



INTERSCHOLASTIC UNIFIED SPORTS® INFO SHEET

Special Olympics Mission

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

“Special Olympics has pursued a fully inclusive sports participation path for people with various levels of intellectual capabilities and sporting abilities throughout our history, and with Unified Sports® since 1989”

-Tim Shriver, Special Olympics Chairman & CEO

National Federation of State High School Associations Mission (NFHS)

The National Federation of State High School Associations serves its members, related professional organizations and students by providing leadership for the administration of education-based interscholastic activities, which support academic achievement, good citizenship and equitable opportunities.

“Inclusive school sports is an area of focus for us at the NFHS and we feel that Special Olympics Unified Sports is an ideal model for our schools to accomplish this”

-Robert Gardner, NFHS Executive Director

Project UNIFY®

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

Unified Sports®

Special Olympics Unified Sports is an inclusive sports program that combines an approximately equal number of Special Olympics athletes (individuals with intellectual disabilities) and partners (individuals without intellectual disabilities) on teams for training and competition.

Interscholastic Athletic Association Partnerships

What: A partnership between Special Olympics State Programs and their respective NFHS state member association to advance the mission and goals of both organizations. Project UNIFY is often the focus of these partnerships where Unified Sports is integrated as a sanctioned program of the state Interscholastic Athletic Association (IAA) for its member schools.

Who: According to the 2008 U.S. Census there are 14.98 Million students enrolled in U.S. Public High Schools (grades 9-12). It is estimated that 2% of all U.S. citizens have an intellectual disability (ID) and qualify as a Special Olympics Athlete (World Health Organization estimates 1%-3% globally have an ID). **This means there are as many as 300,000 potential Special Olympics athletes in public high schools.**

Special Olympics athletes team up with students without intellectual disabilities

to create proportionately rostered Unified Sports teams. These Unified Partners are recruited from the general education student population and typically do not have a background in competitive high school sports. Teams are formed and managed through the school Athletic Department. Special Olympics and the NFHS have developed a 90 minute online course for Coaching Unified Sports housed at www.NFHSLearn.com, and offered at no cost.

There are currently over 2,000 schools in 40 states participating in Project UNIFY. Six of these states have an official Interscholastic partnership: Arizona, Connecticut, Indiana, Maryland, New Hampshire and Rhode Island.

Why: Interscholastic Unified Sports® increases school athletic participation by including a new population of students- both the Special Olympics athletes, and

the Unified Partners. Special Olympics athletes experience invaluable social inclusion and new sports opportunities. Project UNIFY changes attitudes about people with disabilities and positively impacts the climate in each school. Special Olympics is a lifetime program, when students get involved as youth, there is a good chance it will continue to impact the quality of their life after graduation.

“Interscholastic Unified Sports brings a whole new dimension to an interscholastic program with a renewed perspective through the eyes of a new set of student athletes into our association membership, these young people may not have had the opportunity to participate in the past, now they do.”

- Chuck Schmidt, Associate Executive Director, Arizona Interscholastic Association