

THE GLOBAL STATE OF INCLUSION IN EDUCATION

THE YEAR OF THE TEACHER: TEACHING INCLUSION IN A DIVIDED WORLD

International Day of Education – January 24, 2026

A Message from Timothy Shriver, PhD, Chairman of Special Olympics International



TEACHERS ARE THE KEY

Timothy is the Chairman of Special Olympics International.

Timothy used to be a teacher.



When Timothy first became a teacher he felt overwhelmed.

He learned how to teach but he did not feel ready for every part of the job.

Teaching means:



- Planning lessons
- Grading work
- Talking with families
- Supporting students

Teaching is a big responsibility.

Teachers work very hard, but they often get little support.



Teachers do amazing work.

Around the world, teachers are doing more than ever before.

Timothy has visited many schools that work with Special Olympics.

Timothy has seen teachers:



- Teach inclusive classrooms
- Coach Unified Sports teams
- Support student leaders
- Organize school events for inclusion and dignity
- Care deeply for every child

But teaching is still very difficult.

Inclusive teaching is even more difficult.



Inclusive teaching means students with or without disabilities can learn and be successful together.

There is a global teacher shortage.



A **teacher shortage** means there are not enough teachers to fill all the teaching jobs.

The good news is that teachers are trying their best.

The bad news is that teachers do not get enough support.

Many teachers leave the profession because of this.

This has caused a global teachers shortage.



This is serious and the future of children everywhere is at risk.



THE NUMBERS ARE VERY SERIOUS

Research shows that the teacher shortage is a serious problem.

Teachers are one of the most important factors in student learning.

There are 44 million teacher openings around the world.

Millions of children are not getting the education they need.

When there are not enough teachers, children learn less.

Some children have to stop going to school.

Children with intellectual and developmental disabilities are affected the most.

Children with intellectual and developmental disabilities are being left behind.





A **crisis** is a serious problem that needs help right away.

A crisis area means people living there need help right away.

Many children live in difficult situations.



234 million children
live in crisis areas.



More than
85 million children
are not in school.



90% school-aged children
with intellectual and
developmental disabilities
are not in school.

Children not attending school is especially true
in low-income countries.



Low-income countries do not have a lot of money or resources.

This is unacceptable.

Something must change.

This can change if leaders take action.

DEFINING THE CRISIS



In countries with teacher shortages, class sizes are becoming bigger.

Big classes make learning harder.



Teachers cannot give personal attention to students.

Children with intellectual and developmental disabilities need extra support.

Large classes make this almost impossible for them to learn.



School closures make the problem worse.

If there are not enough teachers, schools can no longer stay open.

When schools close, children have to travel farther and some children have to stop going to school.



Barriers are things that make it hard to do something.

Children with disabilities face the biggest barriers.

Going to school is not enough to stop other learning barriers.

Even when children with disabilities attend school, they may not get quality teaching.

Education must be meaningful.

This requires trained and supported teachers.



Funding means giving money to support something.

Funding for global education is becoming less and less funding is expected in the future.



With less money, teacher training programs are being reduced.

This means teachers are less prepared and children with or without disabilities have less opportunities.

Another barrier is gaps in data.



Data is information collected to learn about something.

Many countries do not collect good data about students with disabilities.

This means:



- Children with intellectual and developmental disabilities are not counted
- Their needs are invisible
- Governments are not held accountable



WHAT WORKS: INVESTING IN TEACHERS DRIVES RESULTS

Despite challenges, some countries show that change is possible.

These are examples from different countries.



Philippines

- Teachers receive inclusive education training
- Inclusive education is part of national law
- 2,000 teachers are being trained with Special Olympics



Argentina

- Inclusive education is required in all teacher training programs



Chile

- Most public schools are part of an inclusion program
- Teachers receive support to teach inclusively



Montenegro

- The government is investing in inclusion
- 500 teachers are trained through Unified Champion Schools



Tanzania

- Teachers receive mentoring and coaching
- Schools work together to improve inclusion



South Africa

- National policy supports inclusive education
- Teacher training focuses on equal opportunity



Mongolia

- Teachers use inclusive teaching methods
- Technology supports learning for students with disabilities

These examples show that inclusion works when teachers are supported.



THE SOLUTION: RECRUIT BOLDLY, TRAIN INCLUSIVELY, SUPPORT HOLISTICALLY



Teachers are leaving the profession.

Many teachers leave because their pay is too low and they feel unsupported and unheard.

When teachers leave students lose opportunities.

Underserved students suffer the most.



Teachers with disabilities must be included.

Teachers with disabilities are role models.

They show inclusion every day.



But many face barriers.

Barriers include inaccessible schools and unfair hiring and lack of accommodations.

We must recruit teachers with disabilities and support them in their careers.

Inclusive teaching must be standard.

Teachers need:



- Practical teaching strategies
- Universal Design for Learning
- Assistive technology
- Support from other professionals



Teachers must also believe that all children can learn and systems must adapt to learners.

Special Olympics worked with universities to create and learn about tools that:

- Teach inclusive values
- Make inclusion measurable

These tools also help teachers become inclusion leaders.

These tools are called Inclusive Mindset and Behaviors and Universal Design for Learning.

Inclusive Mindset Behaviors and Universal Design for Learning work together:

- Universal Design for Learning makes learning accessible.
- Inclusive Mindset Behaviors builds inclusive attitudes and behaviors.



Special Olympics and Harvard University collaborated with several countries to improve these tools.

A new Unified Champion Schools Inclusion Academy will launch in Abu Dhabi in 2026.



The academy will support teachers through sports and leadership programs.



CLEAR DEMANDS TO LEADERS

Leaders must act now.

The future depends on how we support teachers and education.

They must:



- Fund teacher recruitment and retention for at least 5 years



- Make inclusion training required for all teacher certification



- Protect teacher wellbeing and raise their pay



- Include teachers in policy decisions



- Invest in inclusive school programs like sports and leadership



Inclusion is a human right.

TAKING ACTION

History will judge us not by what we promised children,
but by how we invested in the teachers who serve them.



With hope and determination,

Tim

Timothy Shriver, PhD
Chairman, Special Olympics International



THANK YOU

I would like to thank my friends around the world for helping to write this letter:

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Nidhi Singal, PhD

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This support creates more learning opportunities for students around the world.



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**SPECIAL OLYMPICS
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