



# Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Language Guidelines

Updated July 2021



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools®**



# Preface

**Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®** is a program for schools Pre-K through university that intentionally promotes social inclusion by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) through sport and education-related activities. The three-component model offers a unique combination of effective activities that equip young people with the knowledge, skills, tools and training to create classrooms and school climates of acceptance, respect, and meaningful inclusion. These are school climates where students with disabilities feel welcome and are routinely included in -- and feel a part of -- all activities, opportunities, and functions.

Unified Champion Schools have three components: Special Olympics Unified Sports®, inclusive youth leadership, and whole school engagement. Over ten years of research and evaluation has shown that these three factors are essential for schools in the United States to promote positive attitudes about people with intellectual disabilities and promote social inclusion.

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

## Quick Tips:

1. When referring to Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools, you must always have Special Olympics precede Unified Champion Schools and include the ® on the first reference.  
Example: Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® programming is proven to reduce bullying and offensive language.
2. When referring to Special Olympics programs or activities, always include Special Olympics on the first reference.  
Example: Special Olympics Young Athletes brings together children ages 2-7 with and without intellectual disabilities to introduce them to sport and play.
3. Use “the” before Special Olympics when referring to programs, initiatives, and models within Special Olympics.  
Example: The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools model will be used nation-wide.  
Example: With sports as the foundation, the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program will lead to a more inclusive culture.
4. Do not use “the” before Special Olympics when referring to the organization or program solely by name.  
Example: Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools is the comprehensive model of the Unified Schools strategy that is implemented in the United States.  
Example: My child’s school is a Special Olympics Unified Champion School.



# Terms

## **athlete**

Not capitalized. Refers to an individual with an intellectual disability.

Example:

- Special Olympics **athletes** are children and adults with intellectual disabilities in 200 countries around the world.

## **inclusive youth leadership (IYL)**

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

## **inclusive sports**

See Special Olympics Unified Sports®

## **Office of Special Education Programs at the U.S. Department of Education**

Refers to Unified Champion Schools' main supporter, partner, and source of federal funding in the United States. Always refer to in full.

**NOTE:** To all Programs receiving federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education for Unified Champion School programming: Please include the Special Education (OSEP) logo - Ideas that Work – along with the disclaimer language on documents created as a part of the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools work (examples: documents and materials created or developed for use with schools, educational materials, handbooks, brochures, informational presentations).

- When using the logo on documents, the disclaimer language must also be used: "The contents of this (insert type of publication; e.g., report, presentation, brief) were developed under funding from the U.S. Department of Education, #H380W140001. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government."

## **partner**

Not capitalized. Refers to an individual without an intellectual disability.

Example:

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

## **program**

Lowercase program refers to the services we provide as Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools, or the Unified Champion Schools work happening at schools.

Example:

- Hendrickson High School's Unified Champion Schools **program** has been growing for six years.



## **Program**

Note capitalization. Refers to a Special Olympics Program – a 501c3 accredited organization in a state or region. When referring to a Special Olympics state Program, always capitalize. This can be used short form as Program.

Example:

- The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools monthly newsletter features stories and best practices from **Programs** across the country and the work they are doing in schools.

## **R-word**

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

## **Special Olympics College Clubs**

Capitalized. Special Olympics College Clubs is a specific brand within Special Olympics college programming. Special Olympics College Clubs are registered student organizations recognized by both their institution and their state Special Olympics Program. College clubs fall under the inclusive leadership component, but also support whole campus engagement and Special Olympics Unified Sports activities.

## **Special Olympics college programming**

Special Olympics college programming is Unified Champion Schools programming for colleges and universities that falls under the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools umbrella. All U.S. postsecondary institutions (colleges, universities, community colleges, junior colleges, etc) with Special Olympics college programming, including Special Olympics Unified Sports, inclusive leadership, and whole campus engagement, should be counted as Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools.

## **Special Olympics North America (SONA)**

Refers to the Special Olympics region that includes the United States, Canada, and Caribbean Programs.

## **Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® (SOUCS)**

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® (SOUCS) on first reference. After first reference, it can be referred to as Unified Champion Schools or SOUCS. Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools is a comprehensive program of the Unified Schools strategy that combines Unified Sports, inclusive youth leadership and whole school engagement to create the greatest impact.

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

Example:

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



### **Special Olympics Unified Sports®**

On first reference, refer to as Special Olympics Unified Sports®. Unified Sports on second reference is fine. Always capitalize when referring to inclusive sports and fitness activities that bring together people with intellectual disabilities (athletes) and those without intellectual disabilities (partners) on sports teams for training and competition. Examples include such things as: Interscholastic Unified Sports, Unified PE or Unified Intramurals. Special Olympics Unified Sports and Special Olympics Young Athletes are examples of inclusive sports.

### **Spread the Word >> Inclusion**

Capitalized. The campaign for mutual respect and dignity that has spread across the United States and around the globe, involving people of all ages – from high schools to college campuses and corporate offices. In 2019, Spread the Word to End the Word became Spread the Word, with a focus not just on the elimination of a word but on the creation of a new reality: inclusion for all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. **For more information, go to:** <http://www.spreadtheword.global/>

### **Unified**

The U in Unified is capitalized when used as an adjective. When referring to Special Olympics Unified Sports® or school activities, the U is always capitalized but the sport/activity is not.

Examples:

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

### **Unified Champion Schools (UCS)**

See Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®

### **Unified Champion City Schools (UCCS)**

The Unified Champion City Schools initiative is a focused, initiative-based approach within ongoing Unified Champion Schools work to amplify the essential elements of Unified Champion Schools programming within city school districts. Through the Unified Champion City Schools initiative, Special Olympics will be partnering with underserved communities to expand and accelerate UCS programming and make a lasting impact of inclusion

### **Unified Club**

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

Example:

- The Eunice Kennedy Shriver Elementary School **Unified Club** is organizing a Spread the Word >> Inclusion campaign this month.

### **Unified Fitness**

Capitalized. Based upon the Special Olympics Fitness models, Unified Fitness is an opportunity for students with and without intellectual disabilities to complete fitness and health activities together in schools. Students can utilize Special Olympics fitness models and resources such as Unified Fitness Club, Fit Families, SOfit, and Fit 5. These fitness activities can satisfy both Unified Sports and inclusive youth leadership components.



### **Unified pair**

The U in Unified is capitalized, the p in pair is not. Refers to a pair of Special Olympics participants comprised of one athlete and one partner.

Example:

- Special Olympics Minnesota sent Maggie and John, a Unified pair, to the Youth Leadership Experience.

### **Unified Physical Education**

Or Unified PE. Unified Physical Education is a concept for bringing students with and without disabilities together, as equals, in a physical education setting where all students earn physical education credit, thus putting all students on equal footing. Unified PE supports the development of leadership skills for all students, and the empowerment of ALL students to foster an inclusive class and school-wide environment

### **Unified Sports Experience**

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

### **U.S. Youth Ambassador**

Special Olympics U.S. Youth Ambassador on first reference. U.S. Youth Ambassadors are a group of selected youth leaders with and without intellectual disabilities who act as ambassadors and spokespeople for the Unified Champion Schools movement. These youth leaders are trained in a 2-year term to act as advocates, share stories, and demonstrate the values of inclusive youth leadership across the country.

### **whole school engagement**

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

### **Young Athletes**

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

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

### **Youth Activation Committee (YAC)**

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

### **youth leader**

A general term for a youth participant of Special Olympics of any ability level who acts as a leader in their school or community.



### **Youth Leadership Experience (YLE)**

A Youth Leadership Experience is a deliberately planned series of activities designed to engage Special Olympics youth leaders and develop their knowledge of inclusive youth leadership, management of Special Olympics events, and community programming. Emerging youth leaders within the Special Olympics movement may participate in a Youth Leadership Experience at a State/Local Games, or other events and competitions planned by State Programs such as tournaments, clinics or trainings.



# Social Media Guidance

Social Media is a great way to share stories and information from Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® across the country and elevating the voices of the Unified Generation. Here are some suggestions to help you do this!

## Accounts to Follow:

- **Special Olympics North America**
  - o Facebook: @SONorthAmerica
  - o Twitter: @SONorthAmerica
  - o Instagram: @SONorthAmerica
- **Special Olympics International**
  - o Facebook: @SpecialOlympics
  - o Twitter: @SpecialOlympics
  - o Instagram: @SpecialOlympics
  - o LinkedIn: @SpecialOlympics
  - o YouTube: Special Olympics
- **Unified Generation (specific content to Unified Champion Schools)**
  - o TikTok: @unifiedgeneration
  - o YouTube: Unified Generation

**Main Hashtag:** #UnifiedGeneration

**Additional Hashtags:** #InclusionRevolution, #PlayUnified

When thinking about what to post on social media about Unified Champion Schools think about these things:

- **User-Generated Content:** Think about how your youth leaders can be the spokespeople of their own work!
- **Takeovers:** Let youth leaders “takeover” social media accounts during events or Unified Sports events.
- **Tag Supporters:** Think about your local department of education, relevant partners and organizations as well as any individual supporters or ambassadors that may help broaden the reach of your post. relevant accounts



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

In 2008, Special Olympics started a strategy called **Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®**. For over a decade, Special Olympics has been actively engaged in the development and implementation of a **Unified Schools strategy** for promoting and increasing the social inclusion of youth with intellectual disabilities in schools and in their communities.

**Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools** is a program for schools Pre-K through university that intentionally promotes social inclusion by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) through sport and education-related activities. The three-component model offers a unique combination of effective activities that equip young people with the knowledge, skills, tools and training to create classrooms and school climates of acceptance, respect, and meaningful inclusion.

This is accomplished by implementing Special Olympics Unified Sports®, inclusive youth leadership opportunities (such as clubs, student organizations and leadership teams), and whole school engagement. The program is woven into the fabric of the school community, enhancing existing efforts and providing rich opportunities that empower all students to be the agents of genuine change in their schools, creating socially inclusive environments that support and engage all learners. **Unified Champion Schools** implementation can vary greatly from school to school, based on the needs, goals, schedules, and other factors unique to each school, but the building blocks and framework are the same.

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

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

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

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

Unified Sports, inclusive youth leadership, and whole school engagement let students with and without intellectual disabilities interact in a variety of ways. When all three components of the **Unified Champion Schools** program are utilized, it creates the maximum amount of opportunity for positive attitudes to be created by students and reinforced by the schools.