the various ways Project UNIFY may impact constituents, mainly the students.  We were particularly interested in exploring the relationship between Project UNIFY involvement and student attitudes toward their peers with ID.  In order to understand the possible impacts, we followed selected schools from a *subsample* of states over the course of the year.

**Participants**

States SO Programs. Twelve State SO Programs (AZ, CT, LA, MO, MT, MI, NJ, NC, OK, SC, VA, WY) were selected out of the Level 1 sample to participate in an intensive Level 2 evaluation. These states were selected for the Level 2 evaluation based on a number of criteria, including regional representation, uniqueness of program design, and history of receiving Project UNIFY funding. Given that these Programs were selected out of the total group that received Project UNIFY funding, they are representative of the larger sample of participating Programs. The states ranged in the total number of participating schools from 3 (Oklahoma) to 32 (Virginia). With the exception of Michigan and Wyoming, all of the Programs that participated in the Level 2 evaluation received funding for Project UNIFY in the 2008-2009 grant year.

Schools. From the 12 participating states, two schools were selected for the Level 2 evaluation, for a total of 24 schools. These schools were selected by the State SO Programs using guidelines provided by the UMass Boston evaluation team. Specifically, we instructed State SO Programs to select schools that they believed exemplified how Project UNIFY is carried out in their state. Although it was stated that at least one school should be new to Project UNIFY (and, where possible, new to Special Olympics), and that Programs should pick both a middle and a high school, not all states met these requests. The initial sample of 24 schools, therefore, included seven middle schools and seventeen high schools; seven of the schools had been involved in Project UNIFY in Year 1, while thirteen of the remaining schools had previous involvement in Special Olympics in general.

Five of the 24 schools were not included in this report due to missing data that can be attributed to several factors. First, liaisons in three schools withdrew from participation at various points in the evaluation (i.e. stopped completing liaison logs or did not complete the end of the year survey). Second, student data were missing from two schools because one school chose not to participate in the student survey, and the other school did not return the student surveys. Therefore, the final sample of schools for Level 2 involves 19 schools from 10 states. Six were middle schools and thirteen were high schools.

The schools participating in the Level 2 evaluation were similar in characteristics to the middle and high schools in Level 1. On average, the middle schools in Level 2 had a student population of 699 students, while the Level 2 high schools had an average of 1,287 students. For both the middle schools and the high schools, approximately 12% of the students were identified as receiving Special Education services. The 19 schools did differ from the larger sample of schools presented in Level 1 however in that more schools had previous involvement in Project UNIFY and SO. Almost all of the 19 schools had some previous relationship with Special Olympics; however, only five of the schools (two middle schools and three high schools) participated in Project UNIFY in Year 1. Two schools had no prior connection to Special Olympics.

In addition to the characteristic described above, we collected additional information on the schools participating in Level 2. Specifically, seven of the schools are from major urban areas. The ten other schools are located in smaller cities and towns. Sixteen of the 19 schools have been identified by the US Department of Education’s Teacher Cancellation Low Income directory as being low-income schools within the last two years.

Liaisons. As expected, the liaisons in the Level 2 schools were similar to the liaisons in Level 1. The majority of the liaisons were female (90%), and almost two thirds were special education teachers (63%). Of those who were not special education teachers, three liaisons were general education teachers, two were Inclusion Specialists, and two were Physical Education teachers. Like the liaisons in Level 1, the liaisons from the Level 2 schools had been in their schools for an average of nine years. Twelve of the Level 2 liaisons had been involved in Special Olympics before Project UNIFY, most often as a Special Olympics coach or volunteer; three of the liaisons had been the Project UNIFY liaison the year before (see Table 21).

**Table 21.** Characteristics of school liaison in Level 2 evaluation (N = 19)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Percent of Liaisons** |
| **Gender**  |  |  |
| Male  |  | 11% |
| Female  |  | 89% |
| **Mean age (years)** | 47 |  |
| **Type of teacher** |  |  |
| Special Education  |  | 74% |
| General Education  |  | 26% |
| Administration |  | 0% |
| **Previous involvement in SO**  |  | 63% |
| **Type of previous involvement** |  |  |
| coach  |  | 67% |
| volunteer  |  | 58% |
| family member of athlete  |  | 8% |
| other  |  | 58% |

Students. Approximately 4,500 students were surveyed across the 19 schools; this included 1,389 middle school students and 3,073 high school students (Table 22). From the middle schools, about one third of the students were from the 6th (31%) and 8th (30%) grades, and slightly more students were in the 7th grade (39%). The average age of the middle school students was 13. Males and females were equally represented in the sample. Most of the middle school students were white (60%) followed by black (25%) and Hispanic (16%).

At the high school level, there was a relatively equal distribution of students across all grades, though the most students (30%) were in the 11th grade. The average age of the high school students was 16 years. Similar to the middle schools, there was an equal distribution of males and female and the majority of the students were white (75%).

**Table 22.**Characteristics of students in middle school and high school that participated in Project UNIFY Level 2 evaluation

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Middle School** | **High School** |
|  | **N** | **Percent** | **N** | **Percent** |
| **Total number of schools** | 13 |  | 6 |  |
| **Total number of students**  | 1,389 |  | 3,037 |  |
| **Gender**  |  |  |
| Male  |  | 49% |  | 49% |
| Female  |  | 51% |  | 51% |
| **Age (in years)** |  |  |
| 11 |  | 7% |  |
| 12 |  | 28% |  |
| 13 |  | 38% |  |
| 14 |  | 27% |  | 7% |
| 15 |  |  | 23% |
| 16 |  |  | 27% |
| 17 |  |  | 27% |
| 18 |  |  | 16% |
| **Grade**  |  |  |
| 6 |  | 31% |  |
| 7 |  | 39% |  |
| 8 |  | 30% |  |
| 9 |  |  | 25% |
| 10 |  |  | 26% |
| 11 |  |  | 30% |
| 12 |  |  | 19% |
| **Race**  |  |  |
| White  |  | 60% |  | 75% |
| Black  |  | 25% |  | 22% |
| Hispanic  |  | 16% |  | 17% |

**Instruments**

Several instruments were developed for use in Level 2 of the evaluation. While similar information was collected from the liaisons in each school to describe and document the implementation of Project UNIFY in the schools (as in Level 1), more detailed information was also collected. In addition, information was collected from students in the participating schools. A brief description of the instruments employed is provided below.

School Liaison Survey*.* Similar to Level 1, all liaisons in Level 2 completed the school liaison survey.This 322-item online survey was used to collect information from each school related to: the liaison’s role in the school; the school’s prior involvement with Project UNIFY; the initiatives that took place during the 2009-2010 school year as part of Project UNIFY including the type of initiative or activities and who was involved in program planning and implementation; and the challenges schools faced in implementing the program.

Monthly Log*.* To monitor how Project UNIFY was implemented in each school, a log was developed that focused on the activities that took place in a given month and their implementation. These open-ended logs were designed to gather information from the liaison related to specific programming for each month. Additional open-ended questions were included in the logs that focused on successes, challenges, and future plans for Project UNIFY.

End of Year Interview*.* To assess the liaisons’ experiences implementing Project UNIFY in their schools, end of the year telephone interviews were conducted that focused on the planning process, the changes Project UNIFY brought about in their schools, the liaison’s relationship with SO, and the liaison’s perceptive on the evaluation process. Questions about planning Project UNIFY included “How much time do you think you put into Project UNIFY activities?” and “How hard was it getting other staff involved in Project UNIFY at your school?” To evaluate changes brought about by Project UNIFY, we asked general questions such as “Have you seen changes in the students since Project UNIFY began?” and more specific questions regarding student behavior, such as “Did students ever hang out together outside of Project UNIFY activities?” To gather information about the liaisons’ relationships with SO and the evaluation process, we asked questions, such as: “Did you feel you got the support and information you needed from Special Olympics?” and “Was there anything that was particularly difficult for you?”

National Survey of Youth Attitudes(Siperstein et al., 2007). To assess the attitudes of youth toward their peers with ID, we included two subscales from the National Survey of Youth Attitudes: the “Perceived Capabilities Scale” and the “Behavioral Intentions Scale”. These scales were adapted for use with high school students.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The “Perceived Capabilities Scale” is a 16-item scale that assesses youth’s perceptions of the capabilities of their peers with ID. For instance, youth were asked, “Do you think that most students with intellectual disabilities are capable of… ‘Understand[ing] the rules of a competitive sports game’; or ‘Handle[ing] their own money’’. Each question was answered on a dichotomous yes/no scale. Scores ranged from 0 to 16, with higher scores indicating more positive perceptions of capabilities of youth with ID. The coefficient alpha index of internal consistency was .83.

The “Behavioral Intentions Scale” is a 12-item scale that assesses youth’s intent to interact with a peer with an ID both in and out of school. For example, in school questions asked students about what they would do with another student in their school: “Say hello to a student with ID” or “Talk to a student with ID during free time or lunch.” Out of school items focused on activities students would do with friends in a non-school setting, such as: “Hang out with a student with ID” and “Go to the movies with a student with ID.” Items were scored on a 4-point scale from 0 (Definitely No) to 3 (Definitely Yes). Scores ranged from 0-36, with higher scores indicating more willingness to interact with youth with ID.[[7]](#footnote-7) The coefficient alpha index of internal consistency was .94 for both the middle school and high school samples.

To establish the convergent validity of our attitude scales we computed intercorrelations. Perceived Capabilities had a strong positive relationship with Behavioral Intentions in both middle schools (.42) and high schools (.48). Youth that perceived their peers with ID as capable, generally were willing to do things with them. Split-half reliability was used to establish the internal consistency of the Perceived Capabilities scale and the Behavioral Intention Scale. Both scales exhibited good internal consistency with Spearman-Brown coefficients of .75 for Perceived Capabilities and .89 for Behavioral Intentions.

School Climate*.* To assess the feelings of youth toward their school, we designed a 6-item scale focusing on those aspects of schools that promote a positive school experience. Items began with the prompt “How good of a job does your school do with the following things?” and included “Making sure all students feel accepted” and “Providing opportunities for different groups of students to work together on school projects.” Youth responded to items on a 3 point scale, ranging from 0 (My school does not do a good job) to 2 (My school does a really good job). Possible scores ranged from 0-12, with higher scores indicating a more positive school climate. The coefficient alpha index of internal consistency was .83.

Student Involvement*.* To assess student involvement in Project UNIFY, we developed a questionnaire focusing on five Project UNIFY initiatives that we believed would have the most recognition and involvement among students. For each of the five initiatives (R-Word Campaign, Unified Sports, Partners Clubs, Sports Day[[8]](#footnote-8), and Polar Plunge) students were asked about their awareness of and participation in each initiative. For some initiatives, questions were included for youth to reflect on their experience in that initiative and the program in general.

End of Year Student Interviews*.* To further assess student involvement in Project UNIFY, telephone interviews were conducted with school-selected youth leaders with and without ID focusing on their experience in Project UNIFY, what it meant to them, and how they think it affected their school. For instance, youth who were involved in Unified Sports were asked, “What did you like the most about being on the Unified Sports team?” Similar questions were asked for other initiatives. Youth were also asked questions pertaining to the changes that occurred in their school: “Do you think your school has changed because of doing these activities? What has changed?”

**Procedures**

In the fall of 2009, telephone calls were made to the 12 State SO Programs to discuss the evaluation process and what was expected from Level 2 states.  These calls were also used to begin identifying two schools in each state that would serve as the exemplary Project UNIFY schools. The Programs were asked to identify a liaison within each of the selected schools who would act as the main source of information regarding the Project UNIFY activities occurring in his/her school. It was explained that the liaisons would also be responsible for assisting in carrying out the evaluation process in his/her school, particularly in regards to the student survey.

Once liaisons were identified, calls were made with each liaison to review the same information that was shared with the State Programs. As part of this initial call, liaisons were asked to describe the types of activities that had already taken place in their schools as part of Project UNIFY, or to describe what activities they were planning on implementing. For their participation in the Level 2 evaluation, liaisons were given a stipend of $250 and a choice of either a white board or sports equipment package donated from Special Olympics.

Communication was maintained with each liaison through the monthly logs. Furthermore, regular email and telephone communications were conducted as needed throughout the evaluation. At the end of the school year, liaisons were sent the online Liaison Survey that was used with all Level 1 schools, and were also interviewed over the telephone by trained interviewers from the Center for Survey Research (CSR) at UMass Boston.

The procedure for the student survey relied heavily on the assistance of liaisons in identifying students to participate and overseeing the administration of questionnaires.  Before materials were sent to each liaison, principals or other school administrators were called to explain the importance of the evaluation and the parameters we sought for the survey. Liaisons were then asked to randomly select a sample of classes in their school to participate in the survey. Emphasis was placed on ensuring liaisons selected a representative sample of students in their school (e.g., not only surveying students in AP, or not only students who participated in Project UNIFY). Permission forms and surveys were sent to the liaisons who oversaw the distribution and collection of the student surveys. Surveys were administered in various classes, using paper and pencil.

Liaisons also assisted in identifying student leaders for the student interviews.  Toward the end of the school yea, liaisons were asked to select students who they felt were highly involved in Project UNIFY activities at their schools. Interviews were conducted by telephone by trained interviewers at CSR. All interviews were conducted toward the end of the school year and into the first month of summer.

**Results**

**Implementation of Project UNIFY**

As expected, the Level 2 schools were more actively engaged in Project UNIFY than the Level 1 schools. Among the middle schools and the high schools, the Level 2 schools carried out more initiatives, and tended to involve more people from their school in the planning and implementation process. Youth leadership was also a major aspect of Project UNIFY for most of the Level 2 schools, particularly at the high school level.

***Middle Schools***

As would be expected from model Project UNIFY schools, the Level 2 middle schools implemented a number of initiatives, and fulfilled the requirements of implementing a sports component and a youth leadership component as part of Project UNIFY. All of the schools implemented a minimum of five initiatives, while one of the schools implemented all 11 initiatives. The middle schools in Level 2 carried out more Project UNIFY initiatives than the middle schools in Level 1, implementing an average of 6 initiatives, while the Level 1 middle schools only carried out an average of 3 initiatives. Almost all of the Level 2 middle schools (5 out of 6) implemented the R-Word campaign, whereas two-thirds of the Level 1 middle schools (65%) implemented this initiative (See Table 23). A more striking comparison is in the implementation of Partners Clubs. All six of the Level 2 middle schools had a Partners Club as part of their Project UNIFY initiatives, while less than one-third of the middle schools in Level 1 (29%) implemented such an initiative. Of the sports initiatives, all of the middle schools held a Sports Day, and five of the six schools implemented either Unified Sports or Traditional Special Olympics. For youth leadership, all of the schools had a Partners Club.

In addition to these various initiatives, four of the middle schools held Project UNIFY kick off events and three held end of the year events. The kick-off events included a pep rally, a school assembly, special announcements and a “Fans in the Stands” event to support SO athletes. Ending events occurred in March or May, and included school dances, a picnic and a unified basketball tournament.

Given the level of activity occurring in the middle schools in Year 2, it is not surprising that five of six liaisons involved other people to help with planning and implementing the Project UNIFY activities. Five liaisons from the Level 2 middle schools recruited special education teachers, while only two liaisons indicated that they involved general education teachers. Liaisons also relied on Special Olympics staff or volunteers (4) and either students with or without ID (4). In addition to school personnel, individuals from Special Olympics, and students, three of the liaisons indicated that they also reached out to student organizations in their schools (i.e., Best Buddies, National Honor Society, Key Club, athletic programs, and student government) to help with some aspect of Project UNIFY.

**Table 23:**Distribution of Project UNIFY initiatives implemented in Level 2 middle schools

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | **R-Word Campaign** | **Unified Sports** | **Partners Clubs** | **Sports Day** | **Polar Plunge** | **Traditional SO** | **Fans in the Stands** | **Be a Fan Branding** | **SOGII** | **ALPs** | **Youth Rally****or Summit** | **Total Initiatives** |
| **Middle School** |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | **7.17** |
| Duffield | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |  | Yes |  |  |  |  | Yes | **6** |
| Truman | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |  | Yes | Yes | **11** |
| Sacajawea | Yes |  | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |  | Yes |  | Yes | **8** |
| PS 17 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |  |  |  |  |  |  | **5** |
| Pansy Kidd | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |  |  |  | Yes | **8** |
| Mauldin |  | Yes | Yes | Yes |  | Yes |  | Yes |  |  |  | **5** |
| **Total # of schools to offer initiative** | **5** | **5** | **6** | **6** | **4** | **5** | **3** | **2** | **1** | **1** | **4** |  |

Of the four middle schools that involved youth in the planning of Project UNIFY activities, three (Truman, Pansy Kidd, PS 17) included youth with ID as part of the planning group. The middle schools involved small numbers of students with ID (from 5 to 8) and larger numbers of students without ID (15 to 50).In addition to having students with and without ID as part of a planning and implementation group, four of the Level 2 middle schools, gave students the opportunity to plan specific aspects of Project UNIFY. For example, students at Pansy Kidd Middle School planned an R-word announcement to the community to spread awareness. At two schools, students were provided the opportunity to plan a community service activity (Duffield Middle School) and the Spread the Word to End the Word Day (Sacajawea).

While all of the Level 2 middle schools succeeded in carrying out a dynamic set of initiatives for Project UNIFY, Truman Middle School provided a striking example of the intensity of the implementation of Project UNIFY. In the 2009-2010 school year, Truman implemented eleven initiatives, including an R-word campaign, Unified Sports, the Athlete Leadership Program (ALPs), and Polar Plunge. Their Partners Club, called the TUF. (Truman United Fans) Club was a major component of Project UNIFY at Truman. Founded in 2008-2009, the TUF Club was specifically a Project UNIFY club, whose main purpose was to support the Special Olympics in the school and help with carrying out Project UNIFY activities. The TUF. Club at Truman had approximately 15 members throughout the year, five of whom had an ID. The club had regular meetings a couple of times a month after school, and was supervised by the liaison and three other teachers. The students that were part of the TUF club participated in Unified Sports, and helped with organizing fundraisers and the R-Word Campaign. They created posters and banners, gave presentations on inclusion, respect, and disability awareness in a class or at an assembly, attended a Special Olympics sport event, and volunteered for Special Olympics. The TUF club helped to develop the unique activities that happened at the school; specifically, the students sold ducks for a duck race to raise money for Special Olympics and organized an end of year “Duck Dance” for students who supported Special Olympics Missouri during the year. Besides doing activities related to Project UNIFY, club members also participated in a buddy program for youth with and without ID. According to the liaison, club members did other activities together beyond their regular club meetings, such as eat lunch together or do homework together. Students who were part of the club reported that they would do things like play games together, go out to eat as a club, or just generally hang out.

***High Schools***

Like the middle schools, the high schools in Level 2 implemented a number of different initiatives over the course of the school year; however, there was a greater range across the thirteen schools. Two high schools (Moon Valley High School and EC Glass High School) implemented only four initiatives, while Harrah High School carried out 10. The high schools in Level 2 were more involved in Project UNIFY initiatives than the high schools in Level 1. Furthermore, there were large differences between the Level 1 high schools and the Level 2 high schools in their choice of initiatives. While almost all of the high schools in Level 2 (85%) implemented the R-Word campaign, only 62% of the Level 1 high schools implemented this initiative. Similarly, over half of the Level 2 high schools (69%) held some kind of assembly or rally, but only one third of the high schools in Level 1 (34%) did the same initiative (see Table 24). All of the high schools implemented at least one sports initiative, as every high school held a Sports Day. In addition, eight schools implemented Unified Sports or Traditional SO Sports. Most of the high schools (11) included a Partners Clubs as part of their initiatives.

In addition to the Project UNIFY initiatives, six of the high schools held a kick-off event; seven held an end of the year event and three schools held both. The kick-off events ranged from a planning meeting with other schools in their area, to a pizza party for a couple of classrooms, to an assembly and dance. Interestingly, Harrah High School integrated their kick-off event into the school’s Rush Week, when students learn about different clubs and sign up to participate. At the end of the year, several schools hosted an awards ceremony when athletes and partners received school athletic letters or other forms of recognition for their participation in Project UNIFY. Other schools hosted social gatherings, such as a dance or picnics or barbecues for students who were involved in Project UNIFY.

To carry out Project UNIFY, the Level 2 high schools involved more people than the middle schools. On average, liaisons involved 17 individuals. Nine of the liaisons received help from special education teachers. Unlike the Level 2 middle schools and the larger sample of schools in general, ten of the liaisons recruited help from general education teachers as well. In addition to recruiting other teachers, nine liaisons in the high schools involved Special Olympics staff or volunteers and nine included students with and without ID. Eleven of the Level 2 high schools also indicated that they reached out to student organizations in their schools to help with some aspect of Project UNIFY.

Youth involvement was also a major component of Project UNIFY in the Level 2 high schools. Nine schools involved youth in the planning of Project UNIFY activities. The high schools varied considerably in the number of students with ID (from 1 to 15) and without ID (0 to 50) that they involved in planning and implementing Project UNIFY. In addition to having students assist with planning and implementing Project UNIFY as part of a larger group, the Level 2 high schools gave students many different opportunities to be involved in planning Project UNIFY. Four high schools reported that students talked to staff about Project UNIFY at a faculty meeting and eleven schools provided students with opportunities to plan specific activities as part of Project UNIFY. Thus, at the high school level, students were responsible for planning R-Word activities, fundraisers, and other games or parties.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **R-Word Campaign** | **Unified Sports** | **Partners Clubs** | **Sports Day** | **Polar Plunge** | **Traditional SO** | **Fans in the Stands** | **Be a Fan Branding** | **SOGII** | **ALPs** | **Youth Rally or Summit** | **Total Initiatives** |
| **High School** |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | **6.31** |
| Moon Valley | Yes |  | Yes | Yes |  |  |  |  |  |  | Yes | **4** |
| Kellis | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |  |  |  | Yes | **8** |
| Southington |  | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |  |  |  |  | Yes |  | **5** |
| Cody | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |  | Yes |  |  | Yes |  |  | **6** |
| Union | Yes | Yes |  | Yes |  | Yes |  |  |  |  | Yes | **5** |
| Bozeman | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |  |  | Yes | Yes | **9** |
| Queens Grant Prep | Yes |  | Yes | Yes | Yes |  | Yes | Yes |  |  | Yes | **7** |
| Robbinsville | Yes |  | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |  |  |  |  | Yes | **6** |
| Ferris | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |  |  |  |  |  |  | Yes | **6** |
| Harrah | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |  |  | Yes | **10** |
| Irmo |  | Yes |  | Yes |  | Yes | Yes | Yes |  |  |  | **5** |
| EC Glass | Yes |  | Yes | Yes | Yes |  |  |  |  |  |  | **4** |
| Freeman | Yes |  | Yes | Yes |  | Yes | Yes |  |  |  | Yes | **7** |
| **Total # of schools to offer initiative** | **11** | **8** | **11** | **13** | **7** | **8** | **6** | **3** | **1** | **2** | **9** |  |

**Table 24:**Distribution of Project UNIFY initiatives implemented in Level 2 high schools

Similar to the middle schools, most of the Level 2 high schools implemented vibrant Project UNIFY programs; yet there were several schools that carried out exemplary Project UNIFY initiatives. Kellis High School had two very prominent Partners Clubs on its campus, the Cougar Pride Club and Best Buddies. Both of these clubs had started in previous years, but they were integral to the Project UNIFY activities that occurred at Kellis. Due to other commitments and the high number of activities going on throughout the year, the liaison reported that attendance and participation fluctuated a lot during the school year. Thirty students with ID and 12 students without ID were members of one of the two Partners clubs. Additionally, 5 teachers or school staff were involved in the clubs. The larger of the clubs held regular meetings every couple of months during school hours, and the smaller club held meetings once a week during school hours. The clubs were involved in a number of Project UNIFY initiatives including, Unified Sports, the R-Word Campaign, Traditional SO, and the Youth Rally. Youth created posters/banners, presented on inclusion, respect, or disability awareness in a class or assembly, attended an SO sports event, volunteered for SO, organized a fundraiser, or were a part of a buddy program for youth with and without ID. Furthermore, members also did social activities together (e.g. going on field trips or having movie nights), as well as did things at together at school (e.g. eating lunch or doing homework). Clubs were promoted and publicized to youth and staff through school events or assemblies and word of mouth

Bozeman High School implemented a particularly successful R-word campaign. For all of the Project UNIFY initiatives, Bozeman had a high level of support from their school community, including special education and general education teachers, students with and without ID, and various student organizations. In addition, the school had active support from Special Olympics staff and volunteers. This team started planning school-wide campaign activities in December 2009, and the campaign activities ended in March. As part of the R-Word campaign, the school participated in the Spread the Word to End the Word Day. The Unified Partners Club, which involved six students with ID and twenty students without ID, was particularly involved in planning and implementing Project UNIFY. The club made a video about the importance of ending the “r-word”, which was shown on school television. In addition to the video, students with ID paired with students without ID and talked to classes about the R-Word Campaign and asked classes to pledge their support. Through these efforts, 1,200 signatures were received pledging to end the word. The campaign was promoted and publicized to students and staff through the school newspaper, bulletin boards, announcements at school events or assemblies, T-shirts that said something about the R-Word (30 were handed out), the school website, public announcements/PSAs, posters/banners, videos, and word of mouth.

**Student Involvement in Project UNIFY**

After examining the various initiatives that were implemented in the Level 2 schools, we turned to understanding exactly what the experience of Project UNIFY was like for the students. We examined the various ways in which students could experience Project UNIFY, from an uninvolved bystander to an involved planner and participant. Then, we examined how the student’s experience in Project UNIFY impacted attitudes toward individuals with ID.

 ***Gradient of Student Experience in Project UNIFY***. Just as many different initiatives could be implemented in schools as part of Project UNIFY, there were also varying degrees to which students could experience Project UNIFY. The level of experience depended both on the number and types of initiatives offered within a school. In order to understand how students experienced Project UNIFY, therefore, we developed a gradient of experience which could be used to compare Project UNIFY across schools[[9]](#footnote-9).

To begin, we created an opportunity variable for each school. This variable was simply the sum of the number of initiatives that took place in the school. To create this variable, we examined whether liaisons indicated each of five initiatives occurred in the school (R-Word Campaign, Unified Sports, Sports Day, Partners Clubs, and Polar Plunge). Once this sum was created, it was compared to those initiatives students in the school indicated occurred.

We found a few instances in which students indicated an initiative occurred but the liaison did not report it in any of our measures (i.e., monthly log, school liaison survey, end of the year interview). We determined that it was possible for students to participate in certain Special Olympics initiatives outside of their school’s implementation of Project UNIFY. For example, some initiatives (e.g. Unified Sports) may have been implemented as a district or community-wide program. While it was encouraging to see that students were participating in these initiatives, this type of participation was beyond the scope of this evaluation (e.g., we had no further information about these programs, not all students within a school had the same opportunity to participate in or awareness of these programs).

The liaison report, therefore, was used as the final account of which initiatives took place in a school *as a part of* Project UNIFY*.* At minimum, each school implemented three initiatives and 6 of the 19 schools implemented all five initiatives (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Number of Project UNIFY initiatives implemented in each middle school and high school

Once the opportunity to experience Project UNIFY was established for each school, we examined the various *ways* in which youth could experience each Project UNIFY initiative. More specifically, each initiative provides a gradient of experience, from no experience to full participation in the initiative. Based on student responses to specific questions about how they were involved in each initiative, then, four distinct levels of experience were created for each initiative: unaware, uninvolved, spectator, and participant. Youth who were scored as “unaware” did not know that any Project UNIFY initiative had taken place in their school and, therefore, did not experience Project UNIFY in their school. Those that were “uninvolved” indicated that they knew at least one Project UNIFY initiative occurred in their school but they did not attend or participate in any way. A “spectator” attended at least one event (e.g., an assembly about the R-Word) but did not actively take part in the planning or implementation of the initiative. Finally, youth were considered a “participant” if they had an active role in participating (e.g., played on Unified Sports team), planning, or implementing at least one Project UNIFY initiative. Scores were calculated for student’s experience level in each initiative separately by assigning a score of 0 to 3 for each initiative based on whether the student was unaware (0), uninvolved (1), spectator (2), or participant (3). Each student was scored into one of these categories to establish their level of overall experience of Project UNIFY at their school.

Also, students were scored in terms of their experience in all of the initiatives that took place in their school separately. To create a **gradient of experience**, the scores for each initiative were summed across initiatives, providing a possible range of 0-15. To account for the differences in opportunities, however, each student’s sum was then divided by the number of initiatives that occurred within their school. This created a student “experience in Project UNIFY” score that could be compared across schools (see Table 25).

**Table 25.**Students’ gradient of experience in Project UNIFY

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Middle School** | **# Initiatives Offered** | **Mean Score on Gradient of Experience** | **Range of Student Scores on Gradient of Experience**  |
| Duffield | 4 | 3.23 | 0-11 |
| Truman | 5 | 5.32 | 0-14 |
| Sacajawea | 4 | 5.72 | 0-12 |
| PS17 | 4 | 2.48 | 0-12 |
| Pansy Kidd | 5 | 4.27 | 0-14 |
| Mauldin | 3 | 1.31 | 0-9 |
| **High School** |  |  |  |
| Moon Valley | 3 | 1.75 | 0-9 |
| Kellis | 5 | 7.07 | 0-15 |
| Southington | 4 | 3.86 | 0-12 |
| Cody | 4 | 1.66 | 0-10 |
| Union | 3 | 1.33 | 0-6 |
| Bozeman | 5 | 6.15 | 1-14 |
| Queens grant Prep | 4 | 4.81 | 0-12 |
| Robbinsville | 4 | 5.09 | 1-12 |
| Ferris | 4 | 2.98 | 0-12 |
| Harrah | 5 | 5.48 | 0-15 |
| Irmo | 3 | 1.06 | 0-6 |
| EC Glass | 4 | 3.07 | 0-12 |
| Douglas S. Freeman | 3 | 3.57 | 0-9 |

***Level of Involvement in each Initiative.*** Because Project UNIFY included various initiatives within schools, we first looked at the levels of student experience within each initiative before examining their experience in Project UNIFY overall. In looking at the differences in percentages of spectators and participants, we found that initiatives seemed to lend themselves to different levels of experience. For example, while the R-Word Campaign had a high level of spectators in both middle (39%) and high (35%) school, surprisingly, very few students were participants (7% and 15%, respectively). In essence, the R-Word Campaign drew many spectators, but did not encourage higher levels of experience.Finally, there was a low level of participation within Unified Sports in both middle (9%) and high (3%) schools. While Unified Sports was often the doorway for Special Olympics into a school, it is surprising that so few students were aware of its implementation in the schools (76% and 84%, respectively, were unaware; see Table 26).

**Table 26.** Students’ experience in specific Project UNIFY initiatives

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **% Unaware** | **% Uninvolved** | **% Spectator** | **% Participant** |
| **Middle School** |   |   |   |   |
| R-Word | 38% | 15% | 39% | 7% |
| Unified Sports | 76% | 11% | 4% | 9% |
| Partners Club | 80% | N/A | N/A | 20% |
| Sports Day | 65% | 19% | 6% | 11% |
| Polar Plunge | 58% | 32% | N/A | 11% |
| **High School** |   |   |   |   |
| R-Word | 36% | 14% | 35% | 15% |
| Unified Sports | 84% | 9% | 4% | 3% |
| Partners Club | 77% | N/A | N/A | 23% |
| Sports Day | 56% | 22% | 10% | 13% |
| Polar Plunge | 59% | 35% | N/A | 7% |

***Gradient of Experience in Project UNIFY.*** Next, we looked at the gradient of student experience in Project UNIFY overall. Encouragingly, across all 19 schools most students experienced Project UNIFY initiatives in their school (59% for middle school; 65% for high school). Furthermore, more than a third of the students experienced Project UNIFY as participants in at least one initiative (36% for middle school; 40% for high school; See table 27).

**Table 27:** Students’ overall experience in Project UNIFY initiatives

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **%** **Unaware** | **%** **Uninvolved** | **%** **Spectator** | **%** **Participant** |
| **Middle School** | 19% | 23% | 23% | 36% |
| **High School** | 16% | 18% | 25% | 40% |

Due to the variability of experiences in Project UNIFY, we examined student demographic characteristics and participation in school events and extracurricular activities to determine if these variables would help explain the student’s level of experience in Project UNIFY. In middle school and high schools, neither gender nor grade was related to participation in Project UNIFY. Specifically, males and females and youth in all grade levels were equally likely to participate in Project UNIFY.

One might expect that schools with high student engagement overall would also have high student engagement in Project UNIFY. There was no relationship, however, between student involvement in school events and extracurricular activities and Project UNIFY experience. The student body’s overall involvement in school sponsored events was not related to student’s experience of Project UNIFY. There was, however, one exception to this finding. In middle schools, students who were involved in school sports were twice as likely to participate in Project UNIFY.

Finally, on the student survey, before asking students about their specific experience with Project UNIFY initiatives that occurred in their school, we examined whether or not the students knew their school participated in a program called “Project UNIFY”. More specifically, we were curious if students knew that the initiatives in which they participated were part of a larger program, termed “Project UNIFY”. Students were asked “This year, did your school do a program called Project UNIFY?” Surprisingly, over half of the students in middle (51%) and high (58%) school said they did not know if their school did a program called Project UNIFY. This indicates that while over half of the middle (59%) and high school (65%) students experienced Project UNIFY initiatives as either spectators or participants, most of these students did not know that the initiatives were part of a larger program called Project UNIFY.

***Gradient of Experience by School.*** Finally, based on the variability of the number of initiatives that were implemented and level of experience overall, it was important to examine how the level of experience varied between schools. First, we related the number of initiatives offered by a school to the level of experience by the students in the school. As we would expect, when more initiatives were offered in a school, there was a higher level of Project UNIFY experience. Thus, as the number of initiatives implemented in middle and high schools increased, youth experience in Project UNIFY increased as well (Table 28).

**Table 28:**Students’ gradient of experience in schools that implemented varying numbers of Project UNIFY initiatives

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Gradient of Experience** | **F** | **Partial h2[[10]](#footnote-10)** |
| **Number of Initiatives** | **N** | **M (SD)** |   |   |
| **Middle Schools**3 | 271 | .44 (.70) | 48.93\*\* | 0.07 |
| 4 | 443 | .87 (.75) |  |  |
| 5 | 509 | .93 (.62) |   |   |
| **High Schools** 3 | 1297 (4 Schools) | .67 (.69) | 143.96\*\* | 0.09 |
| 4 | 1130 (6 Schools) | .95 (.70) |  |  |
| 5 | 646 (3 Schools) | 1.20 (.60) |   |   |

Next, we were interested if the school’s varied in the gradient of experience. In first looking at the highest level of Project UNIFY experience—“participation” —there was a wide range of the percent of students who experienced Project UNIFY in their school as participants (19% Mauldin MS; 16% Irmo HS to 66% Sacajawea MS; 70% Harrah HS) (see Table 29).

**Table 29.** Middle school students’ experience in Project UNIFY initiatives in each middle school

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **%** **Unaware** | **%** **Uninvolved** | **%** **Spectator** | **%** **Participant** |
| Duffield | 4% | 6% | 58% | 32% |
| Truman | 2% | 4% | 42% | 53% |
| Sacajawea | 1% | 6% | 27% | 66% |
| PS17 | 38% | 7% | 21% | 35% |
| Pansy Kidd | 3% | 37% | 21% | 38% |
| Mauldin | 51% | 26% | 5% | 19% |
| **Total Middle School** | **19%** | **23%** | **23%** | **36%** |

Schools also varied in the percent of students who did not experience any Project UNIFY initiatives. Specifically, while only 1% of students at Sacajawea Middle School did not experience Project UNIFY, 51% of the students at Mauldin Middle School did not experience Project UNIFY, Similarly in high schools, all students experienced Project UNIFY at Bozeman and Robbinsville High School (0% were unaware), but 51% of the students did not experience Project UNIFY at Cody high school (see Table 30). Unfortunately, awareness of Project UNIFY did not always relate to higher levels of experience in initiatives. While all students were aware of Project UNIFY at Robbinsville High School, 13% were still uninvolved in all initiatives that were implemented.

**Table 30.** High school students’ experience in Project UNIFY initiatives in each high school

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **%** **Unaware** | **%** **Uninvolved** | **%** **Spectator** | **%** **Participant** |
| Moon Valley | 38% | 19% | 15% | 29% |
| Kellis | 2% | 9% | 20% | 68% |
| Southington | 4% | 47% | 5% | 44% |
| Cody | 51% | 14% | 10% | 26% |
| Union | 19% | 13% | 40% | 28% |
| Bozeman | 0% | 8% | 36% | 55% |
| Queens Grant Prep | 1% | 5% | 45% | 49% |
| Robbinsville | 0% | 13% | 40% | 47% |
| Ferris | 15% | 6% | 43% | 36% |
| Harrah | 1% | 19% | 11% | 70% |
| Irmo | 42% | 39% | 4% | 16% |
| EC Glass | 7% | 34% | 30% | 28% |
| Douglas Freeman | 6% | 11% | 42% | 41% |
| **Total High School** | **16%** | **18%** | **25%** | **40%** |

**Relationship between Project UNIFY Experience and Student Attitudes**

After examining the experience of Project UNIFY in schools, we shifted our focus to examine how the gradient of experience was related to student’s attitudes toward their peers with ID. To explore this relationship, we looked at middle and high school students separately. For each group, we first looked at the student’s overall attitudes, and then examined the relationship of their attitudes to the gradient of experience in Project UNIFY.

***Middle Schools***

Overall, the middle school youth had positive Behavioral Intentions and Perceived Capabilities ratings[[11]](#footnote-11). The mean score for Behavioral Intentions was 23.63 (well above the midpoint of 18), with scores ranging from 21.73 to 25.64 across the six middle schools. Despite the high rating of behavioral intentions, it was clear that middle school youth were more likely to interact with students with ID in school, compared to outside of school. For example, while almost all of the youth reported that they would lend a student with ID a pencil (93%), and almost three-quarters would work with a student with ID on a class project (70%), fewer students were willing to invite a student with ID to their house (49%) or talk with a student with ID about something personal (44%).

Similar to Behavioral Intentions, students in middle schools had positive perceptions of the capabilities of youth with ID; the mean Perceived Capability Score was 11.27 (range 10.75 to 13.32) which is well above the midpoint of 8. Again, school-related items were rated high (e.g., 72% thought students with ID were capable of working with students without ID on graded group projects). Interestingly, many middle school students also felt youth with ID were capable of social activities, such as acting in consideration of another person’s feelings (78%) or making friends with people without ID (88%); however, middle school youth were less likely to perceive students with ID as capable of self-help skills, like handling their own money (49%) or using public transportation with a friend (48%).

As the attitudes of youth in middle school toward individuals with ID were generally positive, we were interested in whether these attitudes were related in involvement in Project UNIFY. In first looking at behavioral intentions, we found a strong positive relationship between Behavioral Intentions and the Gradient of Experience in Project UNIFY (*r=* .23); as experience in Project UNIFY increased, Behavioral Intentions increased. When looking at each school, the strength of this relationship varied from no relationship (Duffield) to a strong relationship (PS17). Furthermore, the relationship was not related to the number or type of initiatives implemented in a school. For example, Mauldin only implemented three initiatives, but still had a strong relationship between the student’s gradient of experience and their Behavioral Intentions.

Similarly, Perceived Capabilities were related to the gradient of experience (*r* = .14); however, this relationship was not as consistent or strong as Behavioral Intentions. In fact, only two middle schools had a significant relationship, Pansy Kidd and Mauldin (see Table 31).

**Table 31.** Relationship between middle school students’ gradient of experience and their attitudes toward individuals with intellectual disabilities[[12]](#footnote-12)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Gradient of Experience and Behavioral Intentions** | **Gradient of Experience and Perceived Capabilities** |
| Duffield | 71 | .13 | .10 |
| Truman | 166 | .19\* | .14 |
| Sacajawea | 97 | .17 | .03 |
| PS17 | 216 | .25\*\* | .10 |
| Pansy Kidd | 282 | .21\*\* | .13\* |
| Mauldin | 240 | .20\*\* | .15\* |
| **Total Middle School** | **1132** | **.23\*\*** | **.14\*\*** |

 \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01

To further explore the relationship between Project UNIFY experience and student attitudes, we used a group approach to compare the differences in attitudes between youth who experienced Project UNIFY (were involved as either spectators or participants) and who did not experience Project UNIFY (were either unaware or chose not to participate). Overall, students in the six middle schools who experienced Project UNIFY had more positive behavioral intentions (24.96) than students who did not experience Project UNIFY (21.50; *t* (435) = 6.98, *p* < .01) (see Table 32). Looking more closely at the specific schools, three schools had group differences. Specifically, youth who experienced Project UNIFY at PS17, Pansy Kidd, and Mauldin had more positive behavioral intentions compared to those youth who did not experience Project UNIFY(*t*’s = 4.26, 3.44, and 2.34, respectively).

**Table 32.** Relationship between middle school students’ intentions to interact with individuals with intellectual disabilities and experience in Project UNIFY

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | **No Experience** | **Project UNIFY Experience** |  |  |
|  | **N** | **M (SD)** | **N** | **M (SD)** | **T** | ***Cohen’s d[[13]](#footnote-13)*** |
| Duffield | 7 | 19.29 (6.78) | 69 | 24.61 (8.54) | 1.60 | - |
| Truman | 8 | 21.13 (11.00) | 166 | 23.61 (7.51) | 0.89 | - |
| Sacajawea | 8 | 24.50 (10.10) | 102 | 25.73 (7.48) | 0.44 | - |
| PS 17 | 101 | 20.67 (8.48) | 118 | 25.14 (6.77) | 4.26\*\* | 0.58 |
| Pansy Kidd | 121 | 22.83 (8.71) | 182 | 26.14 (7.88) | 3.44\*\* | 0.40 |
| Mauldin | 190 | 21.06 (7.96) | 60 | 23.83 (8.17) | 2.34\* | 0.34 |
| **Total Middle School** | **435** | **21.50 (8.39)** | **697** | **24.96 (7.69)** | **6.98\*\*** | .43 |
| \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01 |

Finally, when looking at perceived capabilities, students who experienced Project UNIFY had higher perceived capabilities of individuals with ID (11.69) than students who did not experience Project UNIFY (10.60; *t* (412) = 4.61, *p* < .01) (see Table 33). Again, the group differences varied across the middle schools, with four schools having significant differences between those that experienced Project UNIFY and those that did not experience Project UNIFY and the perceived capabilities of youth with ID. Specifically, youth at Truman, PS17, Pansy Kidd, and Mauldin had more positive perceived capabilities compared to those youth who did not experience Project UNIFY (*t*’s = 3.15, 3.18, 3.03, and 2.07, respectively).

**Table 33.** Relationship between middle school students’ perceived capabilities of individuals with intellectual disabilities and experience in Project UNIFY

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | **No Experience** | **Project UNIFY experience** |  |  |
|  | **N** | **M (SD)** | **N** | **M (SD)** | **T** | ***Cohen's d*** |
| Duffield | 6 | 12.83 (2.14) | 65 | 10.68 (3.83) | 1.35 | - |
| Truman | 8 | 7.25 (3.88) | 158 | 11.34 (3.57) | 3.15\*\* | 1.10 |
| Sacajawea | 8 | 14.63 (1.77) | 89 | 13.20 (3.15) | 1.25 | - |
| PS 17 | 98 | 9.91 (3.79) | 118 | 11.45 (3.33) | 3.18\*\* | 0.43 |
| Pansy Kidd | 111 | 10.11 (4.34) | 171 | 11.57 (3.32) | 3.03\*\* | 0.38 |
| Mauldin | 181 | 11.17 (3.69) | 59 | 12.27 (3.15) | 2.07\* | 0.32 |
| **Total Middle School** | **412** | **10.60 (3.96)** | **660** | **11.69 (3.46)** | **4.61\*\*** | **0.29** |

 \* p < .05 \*\* p < .01

***High Schools***

Similar to students in middle school, the high school students had generally positive attitudes toward individuals with ID. The mean score for Behavioral Intentions was 24.15 (above the midpoint of 19.5), with scores ranging from 21.05 to 25.41 across the high schools. Just as with middle school, high school students were generally positive about interacting with students with ID in school; they were less likely to interact with students with ID socially. For example, while almost all of the youth reported that they would say hello to a student with ID (94%), less than half of the high school students indicated that they would talk about personal things with a student with ID (41%), or invite a student with ID out with their other friends (47%).

Students in high schools also had positive perceptions of the capabilities of students with ID; the mean Perceived Capability Score was 11.58 (range 10.38 to 12.32) which is well above the midpoint of 8. Again, school-related items were rated high (e.g., 65% thought students with ID were capable of working with students without ID on graded group projects). Interestingly, many high school students also felt youth with ID were capable of social activities, such as engaging in conversations with youth without ID (85%) or making friends with youth without ID (91%); however, high school youth were less likely to perceive students with ID as capable of self-help skills, like handling their own money (45%).

We next examined whether high school attitudes were related to the experience of Project UNIFY. Among the high school youth, there was a positive relationship between the Gradient of Experience in Project UNIFY and behavioral intentions (*r* =.17); as experience in Project UNIFY increased, Behavioral Intentions increased. When looking at each school, the strength of this relationship varied from no relationship (Irmo) to a strong relationship (Harrah). As opposed to middle schools, where the strength of the relationship was not related to the number of initiatives, two of the three high schools (Harrah and Kellis) to implement all five initiatives had the strongest relationships between the gradient of experience and Behavioral Intentions.

While the overall relationship between Project UNIFY experience and Perceived Capabilities was weak, there were strong relationships within specific schools. Similar to Behavioral Intentions, Harrah and Kellis High Schools also had the strongest relationships between Project UNIFY experience and Perceived Capabilities (.25 and .32, respectively). In these high schools, the more experience youth had with Project UNIFY, the more positive were their perceptions of the capabilities of students with ID (see Table 34).

**Table 34.**Relationship between high school students’ gradient of experience and their attitudes toward individuals with intellectual disabilities [[14]](#footnote-14)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Gradient of Experience and Behavioral Intentions** | **Gradient of Experience and Perceived Capabilities** |
| Moon Valley | 457 | .18\*\* | .01 |
| Kellis | 126 | .39\*\* | .32\*\* |
| Southington | 184 | .14 | .18\* |
| Cody | 155 | .12 | .05 |
| Union | 187 | .27\*\* | .17\* |
| Bozeman | 188 | .23\*\* | .18\* |
| Queens Grant Prep | 233 | .15\* | .17\*\* |
| Robbinsville | 233 | .15\* | .03 |
| Ferris | 147 | .11 | .03 |
| Harrah | 309 | .45\*\* | .25\*\* |
| Irmo | 270 | .02 | .01 |
| EC Glass | 114 | .14 | .05 |
| Douglas Freeman | 313 | .22\*\* | .15\*\* |
| **Total High School** | **2929** | **.17\*\*** | **.09\*\*** |

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01

Just as we did with middle schools, we used a group approach to compare the differences in attitudes between youth who experienced Project UNIFY (were involved as either spectators or participants) and who did not experience Project UNIFY (were either unaware or chose not to participate). Overall, students in the 13 high schools who experienced Project UNIFY had more positive Behavioral Intentions toward their peers with ID (24.99) than students who did not experience Project UNIFY (22.50; *t* (988)= 7.48, *p*< .01) (see Table 35). When looking at group differences for specific high schools, six schools had group differences, while the remaining seven did not. When looking at effect sizes, we see that Kellis and Harrah high schools had the greatest differences between groups (*t*’s = 3.14 and 5.36).

**Table 35.** Relationship between high school students’ intentions to interact with individuals with intellectual disabilities and experience in Project UNIFY

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Uninvolved** | **Involved** |  |  |
|  | **N** | **M (SD)** | **N** | **M (SD)** | **T** | ***Cohen's d*** |
| Moon Valley | 259 | 23.72 (8.43) | 205 | 27.12 (8.63) | 4.28\*\* | 0.40 |
| Kellis | 14 | 17.93 (9.53) | 113 | 25.19 (7.99) | 3.14\*\* | 0.83 |
| Southington | 96 | 20.20 (9.48) | 89 | 21.98 (8.35) | 1.35 | - |
| Cody | 102 | 21.43 (8.38) | 57 | 22.65 (8.22) | 0.89 | - |
| Union | 113 | 23.93 (7.71) | 77 | 27.57 (7.34) | 3.26\*\* | 0.48 |
| Bozeman | 16 | 18.06 (9.72) | 176 | 22.01 (7.47) | 1.97\* | 0.46 |
| Queens Grant Prep | 13 | 23.85 (10.29) | 220 | 22.83 (8.09) | 0.43 | - |
| Robbinsville | 31 | 23.81 (9.03) | 204 | 25.51 (8.76) | 1.01 | - |
| Ferris | 23 | 21.13 (9.28) | 124 | 23.42 (8.79) | 1.14 | - |
| Harrah | 61 | 19.64 (9.79) | 251 | 26.45 (8.66) | 5.36\*\* | 0.74 |
| Irmo | 171 | 23.46 (8.34) | 103 | 25.03 (7.89) | 1.54 | - |
| EC Glass | 46 | 23.11 (8.82) | 68 | 26.01 (8.13) | 1.81 | - |
| Douglas Freeman | 43 | 21.19 (8.46) | 272 | 26.40 (7.66) | 4.08\*\* | 0.65 |
| **Total High School** | **988** | **22.50 (8.75)** | **1959** | **24.99 (8.38)** | **7.48\*\*** | **0.29** |

 \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01

Finally, when looking at group differences among students in the 13 high schools, students who experienced Project UNIFY had higher perceived capabilities of individuals with ID (11.74) than students who did not experience Project UNIFY (11.28; *t* (996) = 3.19, *p* < .01). Again, the group differences varied across schools, with four high schools having significant differences between those who experienced Project UNIFY and those who did not. Specifically, youth at Kellis and Bozeman high schools had the greatest differences in perceived capabilities between the two groups (*t*’s = 3.33 and 2.38, respectively). Both of these schools implemented all five Project UNIFY initiatives. In addition, both schools had at least 85% student involvement, with over half of the youth being identified as Participants (see Table 36).

**Table 36.** Relationship between high school students’ perceived capabilities of individuals with intellectual disabilities and experience in Project UNIFY

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Uninvolved** | **Involved** |  |  |
|  | **N** | **M (SD)** | **N** | **M (SD)** | **T** | ***Cohen’s d*** |
| Moon Valley | 255 | 11.93 (3.74) | 212 | 11.62 (3.69) | 0.89 | - |
| Kellis | 15 | 9.33 (4.08) | 111 | 12.22 (3.01) | 3.33\*\* | 0.80 |
| Southington | 97 | 10.34 (4.19) | 89 | 11.62 (3.19) | 2.35\* | 0.34 |
| Cody | 103 | 10.8 (3.47) | 56 | 11.00 (2.64) | 0.415 | - |
| Union | 111 | 12.19 (3.48) | 76 | 12.5 (3.59) | 0.592 | - |
| Bozeman | 16 | 8.50 (5.56) | 172 | 11.86 (3.03) | 2.38\* | 0.75 |
| Queens Grant Prep | 13 | 11.38 (3.57) | 222 | 11.54 (3.54) | 0.154 | - |
| Robbinsville | 32 | 11.72 (3.82) | 201 | 11.76 (3.56) | 0.06 | - |
| Ferris | 29 | 10.17 (4.73) | 124 | 10.43 (3.68) | 0.32 | - |
| Harrah | 61 | 9.31 (4.85) | 252 | 11.64 (3.34) | 3.55\*\* | 0.56 |
| Irmo | 173 | 11.83 (3.02) | 104 | 11.86 (3.47) | 0.07 | - |
| EC Glass | 47 | 11.23 (4.15) | 67 | 12.30 (3.68) | 1.44 | - |
| Douglas S Freeman | 44 | 11.07 (3.98) | 269 | 12.19 (2.68) | 1.81 | - |
| **Total High School** | **996** | **11.28 (3.88)** | **1945** | **11.74 (3.35)** | **3.19\*\*** | **0.12** |

 \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01

It is important to remember that there are two ways to interpret the relationship between the Gradient of Experience in Project UNIFY and student’s attitudes toward individuals with ID. First, this relationship can be interpreted to show that students with high Behavioral Intentions and Perceived Capabilities were more likely to get involved in Project UNIFY initiatives. On the other hand, we can also interpret the relationship to show that students who had a more intense Project UNIFY experience developed higher Behavioral Intentions and Perceived Capabilities. The direction of this relationship is currently unknown, as students were only assessed *after* Project UNIFY occurred in their school.

**Relationship between Project UNIFY Experience and School Climate**

Similar to how we looked at the relationship between attitudes and Project UNIFY experience, we took a correlational approach to examining the Project UNIFY experience and school climate. Overall, middle school youth had positive perceptions of their school’s climate, with scores ranging from 7.59 to 9.86, which was above the midpoint of 6. While middle school youth were generally positive about their school’s ability to provide opportunities for students to interact, they were less positive about the ability of the school to promote acceptance. Less than half of Middle School youth feel that their school does a “really good job” promoting student acceptance (43%), or making sure all students feel like a part of the school (46%)

High School youth showed similar trends in ratings of School Climate. However, they were not as positive as middle school youth, with ratings ranging from 5.88 to 9.05, which was above the midpoint of 6. High school youth thought that their schools did mostly an “Ok job” at promoting a positive school climate. In fact, the only item in which more than half (64%) of high school youth rated their school as doing a “really good job” was if the school offered a lot of different activities for students to get involved in. Only 36% of high school youth think their school does a “really good job” at making sure all students feel accepted and making sure all students feel like they are a part of the school.

To relate school climate to the Project UNIFY experience we correlated the mean of school climate and mean for the gradient of experience in each school. By using the mean of the gradient of experience, we were able to examine the experience of the average youth in each middle and high school. Across 16 middle and high schools (3 schools were omitted from this analysis because they did not implement the R-Word campaign, the Project UNIFY initiative with the widest breadth), we found a strong positive relationship (*r* = .52) between school climate and the gradient of experience. Of course, there are two ways to interpret this strong relationship. We can view it as the more students have a Project UNIFY experience, the more they perceive their school as having a positive school climate (i.e., Project UNIFY positively impacts school climate). Equally plausible is that in schools in which students have a more positive perception of school climate, the more likely students are to become involved in Project UNIFY initiatives.

**Recommendations**

Overall it is clear that Project UNIFY is making progress in creating more inclusive school communities where “all young people are agents of change - fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities.” While considerable variation was observed across states in Year 2 in terms of the number of Project UNIFY schools involved in each state, and in the types and number of initiatives implemented in these schools, it is encouraging that Project UNIFY is being embraced both by the State SO Programs and participating schools as a powerful tool for promoting respect and inclusion for all students. In the spirit of continual development and improvement of Project UNIFY at all levels, the following recommendations are offered.

*State SO Programs should include more general education teachers and administrators in the planning and implementation of Project UNIFY.*

The cornerstone of Project UNIFY is the formation of partnerships between State SO Programs and the educational community, specifically school districts and schools. Project UNIFY has provided State SO Programs the opportunity to reach out to schools above and beyond the traditional routes. While Programs reached out to more general education teachers and administrators than they had in the past, Programs still primarily relied on their connections with special education teachers as their entry point into schools. In order to expand the State SO Program- school partnership, and provide greater opportunities for “ownership” of Project UNIFY, and in turn more collaboration within schools, State SO Programs must continue their efforts to involve general education teachers and administrator as well as special educators.

*Clearer guidelines need to be developed and articulated for what constitutes Project UNIFY in a school, particularly in terms of the array and types of initiatives to be implemented and the connection between those initiatives. Moreover, each initiative should be clearly defined and have set guidelines for implementation.*

Despite the inclusion of Project UNIFY program requirements in the funding guidelines, there was still considerable variation across and within states in terms of how Project UNIFY was implemented in schools. While almost all states implemented a combination of sport and youth leadership/ educational components in at least one school, not all schools implemented initiatives from each of these components. More than a quarter, or 26% of the schools only implemented 1 initiative overall. Furthermore, because initiatives are defined differently by State SO Programs and by the many schools, great variation was observed in the implementation of initiatives within schools. To assist Programs and schools in choosing and implementing Project UNIFY activities, a toolkit could be developed that provides a description of each initiative, as well as guidelines for their implementation and ways to combine initiatives from both sports and youth leadership categories. This toolkit could also include guidelines for the best way to select schools for Project UNIFY and how to optimize Project UNIFY in schools that vary in student composition, grade, and size. These guidelines could also include strategies for implementing initiatives such as ALPs and GII, so there is a larger menu of initiatives available for schools to build the Project UNIFY program. (Once the evaluation and revisions of GII are complete, this curriculum can provide a foundation of all other initiatives to be implemented as part of Project UNIFY.)

*A focus on student leadership should be a significant element of Project UNIFY in the implementation of any Project UNIFY initiative in the school.*

One of the guiding principles of Project UNIFY is to be youth-centered, involving youth with and without disabilities not only in activities but also in the decision-making processes. Efforts have been made to create an environment that optimizes youth leadership (e.g. National Youth Activation Summit), however there is room for much growth in this area. While schools began to involve youth in leadership roles for the planning and implementation of Project UNIFY, youth participation was inconsistent across schools. Although schools were not as successful at involving youth with ID in leadership positions as is exemplified by the Project UNIFY model (one third of schools included youth with ID in planning and implementing Project UNIFY), efforts were beginning to be made to increase leadership positions of youth with ID. To continue to increase the leadership role for youth with ID, , and to include more youth overall, emphasis could be placed on the development of materials, strategies, and techniques for inclusive youth leadership, drawing from the larger field of disability and special education research. Project UNIFY could then serve as an example to schools about not only how to include youth with and without ID in leadership positions, but also about the benefits of such inclusion.

*Every State SO Program should involve youth in the planning and implementation of not only Project UNIFY, but other Special Olympics initiatives and activities as well.*

Project UNIFY has begun to change how State SO Programs operate. In particular, since the inception of Project UNIFY, State Programs have begun to involve youth in their organizational planning for both Project UNIFY and other Special Olympics activities. These findings suggest that SO Programs are beginning to appreciate and embrace the value of youth leadership into their organizational structure. However, while it is still early in the process, not all States have been successful in including youth. Therefore, the value and importance of youth leadership should be clearly emphasized as a guiding principle of Project UNIFY. Moreover, State Programs could also seize the opportunity to expand opportunities for youth leadership by connecting Project UNIFY activities to ALPs and other youth leadership initiatives.

*Identify those initiatives that, in combination, maximize the involvement of students with and without disabilities in Project UNIFY.*

One of the basic tenets of Project UNIFY is the creation of broader school-wide programming focused on promoting respect and inclusion to establish more “inclusive school communities”.

Project UNIFY, however, is only beginning to reach entire student bodies; depending on the school, and the initiatives implemented, the student experience varied greatly. In fact, although it may be true that there will always be some students in a school that are disengaged from any school activities, there were a large percentage of students in many schools that did not experience Project UNIFY at all. For those who did, the experience was related to more positive attitudes toward individuals with ID. The “gradient of experience” that was found to be related to positive attitudes clearly points to the need to continue to explore the unique combinations of initiatives, and those school-based factors (e.g., publicity of initiatives, school climate, student involvement in other extracurricular activities, etc.), that contribute to greater involvement and maximize attitude change.For Project UNIFY to be truly transformative, it needs to reach most, if not all students in the school and involve those students in meaningful ways that promote positive attitudes.

*Begin to identify model Project UNIFY schools that demonstrate how successful programs can be implemented and gather and disseminate information, or “best practices”, that can enhance the quality and fidelity of implementation, particularly in schools new to Project UNIFY.*

It is clear that Project UNIFY, in its most expanded form, is feasible at both the middle school and high school levels; there were a number of schools that successfully implemented five or more initiatives as part of Project UNIFY including Unified Sports, the R-Word Campaign, Partner Clubs, and Sports Day. Furthermore, some of the most highly involved schools were able to include more than two-thirds of the student body in Project UNIFY activities. To learn from these successes, careful consideration and examination could be given to a select group of schools to identify the specific aspects of the Project UNIFY programs that contribute to success. For example, identified “model schools” could provide evidence that could inform the development of a toolkit (mentioned previously) and could allow for a more clearly defined “Project UNIFY school”. In essence, Special Olympics could use “what is working” to help State SO Programs and schools develop effective Project UNIFY programs.

1. States with fewer than five regions were not included because of the challenge that such small numbers pose in comparing across State SO Programs. In a state with three regions for example, involving two regions is two-thirds of the stat [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It is important to note that due to the low response rate by liaisons (44%), we do not have information about all of the schools that implemented Project UNIFY as reported by the State SO Coordinators. Moreover, within this 44% there is a higher representation of high schools (41%) than elementary schools (25%). Furthermore, due to the length of the *Liaison Survey,* a number of liaisons did not complete the entire questionnaire; approximately 25% stopped responding before answering all of the questions. Therefore, the distribution of schools for which we have complete data is different from the national distribution of schools that participated in Project UNIFY overall. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. When looking at these data, only states in which 10 or more schools participated in Project UNIFY were included in the analysis. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. It is important to note that only the 488 liaisons who reported having help in the implementation of Project UNIFY responded to questions about *teacher* involvement. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. It is important to note that only the 488 liaisons who reported having help in the implementation of Project UNIFY responded to questions about *youth* involvement. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Questions differed slightly for middle school and high school surveys. However, format and theoretical design of questions stayed the same. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The high school questionnaire had 13 behavioral intention questions with scores ranging from 0-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For Level 2 analyses, Sports Day replaced Young Athletes. Because only middle and high schools were included in Level 2, it was not appropriate to examine the implementation of Young Athletes. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The opportunity variable included only five initiatives that we anticipated the students would be most familiar with. Students were asked about their involvement in the R-Word Campaign, Sports Day, Unified Sports, Partners Clubs, and Polar Plunge. While we know that some of the Level 2 schools carried out more initiatives than these listed, the data presented about student involvement in Project UNIFY are based on student’s accounts of these five initiatives. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Partial * is the effect size for an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The effect refers to the “real world” difference between two or more groups. It provides reference with which to evaluate a significant statistic. The effect size evaluates a mean difference in terms of the distributions and allows us to evaluate how large the difference is, reducing bias. The term “effect” refers only to the difference between means, not necessarily the influence of one factor on another. Accepted values for Partial ** effect sizes are .01 for small effects, .06 for medium effects, and .14 for large effects. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The means on all of the attitude scales in our sample are higher than those reported in the national survey of youth attitudes (Siperstein et al., 2007), indicating middle school youth in our sample have more positive attitudes than the national average. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Middle School correlations are computed using a scaled score designed to allow us to aggregate involvement across schools [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Cohen’s d* is the effect size for t-tests. Accepted values for Cohen’s d effect sizes are .2 for small effects, .5 for medium effects, and .8 for large effects. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Composite High School correlations are computed using a scaled score designed to allow us to aggregate involvement across schools [↑](#footnote-ref-14)