

# Project UNIFY 2011 – 2012



**Special Olympics**

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Project UNIFY.



## Final Evaluation Report

Special Olympics Global Collaborating Center  
University of Massachusetts Boston



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**Appendix A**

**Appendix B**

## I. Description of Project UNIFY

For the past four years, as part of the National Youth Activation Demonstration, the US Department of Education (DOE) has funded Special Olympics International (SOI) to allocate funds to State Special Olympics (SO) Programs for Project UNIFY, a school-based program which brings youth with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) together through sports and awareness activities. The specific objectives of Project UNIFY are: 1) to create school communities of acceptance where students with ID feel welcome and are routinely included in, and feel a part of, all school activities, opportunities, and functions; 2) to communicate the value of Special Olympics as a community partner that offers programming to schools that benefits all students; and, 3) to promote positive attitudes among students without disabilities toward their peers with ID. Project UNIFY's stated purpose is to *activate youth to develop school communities where all young people are agents of change – fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with ID by utilizing the existing programs of Special Olympics, as well as new, student-led initiatives*. For years, SOI has recognized the role that youth play in achieving long-term societal goals of acceptance and inclusion. Project UNIFY is built upon this premise that in order to have the greatest impact, the change process needs to start with young people. SOI views youth as “powerful and effective advocates ... open-minded to new things” and as having “the courage of conviction to step up and defend their beliefs.”<sup>1</sup> For this reason, SOI considers young people to be some of the most powerful and effective advocates of social inclusion and acceptance. In keeping with this belief, one of Project UNIFY's main goals is to foster youth leadership, providing youth with opportunities to have a voice and to take on active, leading roles in their schools and beyond.

Project UNIFY has been planned and implemented at three levels since the program was first launched in 2008 – the national level, including collaborations with national education organizations and the formation of a National Education Leaders Network (NELN) as well as a national Youth Activation Committee (YAC) of youth leaders; the state level, made up of the State SO Programs and state-level ELNs and YACs; and the school level, made up of the individual schools within states. Since its inception, Project UNIFY at the school level has incorporated a number of different SO initiatives which can be implemented in various combinations to advance the goal of creating school communities of acceptance and inclusion. The initiatives that make up Project UNIFY school-level programming are grouped under three main components: 1) sports and skill development – providing students with and without ID opportunities to participate in sports activities alongside one another; 2) youth leadership and activation – providing students with and without ID opportunities to participate in school-wide activities and take on leadership roles in promoting Project UNIFY activities in the school; and 3) education and awareness – providing educational opportunities for all students in the school to learn about acceptance and respect.

To implement Project UNIFY, SOI funds State Programs according to their level of commitment to Project UNIFY. Of the 38 State SO Programs implementing Project UNIFY in Year 4 (2011-2012), 11

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<sup>1</sup>Special Olympics International, “Get Your Friends or School Involved,” [www.specialolympics.org/schools\\_and\\_youth.aspx](http://www.specialolympics.org/schools_and_youth.aspx).

Programs applied for and received High Activation<sup>2</sup> funding. The remaining 27 State Programs received Building Bridges<sup>3</sup> funding. In addition to the state-level designation, SOI also acknowledges that there are at least two types of schools implementing Project UNIFY: those just beginning Project UNIFY (“Emerging Project UNIFY” schools – Category 2) and those that have reached a point where they are able to implement more comprehensive Project UNIFY programming (“Project UNIFY” schools – Category 1).

State SO Programs are expected to partner with and serve as a resource for schools as they implement the Project UNIFY initiatives. In Year 4, more specific guidelines were provided to State SO Programs regarding what types of activities should be carried out in the schools in order to provide a clearer picture for how schools might combine initiatives to create robust Project UNIFY programs. This is the first year that SOI provided more prescribed school-level guidelines for State Programs, and the changes from the Year 3 to the Year 4 guidelines represent SOI’s understanding of how to best implement and integrate Project UNIFY within schools. Generally, in a Category 1 school, it is expected that initiatives are implemented that address each of the three main components of Project UNIFY (sports and skill development; youth leadership and activation; education and awareness), with an understanding that Project UNIFY is not just an incident or event that happens for one day, or a single experience, but rather year-long or seasonal integrated activities. A Category 2 school is one that is on its way to becoming a Project UNIFY school. Therefore in these schools, rather than implementing activities from all three components, it is expected that schools implement at least two initiatives that came from two of the different areas, with an understanding that youth activation and leadership are key components that should be present. Using these guidelines, State SO Programs have been given autonomy to work with schools to create unique Project UNIFY programs that best fit within the goals and existing programming of each school, and that best fit the population of students they serve.

To gather information about Project UNIFY in the spirit of continuous improvement, SOI has partnered with the Center for Social Development and Education (CSDE) at UMass Boston for the purpose of evaluating the program. Each of the past four years, we have conducted an extensive evaluation of Project UNIFY at the State SO Program and school levels, focused on understanding what Project UNIFY looks like in practice and how it impacts those involved. The evaluation has been critical, as the results have contributed to the ongoing refinement and enhancement of Project UNIFY. Each year, the evaluation has produced findings that have helped guide the developmental course of Project UNIFY by aiding SOI in the continued development and adjustment of goals, guidelines, and tools. The purpose of this report is to describe the goals and findings of the Year 4 evaluation, with an eye toward providing an update on the status of Project UNIFY and recommendations for moving forward.

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<sup>2</sup> *High Activation* funding is the category of increased investment awarded to State Programs that exhibit higher potential for intensive programming in their schools and more engagement within Project UNIFY.

<sup>3</sup> *Building Bridges* funding is given to State Programs that are still developing their programming.

## II. Evaluation Design

### A. Overview

The Year 4 evaluation of Project UNIFY had several objectives, including an examination of how Project UNIFY was implemented in all schools, as in previous years, with a more specific emphasis on assessing the differences in Project UNIFY programming taking place in Category 1 and 2 schools from both High Activation and Building Bridges states. In addition, building on what was learned in the previous three years, a continued emphasis was also placed on documenting the value of Project UNIFY to schools, students, and participating State SO Programs. This objective was further extended in Year 4 to better capture the voice of students with ID participating in Project UNIFY and to better characterize their experiences in Project UNIFY and in school. In addition, beyond continuing to document the basic participation of students in Project UNIFY activities, the evaluation explored student engagement in Project UNIFY and opportunities for youth leadership. Finally, the evaluation also focused on defining what constitutes a successful Project UNIFY partnership between State SO Programs and the schools including the differing models of implementation employed.

Using the above objectives as a guide, the evaluation was designed to address the following questions:

1. What was the scope of Project UNIFY programming in schools?
  - How many schools were designated as Category 1 and 2 in Year 4?
  - What initiatives and combinations of initiatives were most commonly carried out in Category 1 and 2 schools?
  - Were the initiatives carried out in participating schools aligned with the Project UNIFY guidelines for suggested activities put forth by SOI?
  - How was Project UNIFY implemented within schools?
  - Has progress been made in Project UNIFY schools across Years 2, 3 and 4?
  - What were the models of Project UNIFY implementation utilized at schools?
  
2. What is the value of Project UNIFY?
  - What is the value of Project UNIFY for participating State SO Programs?
  - What is the value of Project UNIFY for participating schools?
  - What is the value of Project UNIFY for participating students with and without ID?
    - Does participation in Project UNIFY promote positive attitudes among students without disabilities toward their peers with ID?
    - Does participation in Project UNIFY affect how students without disabilities interact with students with ID attending their school?
    - Does participation in Project UNIFY impact the school experiences of students with ID?

3. How are students engaged as leaders in Project UNIFY?
  - What were the opportunities for youth leadership at the state and school levels?
  - How and why did students get involved with Project UNIFY?
  
4. How did State SO Programs and schools work together in Project UNIFY?
  - What did the partnerships look like?
  - What were the models of Project UNIFY partnerships that occurred between State SO Programs and the schools?

The evaluation methodology utilized in Year 4 retains many of the features of previous evaluations in that once again information was collected about Project UNIFY from multiple sources. In Year 4, this included State SO CEOs and staff, school liaisons<sup>4</sup>, students, and administrators. The evaluation methodology was expanded, however, to involve a mix of qualitative and quantitative data such as large-scale surveys, site visits, and one-on-one interviews. This multi-method, multi-source design aimed to document the value and benefit of Project UNIFY for all constituents, particularly students and schools.

In the Year 4 evaluation, similar to Years 2 and 3, information was collected 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. A more in-depth evaluation was conducted in a selected subsample of schools from High Activation states over the course of the year. The following methods sections will describe the participants, instruments employed, and the evaluation procedures.

## B. Methods

### 1. Participants

**State SO Programs.** In Year 4, 38 State SO Programs applied for and received Project UNIFY funding. Of these, eleven states (AZ, CO, ID, MD, MI, MO, NH, NC, OR, SC, TX) were identified as High Activation states with the remaining 27 identified as Building Bridges (CT, DE, GA, HI, IA, IL, IN, LA, MA, ME, NE, NJ, NM, NoCA/NV, NY, OH, OK, PA, RI, SoCA, UT, VA, VT, WA, WI, WY). One staff member from each of the State SO Programs, identified as the person most knowledgeable about Project UNIFY activities in their state, as well as the CEO/President of the State Program, participated in the evaluation. Data was received from all 38 State Program staff members who are primarily responsible for Project UNIFY in their state, as well as from 37<sup>5</sup> CEO/Presidents of the State SO Programs.

**Liaisons.** School liaisons were identified with the assistance of State SO Programs. State Programs were asked to provide a complete list of participating schools in their state, along with contact information for each of the designated school liaisons. State Programs submitted these school lists to SOI in January

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<sup>4</sup> The liaison is the person responsible for the implementation of Project UNIFY activities that took place in the school.

<sup>5</sup> Two of the 38 State Programs (Northern California and Nevada) share the same CEO/President.

2012, and final lists were received by the evaluation team in mid-February. Contact information was provided to the evaluation team for 1,776 schools. These schools were contacted through the Project UNIFY school liaison. Of the 1,776 schools initially contacted to participate in the evaluation, 1,073 liaisons satisfactorily completed surveys (60% response rate). Of those liaisons who completed the survey, the majority were female (80%), special education teachers (54%), with an average age of 43 years. The majority of the liaisons (78%) had previous involvement with SO and on average were involved for 9 and half years. Approximately half of the liaisons (53%) were involved in Project UNIFY in their schools last year. (See Appendix A: Table A1 for liaison demographic information.)

In addition, liaisons from the 60 schools participating in the more in-depth evaluation (see **Schools** below), were asked to complete an additional brief monthly log. While liaisons often needed multiple reminders to complete the monthly log, all complied.

**Schools.** A total of 60 schools were selected from the 11 High Activation states to participate in a more in-depth evaluation. Of these 60 schools, 92%, or 52 schools (21 middle schools and 31 high schools) were able to participate fully. (See Appendix B for information about the school selection procedures.) Reasons for attrition of the 8 remaining schools varied, 3 schools were dropped from the evaluation at the request of the liaison due to time constraints, and 5 schools encountered difficulty administering the student surveys.<sup>6</sup> In the 21 participating middle schools, the size of the student body ranged from very small (67) to large (1350), with a median of 750 students. In the 31 participating high schools, the student body size ranged from small (230) to large (2200) with a median of 1,330 students. There were students with ID attending all of the participating middle and high schools.

Schools were very similar to one another in terms of school climate, as measured by questions asked of students, liaisons, and administrators. Specifically, across the 52 schools, most students felt that their school supported diversity and multiculturalism. Students reported that interactions between peers in school were generally positive, although there were also instances of bullying and times when students did not get along. Among liaisons, the majority believed that staff in their schools tried new ideas in the classroom to create a more inclusive environment (69%), provided opportunities for all students to serve in leadership roles both inside and outside the classroom (71%), and took the time to get to know students beyond their classwork (85%). Most of the administrators surveyed (between 74% and 89%) agreed with liaisons on these points.

Among the 52 schools that participated in the more in-depth evaluation, 9 were selected to receive site visits. The 9 schools participating in the site visits (5 middle schools and 4 high schools) were selected from four High Activation states (CO, MI, MO, NC). These schools were selected based on information received from schools via the monthly logs and in consultation with the High Activation State SO Programs. Specifically, the evaluation team worked with State Programs to identify at least one school that was new to Project UNIFY in Year 4, and at least one school that had participated in previous years. These 9 schools were similar to the larger sample of middle and high schools participating in the intensive evaluation in terms of size, student composition, and school climate.

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<sup>6</sup> Three of the schools were not able to follow the procedures for the administration of the student surveys, and, in the other two schools, there were errors with the student survey materials they received.

**Administrators.** Administrators were identified in each of the 52 schools that participated fully in the evaluation. Of these 52 administrators, 38 completed surveys (73% response rate). Of the administrators who completed the survey, just over half were male (58%). Two-thirds were the principal of the school (68%). The administrators had been at the school for 5 years, on average.

**Students.** A total of 5,991 students participated in a survey administered at the end of the school year; 1,659 were middle school students and 4,332 were high school students. (See Appendix B for student selection procedures.) Males and females were equally represented across the entire sample (45% and 55%, respectively), and the majority of the students were white (77%), followed by Hispanic (22%) and African American (20%). Most of the middle school students were in 8th grade (50%), followed by 7th grade (31%) and 6th grade (19%), while the high school students were divided evenly among the four grades (26% in 9th grade, 26% in 10th grade, 22% in 11th grade, and 24% in 12th grade). (See Appendix A: Table A2 for student demographic information.)

A total of 971 students participated in surveys given at both the beginning and end of the school year. All were from the middle school level. (See Appendix B for student selection procedures.) Males and females were equally represented in the sample (47% and 53%, respectively), and the majority of the students were white (80%) and 19% were African American. In addition, just under a quarter were Hispanic (23%). Students were split across grades, with most in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade (45%). (See Appendix A: Table A3 for student demographic information.)

A select number of students were interviewed at the 9 schools participating in site visits. In total, 24 students without a disability participated in in-depth interviews. The majority of these students were female (71%), and the group was divided evenly between middle school (46%) and high school (54%) students. In addition, 23 students with an intellectual disability also participated in in-depth interviews. Half of the students were female (48%), and the students were also evenly divided between middle school (52%) and high school (48%).

## 2. Evaluation Instruments

**State SO Program Staff Survey.** To assess how State Programs support and communicate with the Project UNIFY schools in their state, the *State SO Program Staff Survey* was administered. The 37-item online survey, adapted from the instrument used in Year 3, was used to collect information about the structure of Project UNIFY at the state level; recruitment of schools to participate in Project UNIFY and various approaches utilized for supporting and maintaining relationships with schools; State Program goals for Project UNIFY; challenges faced in implementing Project UNIFY; and the funding of Project UNIFY.

**State SO CEO Survey.** To assess the value of Project UNIFY to State SO Programs, the *State SO CEO Survey* was administered. This brief 6-item online survey was used to collect information about how Project UNIFY has changed perceptions of Special Olympics and increased opportunities for



collaboration with schools in the state, as well as what challenges were faced while implementing Project UNIFY.

**School Liaison Survey.** To assess the scope of Project UNIFY at the school level, the *School Liaison Survey* was administered. The 146-item online survey was used to collect information about the initiatives that took place during the 2011-2012 school year as part of Project UNIFY; the people involved in program planning and implementation; collaboration with the State SO Program; the value of Project UNIFY to the school and students; the challenges schools faced in implementing Project UNIFY; and the financing of Project UNIFY. This survey was similar to that administered in Year 3.

**Administrator Survey.** To assess the role of Project UNIFY in schools, the *Administrator Survey* was administered. This 24-item online survey was used to collect information about the administrator's knowledge of and role in Project UNIFY, the alignment of the Project UNIFY goals with their school's goals, and the value of Project UNIFY programming for students.

**Student Surveys.** To examine students' experiences in Project UNIFY two separate scales were employed, the *Student Involvement in Project UNIFY scale* and the *Youth Experiences Survey*. To assess students' attitudes toward their peers with ID, the *Impact of Inclusion Scale* and the *Behavioral Intentions* scales were administered. To determine the actual behavior and interactions between students with and without ID, the *Student Interaction Scale* was used. Descriptions of the individual scales that made up the student surveys are provided below.

**Student Involvement in Project UNIFY Scale.** To assess the involvement of students in Project UNIFY activities, students were asked to indicate whether or not they participated in any of the Project UNIFY initiatives (R-Word Campaign, Unified Sports, Traditional Special Olympics Sports, Youth Athletes Program Volunteer, Partners Club, Special Olympics Sports Day, Fans in the Stands, Project UNIFY Rally, Fundraising Activities, Youth Leadership Training, *Get Into It* Curriculum) reported to have taken place by the school liaison. [Note: the school liaison provided an ongoing account of the activities taking place in the school via an activity log submitted every month to the evaluation team.] Although scores could range from 0 – 11 on the *Student Involvement Scale*, the number and type of initiatives implemented within their schools limited the number of initiatives in which students had the opportunity to take part. As a result, no students had the opportunity to participate in all 11 initiatives. Thus, the range of scores differed by school and was based on the number of initiatives offered in the school, as reported by the liaisons.

**Youth Experiences Survey (YES 2.0).** To measure the experiences students' gained from their involvement in Project UNIFY initiatives a revised version of the YES (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Hansen & Larson, 2005) was employed, as in Year 3. For the purposes of this study, 13 questions were included from four subscales of the YES (Identity Exploration, Identity Reflection, Diverse Peer Relationships, and Group Process Skills) as these questions most closely related to the experiences provided by participation in Project UNIFY. Questions were adapted from their original format to fit the population of students in middle and high school. Examples of questions include "While you were doing Project UNIFY activities, did you do things that you didn't get to do anywhere else?"; "Because of Project

UNIFY, did you learn that working together requires making compromises?"; and "While you were doing Project UNIFY activities, did you learn that you have things in common with students with intellectual disabilities?" Students responded on a 3-point scale, including "Yes, Definitely", "Yes, Sometimes", and "No." The scale yielded scores that ranged from 0 to 26, with higher scores indicating more positive experiences. Reliability ratings were adequate for each domain and the total YES score. Coefficient alpha ratings for internal consistency for the total YES score were .91 for middle school students and .93 for high school students; coefficient alpha ratings for internal consistency for the four subscales ranged from .71 to .81 for middle school students and from .77 to .86 for high school students.

**Impact of Inclusion Scale.** To assess students' perceptions of the impacts of including students with ID in classrooms with typically-developing students, the *Impact of Inclusion Scale* was employed. The scale was adapted from the Attitudes Toward Persons with an Intellectual Disability Questionnaire (Rillotta & Nettelbeck, 2007). The adapted scale consists of 10 items that assess cognitive aspects of youth attitudes. Youth were asked questions such as "Do you think you could learn things from students with intellectual disabilities?" and "Do you think there would be a lot of problems if there were students with intellectual disabilities in your class?" Students responded on a 4-point scale, including "Yes", "Probably Yes", "Probably No", and "No", with three items reverse coded. Possible scores ranged from 10 to 40 with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes toward students with ID. The coefficient alpha index for internal consistency was .83 for both middle school and high school students.

**Behavioral Intentions Scale.** To assess the attitudes of youth toward their peers with ID, the *Behavioral Intentions Scale*, a subscale of the "National Survey of Youth Attitudes" (Siperstein, Parker, Norins Bardon & Widaman, 2007) was employed. The scale was adapted for use with high school students.<sup>7</sup> The Behavioral Intentions Scale is a 12-item scale that assesses youth's intent to interact with a peer with intellectual disabilities both in and out of school. For example, in-school questions asked students about what they would do with another student in their school: "I would say hello to a student with intellectual disabilities" or "I would talk to a student with intellectual disabilities during free time or lunch." Out-of-school items focused on activities that take place outside of school, such as: "I would invite a student with an intellectual disability to go out with me and my friends" and "I would go to the movies with a student with an intellectual disability." Students responded on a 4-point scale including "Yes", "Probably Yes", "Probably No", and "No". Scores ranged from 0 to 36, with higher scores indicating more willingness to interact with youth with ID. The coefficient alpha index of internal consistency was .93 for middle school students and .94 for high school students.

**Student Interactions Scale.** To assess the self-reported interactions of youth with their peers with ID, the *Student Interactions Scale* was employed. This 8-item scale, adapted from the "Behavioral Intentions Scale" assessed youths' interactions with their peers with ID in and out of school. On this scale, those students who indicate that they know a student with ID at their school were asked about the nature of these interactions. Youth were asked questions such as, "During this school year, have you eaten lunch at school with a student with an intellectual disability?" and "During this school year, have you

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<sup>7</sup> Questions differed slightly for middle school and high school surveys. However, format and theoretical design of questions stayed the same.

participated in a school club or other extracurricular activity with a student with an intellectual disability?” Students responded “yes” or “no” to each item, which yielded a range of 0-8, with higher scores indicating more interaction.

**Interview Protocols.** Several interview protocols were developed for use during site visits with schools and State Programs. Questions posed to *school liaisons* included, for example, those that ask about the goals of the Project UNIFY programming in the school as well as its implementation, their role as liaison, the involvement of other teachers and administration, their plans for Project UNIFY in the coming years, and their relationship with the State SO Program. *Administrators* were asked about their goals for Project UNIFY in the school and the role it plays in fostering social inclusion, the role they play in programming, and their relationship with the State SO Program. Similar to liaisons and administrators, *State SO Program staff* were also asked about their partnerships with schools in addition to their assistance and involvement with the Project UNIFY schools in their state. Finally, students with and without ID were asked about their involvement in Project UNIFY in terms of the initiatives they participated in and what, if any, roles they played in the planning and implementation of initiatives. Additionally, students with ID were asked questions about school more generally and about their social interactions with other students at school, and students without disabilities were asked about their reasons for getting involved in Project UNIFY and the impact that Project UNIFY has had on their school.

### 3. Procedures

As in Years 2 and 3, one staff member from each participating State SO Program and the liaison from each participating school were asked to fill out an online survey in the spring, after most Project UNIFY programming had been completed and/or planned. In addition, State SO Program CEOs from each of the participating states, and administrators from the sample of schools selected to participate in the more in-depth evaluation, were also asked to fill out surveys during the same time period.

For State SO staff members and State Program CEOs, an online survey link for the ***State Program Staff Survey*** and ***State SO CEO Survey*** was emailed in early May 2012, and SO staff and CEOs were given until the end of the school year to complete the survey. Weekly reminder emails were sent to respondents during the period that the survey was “open” to increase the response rate.

School liaisons were emailed an online survey link for the ***School Liaison Survey*** in early April 2012 and liaisons were given until the beginning of June to complete the survey. Bi-weekly, and later weekly reminder emails were sent out to respondents during the period that the survey was “open”. State SO Programs were also given weekly updates alerting them of the response rates for the liaisons in their state. State Programs were encouraged to follow up with liaisons who had yet to complete the survey. Liaisons from the schools selected for the in-depth evaluation were also asked to complete a brief online ***monthly log***. These logs were used to document what Project UNIFY activities were taking place in the schools and as a way to maintain strong relationships and ongoing communication with the liaisons. Each month, a short reminder e-mail, including a link to the online survey, was sent to each liaison.

Administrators from these same in-depth schools were emailed an online survey link in early February 2012 and asked to complete the survey by April 1<sup>st</sup>. Bi-weekly and later weekly reminder emails were sent out to administrators during the period the survey was “open”.

A sample of students attending the schools selected to participate in the in-depth evaluation were asked to fill out the **student surveys**. In schools that had participated in Project UNIFY prior to Year 4, surveys were administered once at the end of the school-year (April/May 2012). In schools new to Project UNIFY in Year 4,<sup>8</sup> surveys were administered at the beginning of the school year (October/November 2011) before Project UNIFY activities had begun, and at the end of the school year (April/May 2012) once most activities were complete. (See Appendix B for information about the student survey procedures).

Finally, **site visits** were conducted in 9 of the 52 schools participating in the intensive evaluation during February/March 2012. During these site visits, **interviews** were conducted with school liaisons, administrators, teachers, and students with and without ID.

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<sup>8</sup> All new schools in which the surveys were administered at the beginning and end of the school year were middle schools. Because of the nature of schedules followed in most high schools (e.g. block scheduling, rotating classes per semester, etc.), it was difficult to administer surveys to the same students at two points in time.

### III. Project UNIFY in the Schools: Year 4

Documenting the implementation of Project UNIFY has been a consistent, ongoing goal of the evaluation since the program's inception. As a nationwide, school-based program directed through nearly 40 separate state organizations, there is a great deal to learn about Project UNIFY in terms of the initiatives implemented and in the involvement of State SO Programs, school personnel, and students with and without ID. Acquiring a broad understanding of the implementation of Project UNIFY is an important step toward learning how best to create impactful programming. As such, the following section describes the implementation of Project UNIFY in schools as reported by State SO Programs and liaisons. Areas explored include the scope of Project UNIFY; the form that Project UNIFY programming takes within schools (that is, the initiatives most often implemented as part of Project UNIFY programming, as well as the adherence to the guidelines put forth by SOI); and the processes by which Project UNIFY operates in schools. In addition, school-based models of implementation are presented, along with specific examples of Project UNIFY schools exemplifying these models. Finally, trends in the growth of Project UNIFY within schools over time are examined. This information not only provides a broad picture of how Project UNIFY was implemented in Year 4 but also how schools build their programming over time.

#### A. Scope of Project UNIFY

In examining the scope of Project UNIFY, participating schools were identified through the reports of SO Program staff from High Activation and Building Bridges states. In Year 4, as noted previously (see Section I), SOI acknowledged that there are at two types of schools implementing Project UNIFY: those just beginning Project UNIFY ("Emerging Project UNIFY" schools – Category 2) and those with more developed and comprehensive programs ("Project UNIFY" schools – Category 1). As in previous years, SOI provided State SO Programs with guidelines for what should be carried out as part of Project UNIFY programming. However, the guidelines put forth in Year 4 more specifically indicated what types of activities should be carried out in schools and differentiated the requirements for Category 1 and Category 2 schools.

Using the guidelines provided by SOI, each of the 38 State SO Programs were asked to designate their participating schools as either Category 1 or Category 2. Of the 1,073 schools for which evaluation data was available,<sup>9</sup> approximately half were designated as Category 1 (44%) by their State SO Program and half as Category 2 (56%) (see Table 1).

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<sup>9</sup> Liaison surveys were distributed to 1,776 liaisons. The 1,073 responses received represent a 60% response rate.

**Table 1.** Percentage of schools designated as Category 1 and Category 2

	<b>Total Number of Schools</b>	<b>Category 1 Schools</b>	<b>Category 2 Schools</b>
High Activation States	517	52%	48%
Building Bridges States	554	36%	64%

Of the schools participating in Project UNIFY in Year 4, approximately a third (31%) were new to Project UNIFY, representing the continued growth of Project UNIFY in the schools. In contrast, just under a third of the schools (30%) had participated in Project UNIFY for 3 or more years (See Table 2), representing the sustainability of programming. (See Section III – D for more information on growth of Project UNIFY programming.)

**Table 2.** Length of time schools have been participating in Project UNIFY\*

	<b>1 Year</b>	<b>2 Years</b>	<b>3+ Years</b>
All Schools	31%	24%	30%
Schools from...			
<i>High Activation States</i>	38%	25%	25%
<i>Building Bridges States</i>	24%	24%	32%

\*Does not equal 100% as some liaisons were unsure when Project UNIFY began in the school.

In Year 4, SOI required that all State Programs receiving High Activation awards identify a minimum of 33% of their participating schools as Category 1 schools. Of the 11 High Activation State Programs, over three-quarters (82%) identified at least a third of their schools as Category 1, with the remaining High Activation Programs closely approaching this goal (See Table 3). Specifically, only two of the High Activation SO Programs (New Hampshire and Arizona), did not fulfill this requirement. (For a complete listing of all State SO Programs see Appendix A, Table A4.)

**Table 3.** Percentage of schools in High Activation states designated as Category 1 or Category 2 by the State SO Program

	Total Number of Schools*	Category 1 Schools	Category 2 Schools
Arizona	53	28%	72%
Colorado	41	73%	27%
Idaho	18	100%	0%
Maryland	47	43%	57%
Michigan	38	34%	66%
Missouri	16	56%	44%
North Carolina	104	71%	29%
New Hampshire	34	24%	77%
Oregon	19	53%	47%
South Carolina	73	48%	52%
Texas	74	50%	50%

\*The total number of schools includes only those schools for which completed liaison data was available and does not represent the total number of schools implementing Project UNIFY in a state.

Overall, most State SO Programs receiving High Activation funding were able to meet the requirements outlined by SOI regarding the percentage of Category 1 schools in their state. In addition to this designation by the State Programs, it was also important to explore the actual implementation of Project UNIFY and adherence to the guidelines in Category 1 and 2 schools, in part to ascertain whether schools designated as Category 1 are able to implement the higher levels of programming expected. Therefore, the next section will explore the implementation of Project UNIFY in terms of the types of initiatives implemented in the both Category 1 and 2 schools.

## **B. Implementation of Project UNIFY Programming in the School**

To examine the school-level implementation of Project UNIFY in the schools identified by State Programs, the evaluation relied on the reports of the school liaisons. This included a documentation of the specific initiatives that took place in each school as well as an examination of the extent to which schools implemented programming that aligned with SOI's guidelines. Because liaisons were the most intimately involved in Project UNIFY implementation at the school level, the information they provided was key to fully understanding the breadth of Project UNIFY as it occurred across all schools.

When examining Project UNIFY programming in terms of the initiatives implemented in schools overall, the most common initiative was the R-word campaign (56%), followed by Unified Sports (46%), Traditional Special Olympic Sports (44%), and Partners Club (39%). Among those initiatives less frequently implemented in the schools were *Get Into It* (29%), Fundraising (27%), Youth Leadership

Training (20%), and a Project UNIFY Rally (18%) (see Table 4). As expected, given the varying guidelines outlined for Category 1 and Category 2 schools, the implementation of Project UNIFY differed between these groups of schools. For example, Category 1 schools were more likely than Category 2 schools to implement an R-Word campaign, include Unified Sports, and establish a Partners Club. (For a listing of initiatives implemented by state see Appendix A: Table A5.) In addition to the initiatives, some schools also provided opportunities for students to participate in Project UNIFY activities conducted at the state or regional level. For example, in a few schools (15%) students attended a Youth Summit or were members of the State YAC (16%) (for more information about the state-level YAC see Section IV– A). Again, there were some differences between Category 1 and 2 schools, with Category 1 schools more likely to involve youth in both the Youth Summit (24% of Category 1 schools versus 8% of Category 2 schools) and the State YAC (16% of Category 1 schools versus 4% of Category 2 schools)

**Table 4.** Percentage of schools that included each initiative as part of Project UNIFY

	All Schools	Category 1	Category 2
R-Word	56%	73%	43%
Unified Sports	46%	58%	36%
Traditional SO Sports	44%	48%	40%
Partners Club	39%	49%	31%
SO Sports Day	33%	32%	33%
Fans in the Stands	29%	38%	22%
Get Into It	29%	36%	22%
Fundraising	27%	37%	20%
Youth Leadership Training	20%	25%	15%
Young Athletes*	19%	26%	28%
Project UNIFY Rally	18%	24%	13%

\*Young Athletes programming differs among grade levels: At the elementary school level, Young Athletes most often includes students participating as athletes. Implemented at middle or high schools, Young Athletes includes students volunteering to help younger students.

As described previously (see Section I), the Year 4 guidelines provided to State Programs divide Project UNIFY activities into three main components: sports and skill development; youth leadership and activation; and education and awareness. The ways in which liaisons were expected to incorporate activities from these three areas differed for Category 1 and Category 2 schools. Given their designation as schools with more developed and comprehensive programming, liaisons from Category 1 schools were expected to incorporate activities from each of the three components of Project UNIFY. Specifically, Category 1 schools were expected to incorporate either Unified Sports or Young Athletes (from the sports and skill development area), to involve youth as project leaders, implement a school-wide activity, include one other activity that provides youth with leadership opportunities (from the



youth leadership/activation area), and to introduce and utilize *Get Into It* (from the education/awareness area).

Overall, few schools (23%) were able to meet all of the guidelines outlined for Category 1 schools. This is in part due to the smaller number of liaisons that reported using *Get Into It* (36%), which was required of Category 1 schools in Year 4. When looking at the separate elements of the guidelines, however, nearly three-quarters of Category 1 school liaisons (72%) reported implementing a sports activity (See Table 5). Even more liaisons incorporated the various pieces of the youth leadership and activation requirement, as well over three-quarters of Category 1 liaisons implemented school-wide activities (86%), involved youth as project leaders (84%), and implemented another activity that provides youth with leadership opportunities (81%). Clearly, the majority of schools were successful in fulfilling the elements separately, but fewer were able to implement all. Moreover, in considering the guidelines without *Get Into It*, approximately half of the Category 1 schools (54%) were able to fulfill guidelines.

**Table 5.** Percentage of schools to meet each of the areas outlined in the Category 1 school guidelines

<b>Project UNIFY Components</b>	<b>Schools Meeting the Guidelines</b>
<i>Sports and skill development</i>	
Unified Sports or Young Athletes	72%
<i>Youth Leadership and Activation</i>	
Youth as project leaders	84%
School-wide Spread the Word activities (R-Word, Fans in the Stands, Sports Day)	86%
Youth Rally, Leadership Training or Partner Club	81%
<i>Education</i>	
Get Into It	36%

Given that Category 2 schools are designated as those with less comprehensive Project UNIFY programming, the guidelines in these emerging schools were broader than the Category 1 guidelines in a few ways. First, rather than implementing activities from all three components (sports and skill development; youth leadership/activation; education/awareness), liaisons were expected to simply implement at least two initiatives that came from two of the different areas. Second, the sports and skill development area for Category 2 schools included Traditional SO Sports and Fans in the Stands,<sup>10</sup> which provide students without disabilities exposure to Special Olympics sports activities, even though they do not provide the opportunity for students with and without ID to participate alongside one another as equals. Overall, over half of the liaisons from Category 2 schools (63%) implemented at least two

<sup>10</sup> Fans in the Stands was categorized as a youth leadership/activation activity under the Category 1 guidelines but was included as a sports and skill development activity under the Category 2 guidelines.

activities drawn from two different areas. When looking at the elements of the guidelines separately, almost three-quarters of liaisons (73%) reported including a sports activity, and just over half (61%) implemented a youth leadership and activation activity (see Table 6). Similar to Category 1 schools, fewer liaisons from Category 2 schools used *Get Into It* (22%) as part of their programming.

**Table 6.** Percentage of schools to meet each of the areas outlined in the Category 2 school guidelines

<b>Project UNIFY Components</b>	<b>Schools Meeting the Guidelines</b>
Sports and skill development	73%
Youth leadership and activation	61%
Education and awareness	22%

Together, the majority of the liaisons from Category 1 and Category 2 schools were able to meet the Year 4 guidelines set forth by SOI. It was evident that schools struggled most with fulfilling the education and awareness requirement, as few liaisons reported using *Get Into It* in their schools. Since distributing the Year 4 guidelines, SOI began to work toward altering the school-based guidelines, recognizing that requiring schools to use *Get Into It* may be too narrow an expectation, and that schools are raising awareness and educating their students, staff, and communities in other ways. As such, SOI acknowledged that *Get Into It*, while certainly a useful way to educate students, may be best utilized as supplemental to or in congruence with other ongoing or established programs in the school, or with other Project UNIFY initiatives aimed at education and raising awareness (e.g. the R-Word campaign).

Therefore, during the course of Year 4, the three school-based components of Project UNIFY programming were adjusted by SOI; while maintaining the essential structure and spirit of the three components, these revised definitions expand the ways in which schools may organize their programming to meet the goals of Project UNIFY. The revised components are: 1) *Inclusive Sports and Fitness Opportunities*: providing students with and without ID opportunities to participate in sports activities alongside one another; 2) *Youth Leadership Opportunities*: providing students with and without ID opportunities to take on leadership roles in promoting Project UNIFY activities in the school and in the community; and, 3) *Whole-School Involvement*: providing opportunities for all students in the school to participate in and learn from Project UNIFY through school-wide activities. (Note: For the remainder of the report, any discussion of the components will refer to the updated definitions.)

In considering the implementation of Project UNIFY using these newly defined guidelines, across all schools, over half of the liaisons (62%) reported implementing an inclusive sports activity in their school, while approximately three-quarters offered youth leadership opportunities (72%) and opportunities for whole school involvement and awareness (77%) in their programming (see Table 7). As expected,

differences remain between Category 1 and Category 2 schools. Nonetheless, according to the reports of liaisons almost all Category 1 schools (90%) and two-thirds of Category 2 schools (66%) were able to implement activities from two of the three components. Moreover, nearly two-thirds of liaisons from Category 1 schools (60%) implemented activities from all three components, reflecting well-rounded Project UNIFY programming.

**Table 7.** Percentage of schools including each of the components as defined in the revised guidelines

<b>Revised Project UNIFY Components</b>	<b>All Schools</b>	<b>Category 1</b>	<b>Category 2</b>
Inclusive Sports Opportunities	62%	72%	54%
Youth Leadership Opportunities	72%	86%	61%
Whole School Involvement/Awareness	77%	87%	69%
Included initiatives from 2 of the 3 components	76%	90%	66%
Included initiatives from all 3 components	43%	60%	30%

Overall, it is clear that in this initial year of Category 1 and Category 2 designations, the labels placed on schools by State SO Programs were not always indicative of the Project UNIFY programming that most often takes place in schools. While there were many schools implementing multiple Project UNIFY initiatives, there were many schools that did not fully adhere to the guidelines, particularly with respect to the use of *Get Into It*. The reasons for this are unclear: liaisons may not have been aware of the guidelines; State Programs may have designated schools incorrectly; or liaisons may have simply found the guidelines unattainable. With the revised guidelines put forth by SOI during the course of Year 4 that allow for more flexibility within schools as they work to create and implement Project UNIFY programming, it is possible that schools will be better able to take advantage of these more varied opportunities to incorporate initiatives from each of the three components in the coming year and beyond.

### **C. School Operation of Project UNIFY Programming**

To examine how Project UNIFY was implemented in schools, including the awareness of Project UNIFY throughout the school, the various parties involved in planning and implementation, and the challenges that impeded the progress of Project UNIFY implementation, the evaluation once again relied on the reports of liaisons. In addition to providing information about the breadth of Project UNIFY as it occurred across all schools, liaisons were also in the best position to fully represent *how* Project UNIFY programming took place within schools.

In a broad way, the level of awareness of Project UNIFY within a school provides a useful indication of how Project UNIFY programming looks within a school. For instance, a school beginning Project UNIFY may only create awareness among those students immediately involved in a team or club, while more

extensive programming may lend itself to school-wide awareness. As a first step in documenting awareness, liaisons were asked about how visible Project UNIFY programming was in the school. Overall, only a third of liaisons (35%) reported that most or all of the students and teachers in their school knew about the Project UNIFY activities taking place. Additionally, liaisons were also asked about how Project UNIFY fit within the school more broadly, as the extent to which Project UNIFY is integrated into other ongoing events or programs could impact its visibility in the school. For instance, liaisons were asked how often Project UNIFY took place in collaboration with other events at the school. Less than a quarter of liaisons (20%) reported that Project UNIFY often or always took place in collaboration with other events, suggesting that Project UNIFY activities were not generally incorporated into other school programming. Similarly, only a quarter of liaisons (24%) reported that the values and lessons of the Project UNIFY activities were often or always incorporated into the classroom by teachers. This is likely connected to the fact that not all initiatives implemented were school-wide. That is, for many initiatives, only students from certain grades or classrooms were provided with the opportunity for participation. For instance, while the R-Word was generally open to any student in a school who would like to participate, youth leadership training was often available only to certain students, a finding that was fairly consistent across Category 1 and 2 schools.

Overall, it is clear that, from the perspective of the liaison, Project UNIFY is not yet perceived as a school-wide program and perhaps is only reaching those students and teachers who are directly involved in some way. To further explore the reach of Project UNIFY within the school, the evaluation focused on documenting who in the school was involved in the planning and implementation of Project UNIFY programming beyond the liaisons. Understanding who is involved in carrying out Project UNIFY activities and whether liaisons receive help or support from others within the school provides another useful picture of how Project UNIFY is implemented.

The majority of liaisons (68%) indicated that they received help planning and implementing Project UNIFY. Not surprisingly, there was variation between Category 1 and Category 2 schools in terms of receiving help with Project UNIFY; 82% of liaisons from Category 1 schools reported receiving help, while only 56% of Category 2 schools said the same. In the two-thirds of the schools where the liaisons reported receiving help in planning and implementing activities, the assistance most frequently came from special education teachers (70%), followed by students with (49%) and without (59%) ID, and general education teachers (44%) (See Table 8). That nearly half of the schools involved students with ID in the planning and implementation of Project UNIFY represents progress from Year 3, during which only a third of school liaisons (33%) reported that the same. This is a noteworthy improvement, as one of the guiding principles of Project UNIFY is to involve youth with and without ID not only as participants in activities but also in the implementation of those activities. (For more in-depth information on student involvement and leadership, refer to Section VI). It is also notable that liaisons received help from general education teachers (44%), and administrators (41%), as it suggests that Project UNIFY has indeed begun to move beyond being perceived as only a “special education program” by school staff.

**Table 8.** Percentage of schools in which liaisons had help with Project UNIFY (n=719)

	All Schools	Category 1	Category 2
Special education staff	70%	71%	69%
Students without ID	59%	70%	46%
Students with ID	49%	60%	36%
General education staff	44%	48%	39%
SO staff/volunteers	41%	45%	37%
Administrators	41%	43%	39%
Physical Education staff	33%	33%	32%
Parents	24%	29%	17%
Adaptive Phys. Ed. Staff	20%	19%	23%

Examining the processes of Project UNIFY implementation also requires an assessment of the challenges faced by liaisons in implementing Project UNIFY programming. Overall, the most prevalent challenge reported by liaisons was having enough time to do Project UNIFY activities (60%). Within busy school environments, liaisons often have difficulty juggling Project UNIFY along with other priorities. Beyond the obstacle of sufficient time, few liaisons reported challenges in implementation. For example, only approximately one-third of liaisons reported issues with finding transportation for activities (37%), getting other teachers or adults involved (36%), and getting students without disabilities involved (35%).

It is interesting to note that for the majority of liaisons many of the potential obstacles to implementing Project UNIFY did not present major challenges. In fact, although the awareness of Project UNIFY within the school among teachers and students was not as widespread as might be expected, time was the only challenge that presented a barrier to a majority of liaisons. Ideally, as more and more students and adults in the school become aware of and involved in Project UNIFY, less demand can be placed on liaisons.

#### **D. Project UNIFY Implementation Across Years 2, 3 and 4**

As Project UNIFY entered its fourth year, there was an opportunity to examine how the school-level implementation of Project UNIFY has expanded over time. In previous years, the evaluation focused on how State SO Programs were expanding Project UNIFY by reaching out to new schools in their states, and beginning in Year 4, the numbers of schools recognized as Category 1 or Category 2. While expansion is always a useful indication of growth, and monitoring the adherence to the guidelines moving forward provides valuable information in terms of the breadth of programming, it is also important to begin to document *how* Project UNIFY is expanding over time within the schools. Therefore, the evaluation focused a sample of 144 schools that have participated in Project UNIFY in

each of the past 3 years (i.e. Years 2, 3, and 4<sup>11</sup>), and for whom complete liaison data was available. Examining the implementation of Project UNIFY in this way provided an opportunity to explore Project UNIFY over time in terms of the components that schools included.

While there were schools across the three year period that added or dropped initiatives, there were some general trends of note with regard to the implementation of the three Project UNIFY components.<sup>12</sup> As expected, in Year 2 there were few schools that were able to address all three Project UNIFY components, as less than a third (29%) implemented inclusive sports, whole-school awareness, and youth leadership (see Table 9). There was similar progress evident in both Years 3 and 4 as just over a third of schools in Year 3 (39%) and half of schools in Year 4 (50%) reported the inclusion of all three components.

Across schools, there has been a consistent trend in the percentage of schools implementing initiatives from the sports and whole-school awareness components. That is, while there is slight variation evident, generally schools have implemented initiatives from the sports<sup>13</sup> and whole-school awareness components over the three-year period. The area that has experienced the most notable change was the youth leadership component, as few schools (37%) were including these types of initiatives and activities in their programming in Year 2 (see Table 9). There was consistent growth over the next two years, however. In Year 3, almost half of the schools (49%) included initiatives from the youth leadership component, and in Year 4, that percentage grew to over half (62%).

Given that the youth leadership component appears to be slower to develop within a school, it is perhaps not surprising that most schools tended to begin their Project UNIFY programming with the sports and/or whole-school awareness components (see Table 9). While some schools were able to include the youth leadership component in Year 2, no schools *only* implemented this component. Interestingly, no schools implemented only the youth leadership component in any year (i.e. Years 2, 3, or 4). That is, within this sample of 144 schools, the youth leadership component was implemented only in those schools that were already implementing the sports and/or whole school awareness components. Instead, it appears that any schools implementing all three components in Year 4 were doing so because they added the youth leadership component to their existing Project UNIFY programming. Specifically, of the 47% of schools implementing the sports and whole-school components of Project UNIFY in Year 2, half (52%) added the youth leadership component by Year 4.

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<sup>11</sup> Data was not collected from individual schools in the evaluation of Project UNIFY in Year 1. The data presented are for those 144 schools that participated in Project UNIFY during Years 2, 3, and 4 and for which data was provided by the liaison in each of the three years. Because of the small sample size, these data should be used only to suggest trends in programming in terms of the growth of Project UNIFY over time.

<sup>12</sup> The components are defined using the Year 5 revisions described previously in this section.

<sup>13</sup> Some schools appeared to drop Traditional SO Sports over the three-year period which accounts for some of the variability evident. It is not clear, however, if the program was actually dropped at the school or if liaison no longer reported it as it is not an inclusive sports opportunity. In addition, it is also possible that although students with ID from the school participated in Traditional SO, the trainings and events did not take place at the school and therefore the liaison did not report it as part of the school's Project UNIFY program.

**Table 9.** Implementation of Project UNIFY components in Years 2, 3 and 4 (n=144)

	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>
Whole School Awareness component	86%	89%	91%
Inclusive Sports component	90%	85%	81%
Youth Leadership component	37%	49%	62%
<b>All 3 components</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>50%</b>

This finding is perhaps not surprising, given that most State Programs view either sports-based programming or whole-school awareness programming as the primary starting point for schools becoming involved in Project UNIFY (see the next section for more information about the primary focus of State SO Programs). It is not clear whether this is due to the fact that schools beginning Project UNIFY already have established sports programming, such as Unified Sports, or because youth leadership is more difficult to initiate within a school.

### **E. School - Based Models of Project UNIFY Implementation**

To examine more in depth the implementation of Project UNIFY in the schools and the varying ways in which it is implemented, site visits were conducted in 9 selected schools from High Activation states. Visiting schools and learning about the various forms of Project UNIFY programming provided an educational picture of how schools put Project UNIFY's many options into practice. Though there are numerous distinct ways for schools to implement Project UNIFY programming, the three Project UNIFY components provide a general platform for how schools may build and structure their programming. The focus or emphasis of Project UNIFY programming or goals in various schools can differ depending on a number of factors, including the way in which State Programs envision and present Project UNIFY, the interests of a school liaison, the pre-existing culture and goals of a school, and the way a State Program and school work together to meld their goals and visions.

Surveys of State Program staff provided insight into the differing ways State Programs think about Project UNIFY. While most State Programs (61%) focus on all components equally (i.e. inclusive sports, youth leadership, whole-school awareness), there are a few who primarily focus on one area over the others (See Table 10; for a complete listing of all State SO Programs see Appendix A, Table A6). This may be related in part to the fact that State Programs often view a specific component as a primary starting point for Project UNIFY in schools (See Table 10; for a complete listing of all State SO Programs see Appendix A, Table A7). Rather than emphasizing the implementation of all components equally at the outset of a school's participation, most states view either sports-based programming (40%) or whole-school awareness programming (37%) as the primary starting point for schools becoming involved in Project UNIFY.

**Table 10.** Primary focus and starting point of Project UNIFY programming by State SO Programs

	<b>Primary focus of Project UNIFY among State Programs</b>	<b>Starting point of Project UNIFY among State Programs</b>
Sports –based	18%	40%
Whole-School Awareness	11%	37%
Youth leadership	11%	13%
All areas equally emphasized	61%	11%

Beyond State Program perceptions of the Project UNIFY components, it is informative to examine the implementation of Project UNIFY in practice. Through school site visits, during which school stakeholders including liaisons, administrators, and students were interviewed, two main models of school implementation were identified. Generally, it appeared that schools tended to center their focus on either the inclusive sports component of Project UNIFY or on whole-school awareness component, which often incorporated elements of youth leadership. These models are described below, along with examples of how the models looked in specific schools. Certainly, SOI’s ideal version of Project UNIFY incorporates all three components, rather than focusing on just one or two. However, these models not only provide insight into how schools interpret Project UNIFY and build their programs around that interpretation, but also useful ideas for how schools that structure Project UNIFY around one main goal or component can begin to think about incorporating others for more well-rounded programming.

### **1. Sports Model**

In the sports-based model of Project UNIFY, the participating school often has a strong background in Special Olympics sports programming through the existence of a Unified Sports or Traditional SO program. These programs often exist in the school prior to the introduction of Project UNIFY; however, other schools may simply find the sports component of Project UNIFY to be the most salient when first introduced to the program. In general, in schools with sports-based models, sports programming is not only the primary element that exists, but it is also often the element that is most valued at the school. Schools that focus on the sports component often have stakeholders who espouse the belief that sports serve as a beneficial platform for bringing students with and without ID together. With these qualities and values, schools that begin Project UNIFY through sports may find that expanding sports programming is the most straightforward approach to increasing the breadth of the program at the school-level.

Schools that embody the sports model however, may have challenges incorporating the other components of Project UNIFY into their programming within the school. Specifically, schools may find it difficult to gain teacher and whole-school support, since confusion often exists around what Project UNIFY is and how it is different from the Unified Sports or Traditional SO Sports programs being offered.



However, with this sports backdrop, the introduction of other elements of Project UNIFY can be a natural and useful progression.

The following case studies help to describe two schools that exemplify the sports-based model of Project UNIFY. In School A, Project UNIFY began through a pre-existing and strong Unified sports program and is now working through how best to expand programming. At School B, Project UNIFY began through a newly formed Unified Sports program and quickly expanded, demonstrating how schools that begin with sports may be able to expand toward offering other Project UNIFY opportunities.

### **School A: Sports**

School A's relationship with Special Olympics began 12 years ago with the formation of a Unified Sports program by a special education teacher who had seen a Unified game elsewhere and saw a need for such a program in the school. Following the formation of the first Unified basketball team, the Unified basketball program at School A grew to include eight teams with students from the school participating as athletes and partners, and community volunteers serving as coaches. Based on the success of the Unified program, the SO Program in School A's state identified the school as a good fit for Project UNIFY.

Given the success of the basketball program, the school added additional inclusive sports activities, including two popular Unified PE classes. Today, the primary focus of Project UNIFY is on these inclusive sports programs. The liaison, who began the Unified Sports program, dedicates a great deal of time to organizing the Unified basketball teams and hosting a tournament. The liaison is hesitant to take on additional organizational efforts, particularly without a strong support system in the school. Currently, there is little involvement from school staff, as most tend to view Project UNIFY as a "special education sports program" rather than a school-wide initiative.

Despite this, there are indications that the school has the means and interest to expand its Project UNIFY programming. In the last year, the school has established an in-school YAC, which organized a student-driven R-Word Campaign, and sent two students to a state YAC meeting.

Looking forward, the school's new principal is supportive of the program and its efforts to promote student-driven initiatives. With this administrative support, combined with the Unified programs and newly-formed YAC serving as a springboard for other Project UNIFY activities and creating awareness and interest in the program, there may well be opportunities for expansion in the future.

**School B: Sports**

School B's path toward Project UNIFY began a few years ago, when the cheerleading coach began a Unified Cheer team. The State Program quickly identified the school as a candidate for Project UNIFY and worked with the athletic director and coaches to aid in the expansion of the program. As in School A, School B built on its sports focus by adding a Unified basketball program and, later, a track and field program.

Currently, the focus of Project UNIFY in School B remains primarily on these successful Unified teams. The school has demonstrated its commitment to the value of inclusive sports programming by embedding the Unified teams within the existing sports programming of the school. For example, the school places value on providing Unified teams with uniforms and scheduling in the same way as varsity teams. Partners and athletes in the Unified program are held to the same standards of behavior and responsibility as other varsity athletes at the school, signing athletic codes of conduct. Moreover, being a partner on the Unified teams is viewed as a privilege among students at the school; the Unified Cheer team requires partners to also be on the varsity cheerleading squad, and the Unified basketball team has expanded to include a number of varsity athletes from other teams. As a result of this involvement from students visible within the student body, the Unified program is seen as a popular activity.

Though beginning their program on a sports platform, School B has faced fewer challenges than School A in expanding beyond sports programming, in part due to the whole-hearted support of the administration and the involvement of multiple staff members. Not only are the special education teachers involved, but a number of coaches, who were also teachers or paraprofessionals, also play an important role in the program. With this support, the school recently held their first R-Word Campaign, began a Unified PE class, and formed a large YAC, with emphasis placed on filling each leadership position with students with and without disabilities.

Although the program was formed primarily around sports, School B provides a good example of the way sports can be used a starting point for other initiatives, while avoiding the notion that seemed to exist in School A that Unified Sports, and Project UNIFY by extension, is a program for special education students rather than the entire school community. The program in School B benefited from burgeoning leadership from students, dedicated leadership from a number of different staff members, and support from the administration. Moving forward, the school has plans to expand the program both internally and within the district and state at large.

## 2. Whole-School Awareness Model

In the whole-school awareness model, the school focuses primarily on the whole-school involvement/awareness and youth leadership components. Schools with this model often have programs in place supporting the social inclusion of students with disabilities even prior to becoming involved in Project UNIFY. Often, these efforts are spearheaded by a liaison who is dedicated to increasing the interactions among students with and without ID. Schools with the whole-school involvement/awareness model usually have strong values and goals regarding social inclusion and inclusionary practices that are not specific to sports. A school fitting this model also typically recognizes the importance of an active student leadership in helping to raise awareness about the importance of social inclusion. In this type of setting, Project UNIFY may bring new ideas and additional support to goals surrounding acceptance and social inclusion.

Schools with this model are often less involved with the sports component and may find it difficult to incorporate sports programming. Some schools may include sports activities, such as bowling, as an activity for students with and without ID to participate together, but there may be less organized, sustained inclusive sports opportunities. Other schools may have Traditional SO Sports programs, or one Unified team, but in each of these cases, sports programming is not the primary focus and may be viewed as disconnected from other education/awareness or inclusion efforts. Because of this, schools that embody this model tend to have a different relationship with Special Olympics. Some may perceive Special Olympics as solely a sports organization and may be unsure how to work with Special Olympics to further their inclusive opportunities.

The following case studies help to describe two schools that exemplify the whole-school awareness based model of Project UNIFY. In School C, a popular inclusive club was established, but the school had difficulty connecting it to their Traditional SO Sports program. In School D, the liaison sought out Project UNIFY as a way to promote inclusion and awareness, and is working toward expanding the program.

**School C: Awareness/Youth Leadership**

School C only recently began participating in Project UNIFY, but has a strong history of inclusive programming. A few years ago, the school started an inclusive club where students with and without disabilities eat lunch together once a month and also engage in other activities together, such as attending school sporting events and taking field trips. The club has been popular at the school, with a wide range of students involved, including honor roll students, varsity athletes, and students from minority backgrounds. Upon hearing about the success of the club, the State SO Program identified School C as a good candidate for Project UNIFY and contacted the school to initiate a relationship. In this school, the primary focus of Project UNIFY remains on inclusive and educational programming, centered around the existing inclusive club at the school. Exposure to Project UNIFY's various options gave the club additional ideas for youth leadership and activation, such as organizing the R-Word Campaign. The campaign, which included a Project UNIFY Rally, was extended over several days throughout the school. Though most activities are directed by the liaison, other school staff are supportive of the program and seem to recognize the importance of involving student leaders from a variety of areas.

At School C, the sports component was much less emphasized than the other activities. Some of the activities that took place as part of the club involved sports, but no Unified Sports teams were present at the school. In addition, though there was a Traditional SO Sports program that incorporated some students without disabilities as volunteers, no one, including the liaison, viewed this program as particularly related to other Project UNIFY activities. Extending the school's awareness and support from the club to the Special Olympics sports program may be a first step toward creating a more inclusive sports environment where students with and without disabilities participate together.

### **School D: Awareness/Youth Leadership**

School D's relationship with Special Olympics began through the efforts of a special education teacher who was seeking a program to promote the acceptance and inclusion of students with disabilities in the school. The climate of the school was generally positive and accepting, and the teacher believed that students would both be receptive to and benefit from a program addressed specifically toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. The teacher heard about Project UNIFY from a parent, and subsequently made contact with the State SO Program.

In the school, the primary focus of Project UNIFY is on education and awareness, supported by strong youth leadership. From the beginning, members of the administration have supported the program, and the State Program staff have been active collaborators. At the outset of the school's participation, five students attended a Youth Summit, where they learned how to begin a YAC at the school. The YAC then planned an active R-Word Campaign, with videos shown on the morning announcements and pledging taking place during lunch periods. The YAC and the liaison also organized well-attended inclusive events a few times during the year, during which students with and without disabilities would gather after school to play games and spend time together.

As in School C, School D's strong focus on education and awareness somewhat overshadowed the sports component. Though the school did have a Unified Sports program with a basketball and softball team, and although members of the YAC participated in the Unified program, there was much less emphasis placed on the sports component and thus less school-wide awareness. During this year, Project UNIFY programming was dedicated primarily to raising awareness and promoting acceptance. With the support of administration, there are plans in place to expand Project UNIFY programming both in the school and potentially throughout the school district. More intentionally connecting the Unified Sports program to the education/awareness and inclusion efforts could serve to draw more people into Project UNIFY and provide another opportunity for inclusion.

### ***Summary of Project UNIFY in the Schools: Year 4***

The distinction of Category 1 and 2 schools created by SOI in Year 4 provided an additional window through which to understand the implementation of Project UNIFY. The differences in implementation between Category 1 and 2 schools – such as in the inclusion of various initiatives as well as in the involvement of multiple parties within the school – reinforce the dichotomy between schools implementing high levels of Project UNIFY programming and those either just beginning Project UNIFY

or those who prefer to focus on only one or two particular aspects. Nonetheless, it is clear that many schools in both Category 1 and Category 2 struggled to fulfill the new school-level guidelines put forth by SOI, particularly in including *Get Into It* into their programming. However, the trend toward asking schools to center their programming around the three main components of inclusive sports, youth leadership, and whole-school involvement or awareness seems to be more accessible for schools. That nearly all Category 1 schools included two of the three components, and over half included all three, suggests potential for moving schools toward well-rounded programming. Indeed, it is evident that schools can and do expand their programming over time, with an overall increase in the number of schools including programming from all three components over the course of three years. In Year 5 and beyond, it will be important for State Programs to provide schools with the tools and support to create Project UNIFY programming that draws from all three components. The models and case studies explored in Year 4 provide a preliminary framework for how State Programs might recognize and build upon a school's strengths and identify the areas in which growth may be possible. Continuing to explore how schools implement programming and how they are best able to expand that programming will be an important task in supporting schools moving forward.

## **IV. Value of Project UNIFY to State Programs and Schools**

Beyond exploring and documenting the implementation of Project UNIFY, a consistent goal of the evaluation has been to access the perspectives of those who have first-hand experience with Project UNIFY. As a nationwide, school-based program, Project UNIFY programming touches a wide array of people at a number of different levels of implementation, including State SO Program CEOs and staff, school administrators, teachers, and students with and without ID. These state and school stakeholders are those best equipped to provide information about the unique ways in which Project UNIFY has had a positive impact on their organization or school. Thus, the evaluation in Year 4 reached out to State Program staff and CEOs, school administrators, Project UNIFY liaisons, and students to document the value of Project UNIFY to the participating State Programs and schools. The following section highlights their responses, focusing on the changes that have been observed as a result of Project UNIFY programming and the benefits Project UNIFY has provided.

### **A. Value to Special Olympics**

Special Olympics has long been viewed by many in the educational community primarily as an organization that conducts sporting events for adults and children with ID. While the advent of Unified Sports, and its significant growth over the past 20 years represented a shift in Special Olympics toward providing more inclusive sports opportunities, some State Programs have remained challenged by latent misperceptions about what they do and what they can offer as many continue to identify Special Olympics with programming for only people with ID. However, it is clear that continual efforts to communicate the role that Special Olympics and programs like Project UNIFY can play within the educational community have begun to be realized. Of the 38 State Programs participating in Project UNIFY, almost all of the 38 CEOs (97%) believe that Project UNIFY has changed the way the educational community views Special Olympics as an organization. Specifically, over three quarters of State Program CEOs feel that Project UNIFY has challenged preconceived notions that Special Olympics is a segregated organization (78%) and has in fact raised awareness that Special Olympics supports social inclusion (81%). As one Special Olympics CEO stated, “It has made the educational community more aware of the diversity of programs that Special Olympics offers to students.” (see Table 11).

**Table 11.** Changed perceptions of Special Olympics as a result of Project UNIFY as reported by State SO Program CEOs

<p><b>Raising awareness that Special Olympics promotes social inclusion</b></p>	<p>“Project UNIFY has made us credible within the educational community particularly with the general educators and administrators. I believe the education community views [Project UNIFY] as a leader in inclusiveness...”</p> <p>“They no longer see Special Olympics as a segregated outdated program. They embrace the inclusiveness of Unified Sports and how it changes perceptions and attitudes of youth.”</p> <p>“The majority of the schools in [our state] have always accepted and respected Special Olympics as a means for individuals with intellectual disabilities to participate in sports, now they see it as a way to UNIFY their schools.”</p>
<p><b>Changed perceptions of Special Olympics and what it offers</b></p>	<p>“[Schools] see us as a more professional organization and more than sports.”</p> <p>“The educational community ... has a better understanding of the broad scope of service offered through Special Olympics, particularly, that we are much more than once-a-year Summer Games.”</p> <p>“I now believe they see [Special Olympics] as more of a partner with good ideas to share.”</p> <p>“[Special Olympics] programming is seen as a dynamic catalyst towards building bridges of acceptance and respect for all students...”</p> <p>“I believe that the educational community views SO as a partner in their efforts to create school climates of acceptance and to form communities that care.”</p>

Perhaps partially as a result of changing perceptions of Special Olympics as an organization, State SO Programs have experienced additional benefits as a result of their participation in Project UNIFY. In general, Project UNIFY has changed the way many State Programs do business in the schools within their state. In the past, SO Programs have partnered with schools to identify athletes for participation in Special Olympics programming (e.g. Traditional SO and Unified Programs) that often took place outside of the school. Project UNIFY brings Special Olympics to the schools. Indeed, State Programs reported that Project UNIFY has provided increased opportunities to partner with schools in their state (95%) and to further enhance existing partnerships with schools (100%). (For more discussion of partnerships between State Programs and schools, refer to Section VII.)



Additionally, Project UNIFY has allowed and encouraged State Programs to develop and enhance relationships with the greater educational community. One of the guidelines for all State Programs (both High Activation and Building Bridges) in Year 4 was that each State Program develop a state-level Education Leaders Network (ELN) as a means of forging more formal connections with the educational community, with the hope that the ELN would “...provide insights, direction, opportunities and access to national education conversations, initiatives, forums and collaborations to advance Project UNIFY characteristics in policy and practice.”<sup>14</sup> In Year 4, just over half of the State Programs (53%) reported having an established ELN (91% of High Activation Programs and 37% of Building Bridges Programs). While the majority of the Building Bridges states did not meet the guidelines in this area, this was improvement from Year 3, during which only 12% of Building Bridges State Programs had an established ELN. These ELNs, viewed as a valuable asset by almost all of the Programs that have established them (90%), assist State Programs in a variety of ways, including school recruitment and cultivating relationships with schools, assisting in the promotion of Project UNIFY, and ensuring that the goals of Project UNIFY are aligned with state- and school-level goals (see Table 12).

**Table 12.** Role of the state level ELN in Project UNIFY as reported by State Program staff

“[The ELN provides] strategic input on aligning Project UNIFY with school objectives, open doors within their contacts to expand Project UNIFY, suggest outreach ideas such as education related conferences...”

“Our networking at the [state] Association of Schools allows us to have our finger on the pulse of education in [our state] especially with regards to issues of school climate and social inclusion, which affords us the opportunity to marry the education goals with Project UNIFY initiatives.”

“[The ELN] provide(s) guidance as to how Project UNIFY can fit into each district's educational goals or standards.”

“ELN members have been key in finding ways to tie Project UNIFY initiatives, principles and goals to various programs or initiatives in the education community. Conference opportunities, suggestions for resource development, potential partnerships in school communities are examples of how ELN has assisted Project UNIFY staff with the enhancement and expansion of Project UNIFY in [our state].”

<sup>14</sup> Special Olympics International, “Special Olympics Toolkit for Building a State Education Leaders Network (ELN)” [media.specialolympics.org/soi/files/resources/.../ELN\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://media.specialolympics.org/soi/files/resources/.../ELN_Toolkit.pdf)

Moreover, Project UNIFY has made an impact on State Programs in that it has served to promote a culture of youth leadership and engagement within the organization itself. Each State Program is expected to establish a state-level Youth Activation Committee (state YAC) by which to, “educate, motivate, and activate youth to become agents of change in their communities and advocate for the respect, inclusion, and acceptance of all people, regardless of abilities.”<sup>15</sup> Of the 38 states participating in Project UNIFY in Year 4, three-quarters (74%) convened a YAC; almost all High Activation states (91%) had an established YAC, as did two-thirds of Building Bridges states (67%). This is an improvement from Year 3, during which only 60% of State SO Programs overall had an established YAC. The state YAC is viewed as a valuable asset by most State SO staff members (93%); in addition to providing youth with leadership opportunities, these state YACs provide innovative and new perspectives, feedback, assistance, and guidance to adult Project UNIFY staff (See Table 13).

**Table 13.** Role of youth in Project UNIFY at the state level as reported by State Program staff

<p>“[The YAC] ensures Project UNIFY is truly youth-led ... gives youth a voice in how Project UNIFY is implemented...”</p> <p>“They lead the organization by advising staff on ways youth can contribute to the mission of [Special Olympics], providing new ideas to improve our services to our athletes.”</p> <p>“[The YAC] help(s) organize and coordinate Project UNIFY activities, provide feedback and input on important PU related things, assist in recruiting new schools and they make presentations at conferences about PU.”</p> <p>“The YAC serves as the primary source of statewide youth leadership for Project UNIFY as well as a sounding board for enhancement and expansion of youth engagement through UNIFY.”</p>
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## B. Value to Schools

To examine the value of Project UNIFY to the participating schools, the evaluation relied on the reports of the school liaisons, administrators and students. This included a documentation of the specific benefits realized in terms of, for instance, the increased opportunities for students with ID to participate in school activities, raising awareness about students with ID, and creating a more inclusive school environment.

The value of Project UNIFY was particularly notable at the school level, as a number of benefits were noted by the 1,073 liaisons and 38 administrators surveyed. Not surprisingly, given their level of involvement and commitment to Project UNIFY, liaisons (84%) viewed the Project UNIFY activities and

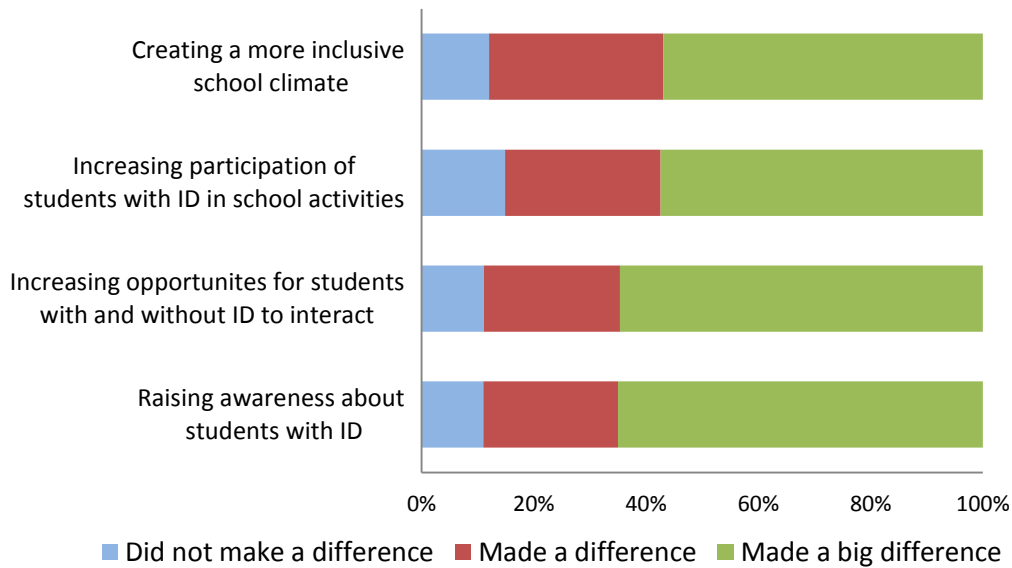
<sup>15</sup>Special Olympics International, “Special Olympics Toolkit for Building a State Youth Activation Committee (YAC)” [http://media.specialolympics.org/soi/files/resources/Project\\_Unify/YACToolkit.pdf](http://media.specialolympics.org/soi/files/resources/Project_Unify/YACToolkit.pdf)

events that took place at their school as successful and very valuable for students with and without ID. According to the liaisons, Project UNIFY made a difference in increasing the participation of students with ID in school activities (58%), raising awareness about students with ID (65%), and increasing the opportunities for students with and without ID to work together (64%) (see Figure 1 & Table 14). Similarly, the sample of administrators surveyed echoed this sentiment, as most reported increased participation of students with ID in school activities (75%) and increased opportunities for students with and without ID to interact during the school day (70%) as a result of Project UNIFY (see Figure 2 & Table 14). Moreover, one administrator commented during an interview that,

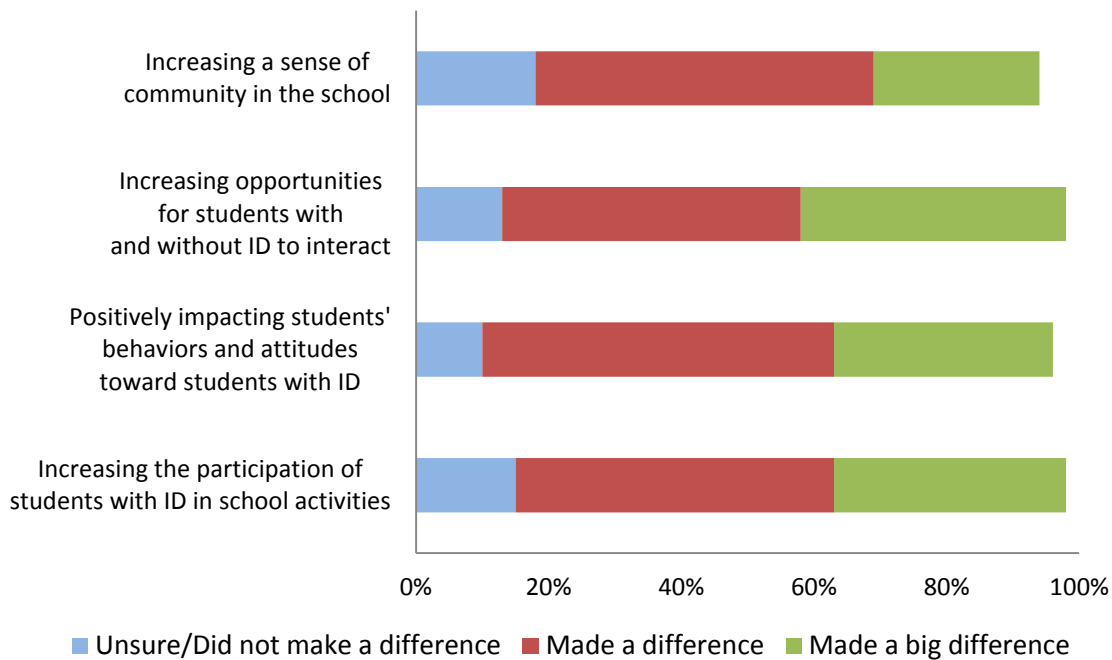
*“Project UNIFY is one of the greatest inclusion programs I have seen. The general education students love it. They work hand and hand with the [special education] students fostering many relationships for these children ... I love this program.”*

Moreover, more than half of the liaisons (57%) and almost two-thirds of the school administrators (63%) agreed that Project UNIFY helps create a more inclusive climate in the school, in which students are open to and accepting of differences, and that it increases the sense of community in the school. Almost three-quarters of the administrators (71%) in particular observed that Project UNIFY impacts the behaviors and attitudes of students without disabilities toward their peers with ID. Moreover, roughly half of liaisons (48%) and school administrators (58%) viewed Project UNIFY as having an impact on reducing bullying, teasing or the use of offensive language in their schools. This role of Project UNIFY is important given that most administrators view promoting acceptance and interaction among students of different races, cultures and abilities, and reducing bullying and teasing, as high priorities in their school (70% and 78% respectively), behind only the top priority of increasing academic achievement (90%).

**Figure 1.** Impact of Project UNIFY as reported by school liaisons<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 2.** Impact of Project UNIFY as reported by school administrators<sup>17</sup>



<sup>16</sup> Liaisons were asked to rate, on six-point scale, whether Project UNIFY made a difference in each of the dimensions listed. The category “did not make a difference” encompasses the first two points on the scale; “made a difference” encompasses the two points that fall in the middle, and “made a big difference” includes the final two end points.

<sup>17</sup> Administrator responses were scored similarly to those of the liaisons. However, administrators were also given the option of indicating that they were unsure about whether or not Project UNIFY made a difference in each of the dimensions listed.

**Table 14.** School liaison, administrator, and teacher perspectives on Project UNIFY

<p><b>Increasing the Participation of Students with ID in School Activities</b></p>	<p>“Students with disabilities are establishing friendships that they never had before ... experiences they’ve never had before.” <i>(Project UNIFY liaison)</i></p> <p>“This is an AMAZING opportunity for our students with special needs to be included in an area of our school that they previously were unable to be included.” <i>(Project UNIFY liaison)</i></p> <p>“It has completely changed the overall school climate and we have seen such a positive change in our athletes and more interaction among all students.” <i>(Project UNIFY Liaison)</i></p> <p>“Project UNIFY has been very positive and valuable to our school climate. Both students with and without disabilities and staff have enjoyed sharing various programs.” <i>(Project UNIFY liaison)</i></p> <p>“This program has made a world of difference to all of our students. It is such a wonderful way to help students with different challenges to be a part of the school community.” <i>(Project UNIFY liaison)</i></p> <p>“The Special education students are accepted and have made friends that respect them and welcome them into all activities in our school. Everyone wants to be a part of Project UNIFY.” <i>(Project UNIFY liaison)</i></p>
<p><b>Raising Awareness about Students with ID</b></p>	<p>“Kids without disabilities learning an awareness of differences and learning it’s ok to advocate for kids with special needs.” <i>(Project UNIFY liaison)</i></p> <p>“[Project UNIFY] has been valuable because a lot of students judge students with disabilities; it has brought the topic to the surface.” <i>(Teacher)</i></p> <p>“[Project UNIFY] forces us to confront stereotypes and makes kids think about the words that they use.” <i>(Teacher)</i></p> <p>“I think [students] gain knowledge that everyone is important, everyone is different, and that’s good. Hearts have been changed by this.” <i>(Project UNIFY)</i></p>
<p><b>Creating a more Inclusive Community</b></p>	<p>“Project UNIFY has changed the climate of our school. It is bringing our school together and changing lives--those of special needs students, "typical" students, parents, teachers, administration, and the community.” <i>(Project UNIFY liaison)</i></p> <p>“Project UNIFY has begun to have a transformational effect on the [school] community of students, parents, teachers, and administrators.” <i>(Administrator)</i></p> <p>“It’s making our school more inclusive ... we’re making a step in the right direction.” <i>(Project UNIFY liaison)</i></p> <p>“[Project UNIFY] has truly made an impact and assisted in changing the climate at our school.” <i>(Project UNIFY liaison)</i></p>

<b>Table 14 cont.</b>	“Project UNIFY has been an outstanding addition to our high school. It has been exceptional to see what an outstanding community we have ... with having such an inspiring group of athletes with/without disabilities just all working together.” ( <i>Project UNIFY liaison</i> )
<b>Creating a more Inclusive Community</b>	“Our kids are very supportive of inclusion initiatives and I feel that the sky is the limit with Project UNIFY at our school.” ( <i>Administrator</i> )

Notably, the value of Project UNIFY to the school was related to the breadth of Project UNIFY in the school in terms of the components implemented (inclusive sports, youth leadership, whole school involvement/awareness; See Section III for a complete description of the Project UNIFY components). Generally, liaisons whose schools implemented all three components of Project UNIFY perceived more impact from Project UNIFY than did liaisons whose schools implemented only one or two components (See Table 15). For example, over three-quarters of liaisons (80%) whose schools implemented all three components believed that Project UNIFY made a big difference in increasing opportunities for students with and without ID to work together, compared to just over half of liaisons (55%) whose schools had one or two components. As shown in Table 15, liaisons from schools with three components rated the impact of Project UNIFY a full point higher,<sup>18</sup> on average, than did liaisons from schools with one or two components. These differences were statistically significant ( $t$  values from -9.03 to -10.76,  $p < .001$ ).

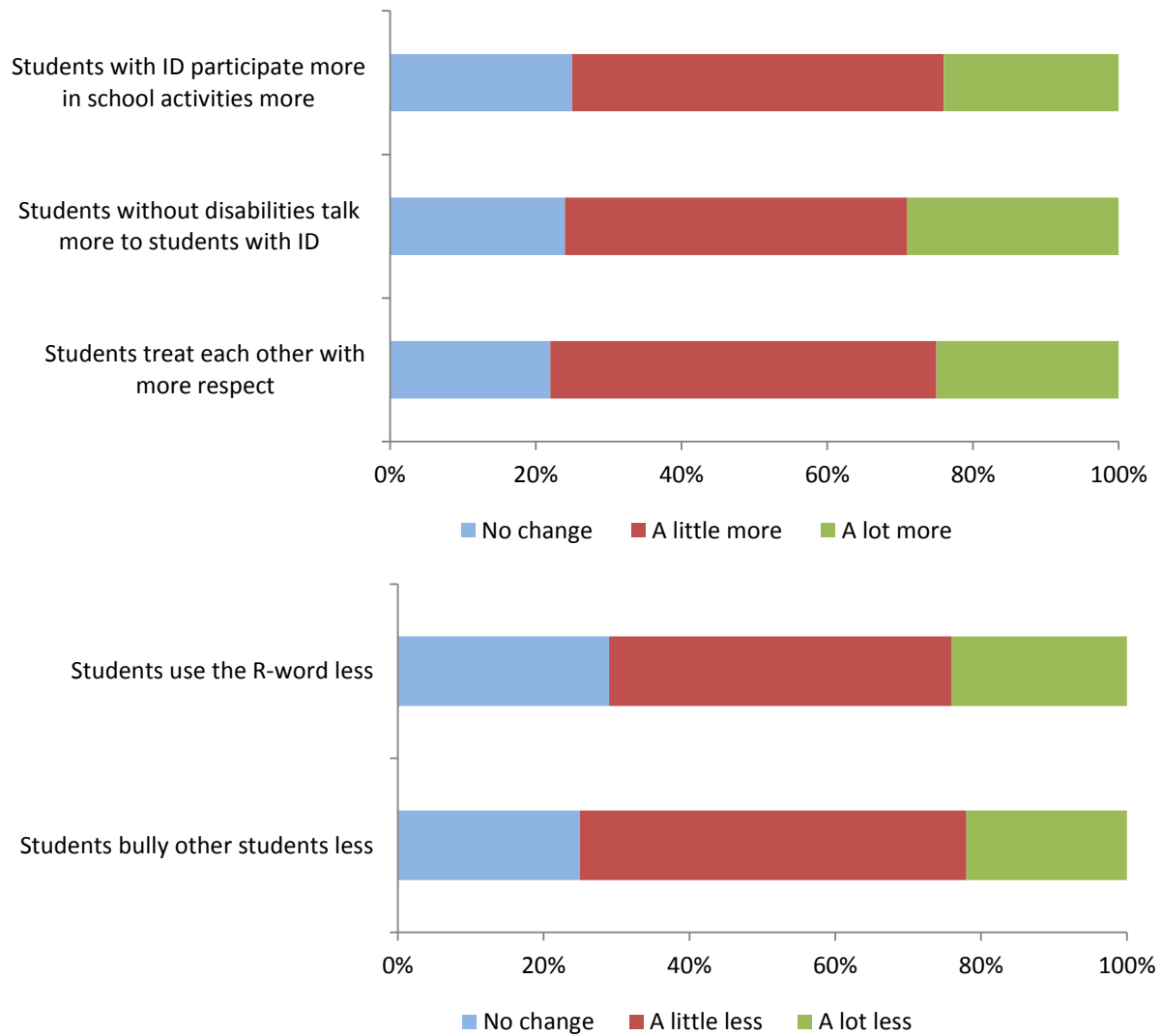
**Table 15.** Liaison-reported impact of Project UNIFY in schools with different levels of implementation

	Schools with One or Two Components		Schools with all Three Components	
	Mean Rating	Percent who said “made a big difference”	Mean Rating	Percent who said “made a big difference”
Creating a more inclusive school climate	3.18	47%	4.09	75%
Increasing participation of students with disabilities in school activities	3.15	50%	3.97	73%
Increasing opportunities for students with and without ID to work together	3.36	55%	4.23	80%
Raising awareness about students with ID	3.39	57%	4.24	82%

<sup>18</sup> Liaisons were asked to rate, on six-point scale, whether Project UNIFY made a difference in each of the dimensions listed. Ratings of difference ranged from 0 – 5 on each item with 0 representing “did not make a difference” and 5 representing “made a big difference.”

In addition to liaisons and administrators, students attending Project UNIFY schools also provided an important perspective on how Project UNIFY has added value to the school, specifically with regard to the positive changes they perceived. The approximately 900 students<sup>19</sup> asked about the value of Project UNIFY were attending schools that began Project UNIFY in Year 4. Of these students, approximately three-quarters reported that students with ID were included more in school activities (76%) and interacted more with their peers without disabilities (71%) than they had at the beginning of the year (see Figures 3 and 4). In addition to increased opportunities for interaction, students also felt that students treated each other with more respect (75%) and that there were fewer instances of bullying (69%). Almost all students (91%) believed that their school should continue participation in Project UNIFY in the future.

**Figures 3 and 4.** Impact of Project UNIFY on the school as reported by students



<sup>19</sup> The questions regarding value to school were asked of 971 students attending 9 participating middle schools new to Project UNIFY in Year 4.

In addition to gathering the perceptions of students through surveys, 24 students<sup>20</sup> attending the schools that participated in the site visits were also asked for their perceptions of the value of Project UNIFY for their schools. In general, students commented that Project UNIFY programming had impacted their school for the better. Specifically, Project UNIFY raised school-wide awareness about the presence of students with disabilities in the school, as well as increased the everyday social interactions between students with and without ID (See Table 16). A number of students talked about the change being most visible in the hallways; whereas students with and without disabilities may not have interacted previously, students without disabilities now acknowledged and greeted students with disabilities more often. In some schools, this change went beyond the hallways, as Unified Sports programs gained school-wide recognition and a large student fan-base.

**Table 16.** Impacts of Project UNIFY on the school as reported by students

“I have friends that go to other schools and they don’t really see the kids in the special education program. They just kind of hide them away. And I think it’s cool because even though a lot of kids don’t get involved with the students at our school, people know that they’re there. They have lunch with us. They have classes with us. [One of the students with disabilities] takes normal classes with kids and she’s loved by every student at school.” (*Unified partner*)

“[At] our Unified basketball games, the stands are more full than for the actual varsity games. I think it’s cool that the Unified program can bridge the gap between [students with disabilities] and general education students. I think before the program started, walking down the hall – it was kind of like you’d glance at the other student and smile, but now it’s like everyone’s equal and no one’s different, and it’s just a community.” (*Project UNIFY Club member*)

“Seeing them play basketball and track and cheer and just interact with them has opened our eyes to their talents and their true personalities that maybe they were too shy to show before and now we really know who they are and what they’re good at and what they like to do instead of just knowing their name or their face.” (*Project UNIFY Club member*)

### ***Summary of Value to State Programs and Schools***

Expanding the understanding of how the value of Project UNIFY was perceived by varying stakeholders was an important achievement of the Year 4 evaluation. For the first time, it is evident that Project UNIFY affords mutual benefits to both schools and State SO Programs; while schools gain the benefits of increased opportunities for inclusion, State Programs find themselves viewed in new ways by the educational community. Moreover, it is not only Project UNIFY liaisons who believe that Project UNIFY programming has a positive impact on their schools, but school administrators and students as well. Reinforcing liaisons’ statements about impact, all parties surveyed in Year 4 agreed that Project UNIFY

<sup>20</sup>The 24 students without disabilities interviewed were from 3 middle schools and 4 high schools.



makes a difference in how students with and without ID interact, from increasing the opportunities for such interaction to increasing the communication between students with and without ID. In addition, it was evident that the extent of Project UNIFY programming plays a role in liaisons' perceptions of value, with larger impact observed in schools incorporating all three components compared to one or two. These perceptions of value support the notion that well-rounded Project UNIFY programming may be more beneficial to schools than implementing only portions of Project UNIFY. Certainly, the views of these Project UNIFY stakeholders provide important information to take into account when moving forward in Year 5.

## **V. Value of Project UNIFY to Students**

At its core, Project UNIFY is a program designed to impact students; with the goal of bringing students with and without disabilities together in inclusive school environments, it is clear that students are the central participants and stakeholders in Project UNIFY programming. Thus, in addition to compiling the perspectives of State Program staff, liaisons, administrators, and students on the ways in which Project UNIFY impacts schools and the SO organization, it is perhaps most important to access the perspectives of students about the value of Project UNIFY on a personal level. Therefore, beyond reporting the value of Project UNIFY to their schools, students without disabilities were surveyed about the impact of Project UNIFY on them personally, in terms of the experiences gained, their attitudes toward their peers with ID, and their reported interactions with students with ID in the school. In addition, an initial exploration of the Project UNIFY experiences as well as the general school experiences of students with ID was also undertaken.

### **A. Value to Students without Disabilities**

To explore the value of Project UNIFY for students without disabilities, it was first necessary to document the extent and breadth of Project UNIFY programming in the schools, followed by students' involvement in Project UNIFY. Given that the schools selected for this aspect of the evaluation were chosen as schools that exemplified Project UNIFY, it was expected that the schools would implement Project UNIFY at a more intense level than other schools. Indeed, the 52 schools selected carried out more initiatives on average than the total sample of approximately 750 middle and high schools. In addition, the selected exemplary schools were more likely to implement all three components of Project UNIFY programming than were middle and high schools on average. Three-quarters of the 52 exemplary schools (77%) implemented all three components, while only half of middle and high schools overall (47%) did the same. The most common initiatives implemented in these selected schools were the R-Word Campaign and Unified Sports (82% and 75% respectively), followed by Partners Club (59%) and Traditional SO Sports (51%).

Because students' involvement in Project UNIFY was generally limited to the initiatives offered in their schools, student involvement was based only on the initiatives that students had the opportunity to take part in. A student was considered to have had the opportunity to participate in an initiative if it was reported to have been implemented at the school by the liaison. Of the 6,962 students surveyed from the 52 schools, over half (56%) participated in at least one Project UNIFY activity. Moreover, one-third of all students (34%) took part in multiple aspects of Project UNIFY. As expected, school-wide initiatives like the R-Word Campaign and Project UNIFY Rallies involved the most students within a school (57% and 44%, respectively), while smaller, club- or team-based initiatives such as a Partners Club (19%) or Unified Sports (27%), included fewer students within a school (See Table 17).

**Table 17:** Middle and high school students' participation in Project UNIFY initiatives (n=6,962).

<b>Initiative Offered by school</b>	<b>Percentage of Students to Participate*</b>
R-Word	57%
Project UNIFY Rally	44%
Traditional SO Sports	28%
Unified Sports	27%
Fans in the Stands	26%
Young Athletes Volunteer	24%
Get Into It	24%
Fundraising	23%
Partners Club	19%
SO Sports Day	18%
Youth Summit	10%
Youth Activation Committee	10%

\*The percentage represents the number of student that participated in an initiative only if it was offered in their school, thereby providing them with the opportunity to participate.

While understanding students' participation in the various initiatives provides a useful picture of the breadth of students' exposure to Project UNIFY, simply knowing what students did does not reveal what they experienced or, moreover, what they took away from their involvement. For this reason, students were not only asked about what types of activities they participated in as part of Project UNIFY but also, for those who did participate, about what they experienced, for example, what they learned and how they felt.

Overall most students surveyed reported positive Project UNIFY experiences. For example, Project UNIFY provided them opportunities to meet new people and learn new things. Project UNIFY also provided the opportunity for self-reflection, as most students (82%) reported learning that their emotions and attitudes can affect their classmates. Participating in Project UNIFY also influenced the ways in which students thought about their peer relationships, as many students (65%) learned that they have things in common with students with ID. Finally, many students (79%) learned techniques for positive social interactions, such as being more patient with classmates and learning that working together requires compromise. Moreover, almost two-thirds of students (64%) reported that participation in Project UNIFY had an impact on their plans for the future. For example, one high school student stated, *"I'm actually going to go to college to become a special ed[ucation] teacher, [be]cause of all the programs at our school, it really inspired me to want to do stuff with the kids."* In fact, students generally regarded Project UNIFY as a positive turning point in their lives (78%).

Even though most students had a positive experience as a result of their participation in Project UNIFY, there was still a strong relationship between their involvement and positive experience. The greater students' involvement in Project UNIFY, the more positive experiences they gained as a result of that involvement ( $r = .32, p < .01$ ).

### 1. Project UNIFY Participation and Students' Attitudes

To better understand the value of Project UNIFY in terms of how it promotes positive attitudes among participating students, approximately 900 middle school students<sup>21</sup> attending schools *new* to Project UNIFY in Year 4<sup>22</sup> were surveyed about their attitudes toward their peers with ID. Specifically, students were asked about their willingness to interact with their peers with ID and their beliefs about the inclusion of students with ID in their schools and classrooms (in addition to being surveyed about their involvement and experiences in Project UNIFY).

To understand how Project UNIFY influences students' attitudes, we examined students' attitudes at two points in time – before the school became involved in Project UNIFY and again at the end of the school year Project UNIFY activities had occurred. In Year 3, the evaluation demonstrated that students with more positive experiences in Project UNIFY also had more positive attitudes toward their peers with ID. While the Project UNIFY experience may influence students' attitudes, it is also possible that students' attitudes may predispose them to become involved with Project UNIFY or have more impactful experiences as a result of their participation. To explore this question of directionality, it is important to consider the degree to which experiences in Project UNIFY promoted attitude change over the course of the year.

Therefore, in Year 4, the unique impact of participation and experiences in Project UNIFY on students' attitudes was explored. A partial correlation was calculated relating students' experiences from their involvement in Project UNIFY and their attitudes at the end of the school year, taking into account their initial attitudes before becoming involved with Project UNIFY.

Overall, there was a strong positive relationship between students' experiences in Project UNIFY and their behavioral intentions at the end of the year ( $r = .54, p < .001$ ). This relationship remained significant when taking into account their behavioral intentions scores prior to starting Project UNIFY ( $r = .42, p < .001$ ). That is, the more positive students' Project UNIFY experiences, the more positive their intentions to interact with their peers with ID were at the end of the year. Similarly, students' experiences in Project UNIFY were also positively related to their attitudes about inclusion at the end of the year ( $r = .48, p < .001$ ). This relationship also remained significant when taking into account their attitudes prior to starting Project UNIFY ( $r = .41, p < .001$ ). Once again the more positive students' Project UNIFY experiences were, the more positive their attitudes about the inclusion of students with

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<sup>21</sup>In total 971 students from 9 middle schools *new* to Project UNIFY in Year 4 were administered surveys in the fall before any school-wide Project UNIFY activities had taken place, and again in the spring once most activities were completed.

<sup>22</sup>All new schools in which the pre-post surveys were administered were middle schools. Because of the nature of schedules followed in most high schools (e.g. block scheduling, rotating classes per semester, etc.), it was proved difficult to administer surveys to the same students at two points in time.

ID in their classrooms at the end of the year. Taken together, it is clear that the experiences students gain as a result of their involvement in Project UNIFY play a significant role in their attitudes toward their peers with ID.

## **2. Project UNIFY Participation and Students' Self-Reported Interactions with their Peers with ID.**

To better understand the value of Project UNIFY in terms of the opportunities it provides for social interaction between participating students with and without disabilities in schools, approximately 6,000 students<sup>23</sup> from 43 middle and high schools were surveyed about their interactions with students with ID. Specifically, students indicated whether they knew students with ID in school, and if so, how they interacted with these students with ID during the course of the school year in a range of activities.<sup>24</sup> These activities ranged from those that are more superficial in nature, for instance, saying hello to a student with ID in the hall, to those that require more personal commitment or choice, such as inviting a student with ID to your home.

Most students (80%) knew someone with ID attending their school, with almost a third (28%) reporting that they had a peer with ID in their class. Among these students, there was a wide range of interaction. In general, students were more likely to report more superficial types of interactions, with fewer students reporting more personal types of interactions. For instance, the types of interactions most frequently reported included saying hello to a student with ID in the hall (88%) and talking with a student with ID during free time (62%) (See Table 18). In contrast to school-related opportunities to interact, fewer students interacted with students with ID in more personal ways outside of school, such as spending time with students with ID outside of school (25%).

Interestingly, students who participated in Project UNIFY reported more interaction with their peers with ID than students who did not participate. Of the participating students, nearly three-quarters (70%) reported talking to a student with ID during free time at school, compared to approximately half of those who did not participate in Project UNIFY (52%) (see Table 18). Additionally, students who participated in Project UNIFY were more likely to report that they participated in a club or extracurricular activity with a student with ID (39%) and spent time with a student with ID outside of school (30%), compared to students who did not participate in Project UNIFY, 16% of whom reported participating in a club or spending time outside of school with a student with ID.

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<sup>23</sup> In total 5,992 students from 12 middle schools and 31 high schools were surveyed at the end of the school year after most Project UNIFY programming had taken place.

<sup>24</sup> The 8 items on the Student Interaction scale were adapted from the Behavioral Intentions scale mentioned in the previous section, which measures students' willingness to interact with students with ID. In comparison to the Behavioral Intentions scale, the Student Interaction scale provided an opportunity to document the interactions students without ID reported taking place with their peers with ID during the school year. The total score on the Student Interaction scale ranged from 0-8, with higher scores indicating more interaction.

**Table 18.** Differences in students' reported interactions with peers with disabilities based on Project UNIFY participation.

Type of Interaction	All Students	Did not Participate in Project UNIFY	Participated in Project UNIFY
Said hello to a student with ID in the hall	88%	82%	92%
Talked to a student with ID during free time at school	62%	52%	70%
Participated in a club or other extracurricular with a student with ID	30%	16%	39%
Eaten lunch at school with a student with ID	29%	22%	34%
Helped a student with ID with a class assignment at school	28%	21%	33%
Spent time with a student with ID outside of school	25%	16%	30%
Invited a student with ID to your house	7%	5%	9%
Invited a student with ID to go out with you and your friends	9%	4%	12%

In addition to more frequently participating in the different types of interactions, students who participated in Project UNIFY also reported interacting with students with ID in more ways over the course of the year than did students who did not participate in Project UNIFY. That is, of the eight different types of interactions asked about (see Table 18, above), students who participated in Project UNIFY reported interacting, on average, in just over three of the different ways ( $m = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ), while students who did not participate reported interacting in two of the different ways, on average ( $m = 2.21$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ).<sup>25</sup> Of course, while it is possible that not all students had equal opportunities for interaction, students who participated in Project UNIFY overall reported more and varied types of interaction than students who did not participate. For example, students who reported only interacting in two ways most often reported interacting in less personal, primarily school-based ways, such as saying hello to a student with ID and talking during free time. Students who reported interacting in more than two ways diversified their interactions, for instance, by interacting at lunch or during extracurricular activities in addition to saying hello in the hall. The most personal types of interactions, specifically the interactions that took place outside of school, were generally only mentioned by those

<sup>25</sup> This difference was statistically significant ( $t = -18.28$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

students interacting with their peers at the highest levels, that is, interacting in 6 or more of the different ways asked about. Overall, very few students reported this higher level of interaction, but those who participated in Project UNIFY were more likely to do so than students who did not participate (11% and 4% respectively).

Moreover, there were also differences in the reported interactions among the students who participated in Project UNIFY, depending on the level of their participation. Students who participated in more Project UNIFY components (inclusive sports, youth leadership, whole-school involvement/awareness) reported interacting with peers with ID in more ways than did students who participated in fewer components (See Table 19). That is, students who participated in two Project UNIFY components interacted with peers with ID more than students who participated in one Project UNIFY component, *and* students who participated in all three components interacted with their peers with ID more than students who participated in two components.<sup>26</sup> It seems that as students become involved in more aspects of Project UNIFY, they also interact more with their peers with ID. This may in part be due to the nature of their involvement: when students are involved in only one component, it is most often the whole-school involvement/awareness component (86%), which may include less opportunity for close interaction with peers with ID. In contrast, when students are involved in two or three components, there is an increasing likelihood that they are engaging with peers with ID in smaller settings, such as Partners Clubs or Unified Sports teams, allowing for more personal interactions.

**Table 19.** Mean interaction scores for students who participated in one, two, or three Project UNIFY components

Project UNIFY Components*	N	Percent of Students	Level of Interaction Mean (SD)
One component	1399	56%	2.78 (1.74)
Two components	703	28%	3.54 (1.88)
All three components	376	15%	4.30 (2.03)

\*Of the 43 schools in which students were surveyed about their interactions, 77% implemented all three components, 19% implemented two components, and 2% implemented only 1 component.

In addition to differences in their interactions with students with ID, students without disabilities who participated in Project UNIFY also behaved differently when they encountered the r-word (“retard”). Because of the emphasis placed on reducing the use of the r-word in Project UNIFY schools, students were asked specifically about how often they heard the r-word and how they felt and behaved in response. Overall, well over three-quarters of students (87%) reported hearing someone call another student “retard” during the course of the school year. Many students (52%) did nothing in response, while approximately one-quarter (28%) told the person who used the r-word that it was wrong.

<sup>26</sup> These between-group differences were statistically significant, based on results of a one-way ANOVA ( $F = 117.56, p < .01$ ). Further analysis (i.e. post hoc comparisons) revealed that the differences between all three groups were significant.

Students also reported affective responses: a quarter of the students felt bad for the person who was called the r-word (26%) or felt angry at the person using the word (24%).

Strikingly, students who participated in Project UNIFY<sup>27</sup> were more likely to respond when they heard the r-word compared to students who did not participate in Project UNIFY. Specifically, those who participated in Project UNIFY were more likely to take action by telling the person that it was wrong to use the r-word (37% vs. 18%) and feel bad (31%) for the person who was called the r-word or angry (30%) at the person using the r-word, compared to students who did not participate in Project UNIFY (20% and 17% respectively). While it is possible that Project UNIFY is attracting students who are more inclined to respond in a more active or sympathetic way, it is also possible that raising awareness is a valuable way to educate and empower students about the use of hurtful language.

Overall, it is clear that Project UNIFY can play an important role in not only promoting positive attitudes among participants but also provide opportunities for interactions among students with and without ID. Participating students in schools new to Project UNIFY reported more positive attitudes toward students with ID in terms of their willingness to interact with their peers with ID and in their beliefs about the inclusion of students with ID in their classes, even when taking into account their attitudes before they became involved. Students without ID who participated in Project UNIFY reported more interaction with their peers with ID than students who did not participate, with higher levels of Project UNIFY participation indicative of greater interaction. It is important to note that irrespective of Project UNIFY involvement, students generally were more likely to report interactions that take place at school and that are more superficial in nature, such as saying hello, than in more personal ways that take place outside of school such as spending time together or inviting a student with ID to their house. It is clear, however, that although most students were not frequently reporting interactions that take place outside of school, those students who participated in Project UNIFY were more likely to report this type of interaction.

## **B. Value to Students with Disabilities**

To consider the value of Project UNIFY to students with disabilities, it is necessary to understand the ways in which Project UNIFY may play a part in the day-to-day school lives of these students. The experiences of students with disabilities both in Project UNIFY specifically, as well as in school generally, are useful in gaining insight into the full picture of students with disabilities in Project UNIFY schools – whether they enjoy school, how they view their peers at school, and what their social interactions are like. To better understand the experiences of students with disabilities, 23 students with disabilities from 8 schools (4 middle schools, 4 high schools) were interviewed about their Project UNIFY involvement and about their experiences in school.

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<sup>27</sup> Similar results were found when looking at those students who participated in the R-Word campaign versus students who did not. This is not surprising given that the R-Word Campaign is the most frequently implemented activity among the Project UNIFY schools included in the analysis, as well as the one with the greatest level of student participation. As such, the subsamples overlap (of the people who did at least one Project UNIFY activity, 76% participated in the R-Word Campaign). Therefore results are presented for Project UNIFY participation more generally.



The students with disabilities interviewed all had the opportunity to be involved in a variety of different Project UNIFY activities, depending on what activities were offered in their schools. In some schools, the students were involved in Traditional SO or Unified Sports. In others, the students were members of a Project UNIFY club (i.e. Partners Club), or went on Project UNIFY-sponsored outings. Most students enjoyed Project UNIFY and were excited about the new and exciting experiences they had while participating (See Table 20). Students even commented on how Project UNIFY provided them with an opportunity to showcase and demonstrate their abilities, particularly in sports.

**Table 20.** Students' with disabilities experiences in Project UNIFY

"I figured Unified basketball would be a really good sport for me to get some shots in and do a good job at what I do. The thing I like about Unified basketball is playing against other teams and making as many shots as I can." (*high school student*)

"We get to meet stars, like the Globetrotters and Oprah." (*high school student*)

"We did banners and everything to show people we're capable of doing anything. We're just capable of doing anything, because we're special education coming together with students not in special education." (*middle school student*)

Many of the students with disabilities said that Project UNIFY helped them make friends or meet new people (See Table 21). Specifically, over half of the students (61%; 14 of 23) reported that they had made new friends as a result of their participation in Project UNIFY activities. A few students, however, reported that they spent time primarily with other students from their special education classes during Project UNIFY activities.

**Table 21.** Students' with disabilities formation of friendships during Project UNIFY

"I made two friends [playing Unified basketball]. I see them in Unified PE, [and] I see them going to classes and on my way to class. We talk about fun activities." (*high school student*)

"I made many new friends in Unified basketball. ... He's a really good basketball player. When I met him, he was just really good at first. Trust me. Whenever he plays basketball, he makes really good three-pointers." (*high school student*)

"I love Project UNIFY. I like going on trips, I like black history month. I like all of it. ... My favorite part is when they help me find new friends so I don't feel lonely." (*middle school student*)

In a few cases, students were able to speak about changes they perceived in themselves or their schools because of Project UNIFY. As one high school student said,

*“When Unified Sports came, I made new friends. And I did better in school. I know more people now than I did before Unified Sports. I didn’t do as good in school as I did now that Unified Sports started.”*

Another high school student prepared a testimonial with the help of her mother, explaining how Project UNIFY changed her school experience,

*“I have been in Special Olympics for three and a half years, and I also have been in the Unified Cheer team [at my high school]. I have loved participating in it, and now I can include the Youth Activation Committee. Before Special Olympics, I never felt included in the activities. Kids would ignore me. I felt invisible. I also have been hurt by teachers, not just students. Once I started Special Olympics, I was no longer invisible. I was a peer. I was just like everybody else because my involvement with the Special Olympics. I love Special Olympics.”*

Given that most students had positive experiences in Project UNIFY, it is perhaps not surprising that almost all of the students with disabilities (91%; 21 of 23) reported liking school (see Table 22). The aspects of school they liked ranged from enjoying particular classes (e.g. science, social studies) to liking the social aspect of school and the people they knew at their schools. Students with disabilities also provided a mixed, but generally positive, perspective on the social aspect of school. More than half (56%; 13 of 23) said that students in school are generally nice to one other. Other students (26%) said that students in school are only sometimes nice, or that some kids are nice and others are not. Students with disabilities also reported that their peers were sometimes mean to one another (48%), but in general, the majority of students with disabilities (56%; 13 of 23) reported that other students in school were nice to them.

**Table 22.** Students’ with disabilities liking of school

<p><i>“I love the people here. They can be funny, and they can be fun.” (high school student)</i></p> <p><i>“I get to see my friends, and all the teachers, and I get to meet more new friends, and I don’t know, I just like school.” (middle school student)</i></p> <p><i>“I love school, I love math, I love UNIFY issues, I love everything about it.” (high school student)</i></p>
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Students provided a range of examples of their peers’ positive and friendly behavior, including that their peers said hi to them, gave them high fives, acted friendly, talked to them at lunch, shared things with them, came to games to cheer them on, and played basketball with them (See Table 23). There were a few students (22%) who reported that students at their school were sometimes mean to them. For instance, one reported that students called her names, and another said that others made fun of him because of his weight. Overall however, all of the students interviewed were able to name or talk about at least one friend at school. Some named Unified partners, while others named other students in their special education classes. Whether these friendships extended beyond school hours varied; a number of

students only saw their friends during school (35%), but some (30%) reported that they sometimes saw friends outside of school.

**Table 23.** Students' with disabilities experiences with school peers

"They're nice to me. They say hello to me. Some people say good morning to me. Some say 'how are you?'" (*high school student*)

"Every day that I come in, my friends [are] here, I'll be in the cafeteria, I'll be walking down to the cafeteria ... and then they would be like, 'how's it going?'" (*high school student*)

"We get along pretty good, cause they don't tease people cause they're in special education classes. They come in our class ... they know how it feels to be in a special education class so they don't tease us. Not at all." (*middle school student*)

### ***Summary of Value of Project UNIFY to Students***

Given the centrality of social inclusion to Project UNIFY's mission, garnering the perspectives of students both with and without ID was of paramount importance. The promising results of the Year 4 evaluation are both cause for celebration and a call for continued work. To celebrate is the fact that not only were Project UNIFY experiences related to students' attitudes toward their peers with ID, but also that Project UNIFY participation was related to students' reported interactions with individuals with ID. Moreover, many students with ID reported positive experiences in Project UNIFY activities and in school more generally, making friends and having the opportunity to meet new people. Using social interaction as a metric, it is evident that Project UNIFY is making progress toward the goal of fostering social inclusion, at least for some students. Equally important to recognize is that not all students are benefitting from Project UNIFY's presence at their schools. Many students did not participate in Project UNIFY programming and some were even unaware that Project UNIFY was taking place in their schools. As one would expect, Project UNIFY can impact students only so far as its messages and goals are carried. Certainly, all of this evidence suggests that continuing to provide students with opportunities for interaction and attracting more students to these opportunities are important areas of focus moving forward.

## **VI. Youth Leadership and Engagement in Project UNIFY**

Project UNIFY is designed with the primary goal of impacting young people – specifically, to engage youth as leaders, to give youth a voice in their schools, and to provide youth with opportunities to become advocates for themselves and their peers. Given this focus, fostering youth engagement and leadership in Project UNIFY programming is an important priority for State SO Programs and schools; State Programs are expected to involve youth on committees and in leadership positions, and schools are encouraged to involve youth as project leaders. For the past three years, the evaluation of Project UNIFY has documented the participation of students in Project UNIFY activities, revealing a wide range of involvement (see Section V for a description of student involvement). The evaluation has demonstrated that students engage in Project UNIFY at a variety of levels, from a peripheral awareness of Project UNIFY activities, to participation in events, to the full-fledged leadership that is the hallmark of ideal Project UNIFY programming. In Year 4, the evaluation further explored student engagement in Project UNIFY, seeking to better understand high levels of student involvement. Opening up a new perspective and understanding of Project UNIFY, the evaluation examined opportunities for youth leadership at the state and school levels as well as collected the perspectives of highly engaged students on how and why students get involved with Project UNIFY.

### **A. Youth Leadership Opportunities and Participation**

In keeping with the belief that youth should be involved as leaders at all levels of Project UNIFY programming, SOI expects that both State SO Programs and schools implementing Project UNIFY include youth with and without disabilities in leadership positions. At the school level, this means that an important goal of Project UNIFY implementation is that students be involved in activities not only as participants, but also in the planning and implementation processes. As reported previously (See Section III - C), many liaisons received help from a variety of different individuals in the school. Overall, over half of liaisons (62%) reported that students helped to plan and implement Project UNIFY activities; of these liaisons who had help from students, three-quarters (74%) reported that both students with and without disabilities were involved in planning and implementation.

Certain Project UNIFY activities, particularly within the whole-school involvement/awareness component, lend themselves better than others to student involvement in planning and implementation. Specifically, when schools implement school-wide activities (e.g. R-Word, fundraising, Sports Day), liaisons report that students with and without disabilities are often involved in the planning and implementation of these activities (See Table 24). For example, of the schools implementing the R-Word Campaign, two-thirds (65%) included students with ID in the planning and implementation, and well over three-quarters (85%) included students without ID.

**Table 24.** Percentage of schools\* in which liaisons reported receiving help from students with and without ID

	Students with ID	Students without ID
R-Word	65%	85%
Fans in the Stands	54%	79%
Fundraising	48%	72%
SO Sports Day	33%	47%

\*Percentage represents only those schools in which the activity was implemented.

While in many schools, students helped liaisons with the planning and implementation of activities, in some schools students had the opportunity to take a lead role in the planning and implementation. In Year 4, students were provided with this type of opportunity in just under a third of the schools (28%). As stated previously, most often this occurred within the whole-school awareness component (e.g. R-Word Campaigns, fundraisers, etc.) Though it was less common for students to take the lead in planning and implementing activities than it was for them to be assisting the liaison, it is promising that these leadership opportunities are being provided to students in some schools. Moreover, schools with all three components of Project UNIFY were more likely to have students as main leaders in the planning and implementation of activities (41%) than were schools with fewer than three components (22%), suggesting that students may be able to become involved in more central roles as schools build more intensive Project UNIFY programming.

In addition to the opportunities provided through the whole-school component, there were also opportunities for students to engage in leadership roles through Partners Clubs. Specifically, in the schools with Partner Clubs, three-quarters of the participating students with and without ID (75%) were provided the opportunity to take on a designated leadership role in the club by the liaison. There were a variety of ways for students to become involved in these roles: some student leaders were chosen by the liaison (52%), others were elected by their peers (25%), and still others became involved in other ways (23%), such as volunteering or stepping up to assume responsibility. Additionally, some Project UNIFY initiatives are structured specifically around student leadership. For instance, in some schools (20%), students with and without ID were provided the opportunity to attend organized Youth Leadership Trainings at the state or regional level.

Beyond the school, some youth were offered the opportunity to engage in leadership roles at the state level as members of the State SO Program’s Youth Activation Committee. (For more information about state-level YACs see Section IV.) Overall, 10% of liaisons reported that students from their school were involved in the state or regional YAC. For one high school student interviewed during the evaluation, the state YAC was a fun and inclusive experience:

*“We meet once a month on Saturday mornings and pretty much just plan events. ... We went up to the mountains for a retreat one weekend, and we planned all the activities we were going to do. There’s a special ed. student from each school, and then there’s one or two partners who come with them, and it’s really fun.”*

Overall, from the liaisons’ perspective, many schools implementing Project UNIFY offered opportunities to engage in leadership roles in Project UNIFY in various ways. It was clear, however, that these opportunities often consisted primarily of aiding liaisons in the planning and implementation of events, rather than students taking lead roles themselves. It is possible that student leadership is an evolving process, such that opportunities for higher levels of leadership are available primarily at schools with established Project UNIFY programming. After all, there is evidence that schools beginning Project UNIFY tend to start with the sports and/or whole school/awareness component, and only later add the youth leadership component, as noted in the exploration of programming trends in schools participating in Project UNIFY in Years 2, 3, and 4 (see Section III). For schools in the beginning years of Project UNIFY, youth leadership may not yet be a main goal. To gain a perspective on student engagement beyond that of the liaison, the evaluation turned to the students themselves.

## **B. Perspectives of Highly Engaged Students**

Documenting both the opportunities for and the prevalence of student leadership is a first step in understanding the breadth of student leadership in Project UNIFY programming, yet to fully understand the students’ experiences, it is important to gain the perspective of those students who are most engaged in Project UNIFY. Students are able to provide not only information regarding what aspects of programming they take part in, but also insight into how they begin their involvement and why they do so. It is well documented that students join programs or activities for a variety of different reasons, ranging from intrinsic interest in the program to a desire to spend time with friends to a need to fulfill an extracurricular requirement.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, students’ reasons and motivations for participating are also related to the quality of their experience and the benefits they believe they derive from their participation. Thus, accessing students’ perspectives on why and how they become involved in Project UNIFY, as well as their perceptions of how Project UNIFY may have impacted them, provide the building blocks for expanding and supporting student participation at higher levels of engagement and leadership.

To explore the experiences of students in Project UNIFY and gain insight into how and why they became involved, 24 students identified by liaisons as highly involved in Project UNIFY were interviewed. These students came from seven of the Project UNIFY schools at which evaluation site visits were conducted (four high schools and three middle schools). These students had a range of Project UNIFY experiences, including participating as partners in Unified Sports and participating in Partners Clubs or other similar Project UNIFY clubs, either as members or as club leaders. In the four high schools, all of the students interviewed became involved in Project UNIFY through their own interest and choice, while in two of the

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<sup>28</sup> Dawes & Larson. (2011.) How youth get engaged: Grounded-theory research on motivational development in organized youth programs. *Developmental Psychology*, 47, 259-269.

three middle schools, students became involved after being asked or selected by a teacher. The reasons for these differences are unclear; while they may be a function of differing procedures at different grade levels, they may also simply be a function of the schools selected. While there was some variation in the Project UNIFY experiences of these students (as it was related to the initiatives taking place in the school), their reasons for getting involved and the lessons they learned from their involvement followed similar themes.

Whether they were involved through their own interest or were asked to be involved, students generally suggested two main reasons for wanting to be involved: an interest in meeting new people, specifically students with disabilities, and a belief in the importance of inclusion (See Table 25). These students often recognized that students with disabilities in their schools were somewhat marginalized, in different classes, with little opportunity for interaction with students outside the special education classrooms. These students tended to express the belief that inclusion was not only an important goal, but also that it afforded advantages in terms of creating a more welcoming and supportive environment in general. As one student said,

*“There’s certain ways you’re supposed to act in school, and you’re supposed to fit in with a group, but you don’t have to do that here, you just do the normal thing, do the natural thing, and do the thing that’s better off for you and everyone else. A different side of people’s a great thing to see sometimes.” (Project UNIFY Club member).*

**Table 25.** Why students got involved in Project UNIFY

“I’d see [students with disabilities] in the hallway and say hi to them but I never got the chance to interact with them very much. So last year when we wanted to start this club, we thought it would be a really cool idea to be able to actually meet them and everything. It’s always fun to have a lot of friends, and they feel the same way, and a lot of the time they don’t get to spend time with people outside of their classes.” (Project UNIFY Club member)

“I like [that] the regular ed and sped come together. ... They’re nice. It’s nice to talk to them. Some of them are my best friends.” (Project UNIFY Class member)

“I first heard about the club last year, and it was brand new, I’d never heard about it before. So I was really excited, because looking back in middle school, I realized how isolated the [students with disabilities] were but I never really made an effort, I didn’t think about it. So then, when I got involved, I was just so happy to be able to make new friends and realize how happy these kids are.” (Project UNIFY Club member)

“I just noticed a difference in the kids, and I wanted to be able to get to know them. I knew I’d have an effect on their lives, as well as they would on mine. Especially being in high school when you’re surrounded by a lot of unpleasant things, being with these kids, they bring a positive attitude back into your life and something you look forward to every day. That’s kind of why I got involved.” (Unified partner)

Once involved in Project UNIFY, students reported a number of positive personal impacts. During Project UNIFY, students had the opportunity to meet new people, both with and without disabilities. For many students, this provided a chance to get to know students with disabilities for the first time, which for some was a new and educational experience. Students involved in Project UNIFY commented that they learned that their peers with disabilities were capable of more than they had originally believed (See Table 26). Some talked about becoming friends with students with disabilities, and learning that those friendships could be very similar to friendships with their peers without disabilities. One student spoke about how Project UNIFY was a learning experience, in that she was nervous about knowing how to act at first, but later developed close relationships:

*“You don’t know how to act sometimes at first, but the kids make you feel so comfortable, just having so much fun. They’re just ... I don’t know how to explain it. You just become so close with them on a personal level – you see them in the hallways and they’ll run up and say hi to you and get so excited, really happy, because you’re impacting their day, but they’re impacting your day so much more.” (Unified partner)*

**Table 26.** Personal impacts of Project UNIFY: Meeting students with disabilities

<p><i>“You get to know each person individually and know each of their strengths and it’s just really cool to see what each of them has to offer because it’s something so unique.” (Project UNIFY Club member)</i></p> <p><i>“I thought “Oh, how should I treat them?” But then when I found out there was basketball, it was like a whole different thing. They can shoot, they can run, they can do a whole bunch of stuff..” (Project UNIFY Club member)</i></p> <p><i>“I do everything with them that I do with my normal friends. One of the kids, she loves to play ping pong. She doesn’t know how to play it yet, but she just likes to play, and she plays video games with me, and we have a basketball court in our back yard, and ... everything that I do with my normal friends, I do with her.” (Project UNIFY Club member)</i></p> <p><i>“You get to know all the students individually – their personalities, what they like, what they don’t like. They’re really outgoing, they don’t hide anything from you.” (Unified partner)</i></p>
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Students also commented that being involved with Project UNIFY just made them feel good; they talked about the positive attitudes and optimistic outlook of their peers with disabilities (See Table 27). A number of students commented that the time they spent involved in Project UNIFY activities had a positive impact on their own mood and that Project UNIFY was a highlight of their time at school. For some students, Project UNIFY provided an accepting environment that contrasted favorably with what one student called “being surrounded by a lot of unpleasant things” in high school. On a basic level, students had fun during their involvement in Project UNIFY.



**Table 27.** Personal impacts of Project UNIFY: Enjoyment, positive outlook

“You can be in the worst mood when you walk into the gym, and you walk out with the biggest smile on your face, because they’re just so happy about everything. Their perspective on life is so ... good, I guess. They see everyone as a good person.” (*Unified partner*)

“When you’re having a bad day, it’s one of those classes that you look forward to, you go in there and get to be yourself, and you don’t have to worry about being judged or people talking about other people, it’s just everyone loves each other in there, and it’s just so much fun to work with all of them.” (*Unified partner*)

“Being with them on field trips, it was fun. It makes you happy. ... They’re really fun when you get to know them. Some people just judge them, but if you get to them, they’re pretty fun. Just like us.” (*Project UNIFY activities partner*)

Aside from their reasons for getting involved in Project UNIFY and their perceptions of the ways Project UNIFY had impacted them personally, the students also had unique insight on why and how other students might get involved in Project UNIFY (See Table 28). As expected these insights varied among schools depending on how widespread Project UNIFY was in the school; for example, in some schools, Project UNIFY existed primarily within a small club and was less known among the rest of the student body. In these schools, the engaged students reported that many of their peers were unsure about getting involved in Project UNIFY and in some cases even confused about the purpose of Project UNIFY. It is perhaps not surprising that, in these instances, it was more difficult to get new students involved.

In other schools, however, students suggested that the ‘hype’ about Project UNIFY had spread from a small group of students to the rest of the school. Students in these schools suggested that other students tended to want to get involved in Project UNIFY as they learned more about the program and about their peers with disabilities. Some students related that they personally recruited friends to get involved with Project UNIFY activities or that peers became interested as the school added activities that appealed to more diverse interests. As one student said:

*“With the cheer team, it started with a few of us, and we had such a positive experience that we shared it with our friends and then they had the basketball team open up, and even just from last year to this year, it’s probably doubled in size. And then with the track opportunity now, it just plays on people’s current interests, and allows them to get involved in something that they’re already a part of. So people already on the track team get another piece of it.”* (*Project UNIFY Club member and Unified partner*)

**Table 28.** Impacts on the school

“I’ve recruited a lot of my friends. Last year, on our basketball team, me and [one of my friends] were the only helpers, and this year I had all my lacrosse friends do it.” *(Unified partner)*

“Last year, there weren’t any guys in our Unified sports class – it was all girls, and none of the guys really knew what it was, none of them got involved, but this year our whole class is almost all guys, there are like three girls. I think that the things are really starting to spread, and I think that people are realizing that they’re not as different as people put them out to be, that they’re just one of us, and you can hold a conversation with one of them and become really good friends with one of them.” *(Unified partner)*

### ***Summary of Youth Leadership and Engagement***

Exploring both liaison perspectives on opportunities for youth leadership and students’ perspectives on their own engagement was an important step in increasing understanding about youth involvement in Project UNIFY. It is clear that the students interviewed in Year 4 were highly engaged in Project UNIFY and had positive perspectives on their own involvement, yet it is also clear that their engagement and enthusiasm did not always extend to their peers. At the same time, while liaisons reported numerous opportunities for youth leadership in their schools, it is likely that definitions of leadership differed. While the students without disabilities interviewed reported a range of engagement, from participating in clubs to assisting in planning to serving as club presidents, students with ID seemed underrepresented in these leadership roles in the schools visited. Another area that warrants further exploration is why and how Project UNIFY expanded throughout the student body in some schools but remained primarily within a small group in other schools. Additionally, further investigations may explore what liaisons mean when they talk about leadership, and whether there are students with disabilities involved as leaders. Meanwhile, it is evident that liaisons may benefit from increased information regarding what student leadership might look like and how they might encourage student leadership and engagement in their schools. In addition, it will be important for Project UNIFY moving forward to continue to identify those students who *are* highly engaged and support them in spreading Project UNIFY through their schools.

## VII. Project UNIFY Partnerships: Collaboration of State Programs & Schools

As a national, school-based program, Project UNIFY operates through a multi-level structure, with programming that takes place at the national, state, and school levels. In order to carry out the ground-level work required to implement inclusive programming in schools, SOI relies on SO State Programs to reach out to and form partnerships with schools in their respective states. This concept of schools partnering with community organizations to support school goals and implement programming is certainly not new, and in fact seems to be a popular strategy as schools increasingly shoulder the responsibility for the socialization of children and youth.<sup>29</sup> Schools can benefit from organizations that support students in the development of important social and life skills, while organizations appreciate the opportunity to provide services directly to students in a natural setting. Nonetheless, fostering a successful collaboration can be fraught with challenges. For a beneficial relationship to exist between Project UNIFY schools and their State Programs, both the schools and the State Programs must feel that the partnership is positive and worthwhile.<sup>30</sup> To explore this vital aspect of Project UNIFY in Year 4, interviews and surveys with key school and state stakeholders were conducted to explore multiple perspectives of the partnerships forged between schools and State SO Programs.

### A. Partnership Structure

In the materials that SOI provides to State Programs, SOI offers general recommendations regarding the types of support State Programs should give to schools. Though broad, these recommendations highlight three important aspects of successful partnerships. Specifically, the recommendations suggest that State Programs should support schools with: regular communication with an identified school liaison in every school, consistent collaboration and technical assistance, and the provision of resources. Beyond these recommendations, State Programs have the freedom to partner with schools in ways they find most beneficial. In addition, the flexibility of the Project UNIFY school guidelines created by SOI allows State Programs and schools to mold Project UNIFY to fit within each school's goals and existing programs. Because of these factors, variation exists from state to state in terms of the way State Programs choose to structure their partnerships and implement Project UNIFY programming.

In general, a prerequisite to carrying out any sort of partnership is having individuals on both sides of the partnership who are available to collaborate. Over the first four years of Project UNIFY, there has always been variation in the staffing structure of State SO Programs and the ways that they utilize their personnel to implement Project UNIFY. Generally, most states (79%) involve multiple staff members in the management of Project UNIFY, and most State Program staff (82%) have multiple responsibilities. Currently, less than a quarter of State Programs (18%) have a staff member dedicated solely to Project UNIFY.

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<sup>29</sup> Joyce Epstein and Mavis Sanders. PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE: PREPARING EDUCATORS FOR SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Catherine Hands. IT'S WHO YOU KNOW AND WHAT YOU KNOW: THE PROCESS OF CREATING PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES.

At the school level, the main point of contact for State Programs is the school staff member identified as Project UNIFY liaison. The liaison serves as the person responsible for the implementation of Project UNIFY activities that take place in the school. While most of the State Programs (74%) worked with a designated liaison in each school, a quarter of State SO Programs (26%) could not identify a liaison for each of their participating schools. These State Programs instead reported that ‘most’ or ‘some’ of their participating schools had a designated liaison<sup>31</sup>. Although not all State SO Programs had a liaison for each school in Year 4, there was improvement from Year 3, during which only two-thirds of Programs (67%) could identify a liaison for each participating school.

## 1. Beginning Partnerships: Recruitment

One of the first areas of interest when examining the partnerships created through Project UNIFY is why and how they were established. Since the beginning of Project UNIFY, states have utilized various approaches for establishing relationships with educators and recruiting schools for participation in Project UNIFY. In many cases, schools become involved with Project UNIFY through existing relationships built around Traditional SO Sports. Other schools are recruited by State Programs because other schools in the district take part in Project UNIFY, or because a school staff member approaches the State Program, among other reasons. To address this question in Year 4, State Program staff were asked what school characteristics they look for when recruiting schools. As expected, answers ranged widely (See Table 29). Some State Programs look specifically for schools with existing Special Olympics programming, while others focus on schools that have a staff member passionate about Special Olympics and/or inclusion. Other State Programs select schools in which students express interest in implementing Project UNIFY. In general, State Programs did not agree on a specific set of criteria defining how to recruit an ‘ideal’ Project UNIFY school, but they did seem to agree that it is important to have a sense that a school will be receptive to Project UNIFY, whether this is evidenced through previous inclusive programming, strong student leadership, or an interested staff member.

**Table 29.** Characteristics State Programs look for when recruiting schools for Project UNIFY

“We look for an engaged youth – one who has been involved in our program or who wants to get involved in our program.”

“We look if they already have an interest in Special Olympics and inclusion within schools. We look to see what their current involvement is and if they have one or two people willing to work to complete the program.”

“Schools are determined to be a good Project UNIFY candidate if there are other schools within their district that are already involved. ... Location of the schools is also important to ensure close proximity to other participating Unified sports teams.”

<sup>31</sup>Note: Some liaisons were selected to represent multiple schools or in some instances, all schools in a school district.

**Table 29 con't**

“The biggest thing that we look for as a state is enthusiasm! We really want a great student body, a solid special ed[ucation] program, outstanding teachers, and an on-board administration, but the enthusiasm is what is key to the success of a program.”

“We do not have characteristics that we look for in potential Project UNIFY schools. All schools can benefit from and contribute to the Project UNIFY movement in our state. Each school is unique and every Project UNIFY program in a school community is consequently unique.”

After identifying schools best suited to or most interested in Project UNIFY, State Programs work to establish relationships with these schools. This step is particularly important to a successful collaboration, as both parties should ideally share a common vision for what they are trying to achieve and have complimentary capacities to provide the intended services.<sup>32</sup> Many State Programs utilized similar approaches for formalizing these partnerships. Nearly every State Program (97%) requires schools to sign an agreement regarding their participation in Project UNIFY. The school stakeholders who sign this agreement differ among states, but most require an administrator (92%) and/or a liaison (81%) to sign. Additionally, almost all State Programs (79%) reported holding formal meetings with most or all of their new schools. These formal meetings can be a beneficial practice, as taking the time at the outset of a partnership is important in order for both parties to discuss expectations and create a shared vision.

In the context of recruiting schools, the question of school administrator involvement or buy-in regarding Project UNIFY was discussed extensively in conversations with State Programs. In Year 4, SOI strongly encouraged State Programs to meet with a member of the school’s administration in an effort to ensure school buy-in for Project UNIFY beyond the school liaison. Over half (58%) of State Programs reported that a member of the State staff spoke with the administration in most or all of their Project UNIFY schools. Whether administrative support is essential to the success of Project UNIFY in a school is still debated among State Programs (See Table 30). However, almost all State Programs (87%) believe that having the support of a school administrator is very important for the Project UNIFY partnership.

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<sup>32</sup> Melinda Thomas, Fiona Rowe and Neil Harris. UNDERSTANDING THE FACTORS THAT CHARACTERIZE SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS, 2010.

**Table 30.** State Program perspectives on the importance of administrative support

“We always say it’s about the administrator – you have to have the administrator. But it’s really not. It’s about finding that teacher ... if that teacher or youth or one key person wants to do it, most of the time the administrator is not going to say no. ... They may not be involved; administrators are dealing with bigger things. But they empower their teachers to do that. I don’t think the administrator is as important as we think they are.”

“[Administrative support] is vital. More than vital. If you don’t have an administrator who says ‘yes, you can do this,’ you have to convince them that it’s important. ... For all our extremely successful schools, there’s somebody at a higher level who is in agreement with it. ... They see outcomes – funding opportunities, the inclusive aspect, climate change. ... They can see the long-term value.”

Certainly, school administrators play an important role in whether Project UNIFY is integrated into the school’s goals. Among administrators surveyed, more than half (61%) felt that Project UNIFY played a very or moderately important role in supporting school inclusion and acceptance policies. However, very few (13%) had incorporated Project UNIFY into their school improvement plans. How best to involve school administrators is a question that State Programs and SOI will need to continue considering, particularly when thinking about the sustainability of Project UNIFY. Currently, half of Project UNIFY liaisons (50%) feel that Project UNIFY is not likely to continue at the school without their direct involvement. Those liaisons who reported the involvement of administration in the decision making around Project UNIFY however were more confident that Project UNIFY would continue in the school without their direct involvement than those liaisons who reported no or limited involvement of administration (62% and 42% respectively). It is clear that there is a need to build strategies for sustainability beyond the liaison into discussions among State Programs, administrators, and school staff.

## **2. Maintaining Partnerships: Communication and Support**

When developing an effective partnership, it is crucial that sufficient time is dedicated to development of the relationship, that both parties are present and available, and that necessary support is provided from both parties. When providing recommendations to State Programs regarding their partnerships with schools, SOI highlights communication and assistance as key suggestions. Most State Programs (79%) reported having regular contact with the schools in their state, with over half of the liaisons (57%) reporting being in contact with their State Program once per month or more. Moreover, approximately half of the State Programs (52%) reported being involved in the school-level planning of Project UNIFY activities in most or all of their schools. Generally, most liaisons seem to be pleased with their relationship with the State Program, rating their involvement with Project UNIFY as about as much as they wanted (69%).

There was more variation in the degree to which State Programs provided guidance and training on implementing Project UNIFY (See Table 31). Three-quarters of State Programs (74%) reported that they

provide training materials to school liaisons at the outset of their participation in Project UNIFY. However, fewer than half of liaisons (46%) reported that they received initial training on how to implement Project UNIFY initiatives. Though this may in part be attributed to variation in when liaisons began Project UNIFY, there may still be inconsistencies in State Program’s provision of training materials.

Similarly, there was variation in whether State Programs provided ongoing training and development opportunities throughout the year. Overall, almost three-quarters of State Programs (68%) reported providing professional development opportunities for on-going learning on how to implement Project UNIFY or make improvements to their programming during the course of the year, either at the state, school, or regional level. In those states that offered professional development opportunities, over half of the liaisons (60%) reported being aware of these opportunities. Of those who were aware, two-thirds (67%) were able to take advantage of these opportunities. The majority of those who did participate rated these trainings as helpful (93%). Going forward, providing ongoing training or information to liaisons, and assuring that all liaisons are aware of these opportunities, may help ensure that Project UNIFY initiatives are implemented as intended across schools.

**Table 31.** Resources and training provided to schools by State Programs

“I provide them with any tools or resources they might need. For example, one district organizes a track and field meet. They run the event, but [the area director] works with them, works with the youth as volunteers to make it happen.”

“We meet as many times as is needed for liaisons to feel comfortable and empowered. Each liaison is given a packet of information on Project UNIFY and Special Olympics, plus information on each [State Special Olympics] initiative they choose to participate in.”

“We currently have a one-pager describing Project UNIFY and a brief outline of various education initiatives and activities that [schools] can implement, as well as a wealth of information on Unified Sports implementation. We are working on developing a complete Project UNIFY handbook to give to school liaisons, complete with information about expectations, letter of support, and activity outlines.”

Another common role of State Programs in partnering with schools is the provision of resources and materials for Project UNIFY activities in the school. Nearly three-quarters of the schools (72%) received materials used to promote Project UNIFY activities at the school level (e.g. uniforms, posters, etc.). Fewer liaisons reported receiving monetary stipends for either themselves or their schools. Specifically, one-third of schools (32%) received a stipend or funding from SO for Project UNIFY activities, and less than a quarter (17%) received a direct stipend for their work as the coordinator of Project UNIFY in the school. The importance of these monetary and in-kind resources was evident, as schools that received direct support from their State Program in terms of materials and/or direct school funding were able to implement, on average, more Project UNIFY initiatives than those who did not receive this type of support. Indeed, the schools that received either in-kind support or school stipends implemented, on

average, four Project UNIFY initiatives. In comparison, schools not receiving this type of support implemented only two Project UNIFY initiatives, on average.<sup>33</sup> While it might be possible that schools planning and implementing larger numbers of Project UNIFY initiatives are more likely to seek out materials and financial support, it is also possible that some schools are unaware of the possibilities for support and as a result, limit their Project UNIFY programming.

Given the variation in many aspects of partnerships between State Programs and schools, it is clear that continued efforts toward understanding what makes these partnerships most successful can be beneficial. Therefore, as a next step, specific models of implementation by State SO Programs were explored through conversations with various State Programs and school stakeholders in different locations across the country.

## **B. State Program-School Partnerships: Three Models**

Among the State Programs that participated in interviews in Year 4, every State Program perceived their relationship with schools differently, in part because these relationships depend on qualities such as the capacity and priorities of the State Program, the needs of schools in the state, and the ability and interest of the State Program and schools to work together. There is currently no ‘correct’ or preferred way to implement Project UNIFY, but it is clear that there are different models for how State SO Programs can support schools. Through site visits and interviews in schools and with State SO Program staff, three such models have been identified. These three models can be understood structurally, in terms of the level of support State Programs provide to schools and how involved State Programs choose to be in their schools. Presented below, the models are described as a top-down model, a mixed model, and a bottom-up model. As State SO Programs continue to evolve in both their views of Project UNIFY and their capacity to partner with schools, these models may serve as a useful guide for how State Programs may collaborate with schools to implement Project UNIFY.

### **1. Top-Down Model**

In the top-down model, the State SO Program views Project UNIFY as a cohesive program with clear goals. The State Program has a clear idea of what Project UNIFY looks like in practice, what the value of Project UNIFY is, and what Project UNIFY can bring to schools. Along with this perspective, the State Program views itself as responsible for the delivery of Project UNIFY to schools and, by extension, the implementation of Project UNIFY in those schools. At the same time, the State Program understands that schools have different needs and priorities, and is committed to working within school goals to implement Project UNIFY programming. With that responsibility comes an understanding that support must be provided to schools to create quality Project UNIFY programming.

A State Program with a top-down model has multiple staff members dedicated to Project UNIFY, each with their own responsibilities and roles. This allows for a high level of in-school involvement by State Program staff, from the initial meeting with school stakeholders and the signing of a participation

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<sup>33</sup> This difference was statistically significant ( $t = -13.41, p < .01$ ).



agreement to a continued presence throughout the year. Moreover, the State SO Program understands that the school administration may not be the entry point into schools, but they know that forging a relationship with a school administrator is important to enhancing the quality of Project UNIFY programming and moving toward a school-wide program.

During the year, the State Program supports individual liaisons and schools by providing materials for various Project UNIFY initiatives and related activities, helping to generate ideas around what activities a school can implement, and even getting to know students. The State Program advises schools on building strong student leadership, and ties school-level youth leadership with the state-level YAC.

“The school agreement form breaks it down to the options they have, [and] gives them the freedom to make sure they’re successful. Yes, there’s a structural basis we need [schools] to follow, but we understand that each school is different, and we want each to be successful.”

“[The strategic plan has] a Unified component – compete in school and at the larger SO level, an inclusive piece, and a larger school-wide piece – R-Word, etc. We realize it takes time – maybe they don’t all do it all at once, [but it’s] the model we expect them to do.”

## 2. Mixed Model

In the mixed model, the State SO Program views Project UNIFY’s youth leadership/activation and whole-school involvement/awareness components and the sports component as slightly separate pieces of the same program. The State Program is very involved in the sports component of Project UNIFY but generally allows the school liaison to run the whole-school involvement/awareness and youth leadership components independently in the school.

In this model, the State Program generally allocates its staff throughout the state and utilizes area directors to locally support schools with all aspects of Project UNIFY related to sports. The State Program supports schools by connecting students with and without disabilities to sports activities, specifically Unified and Traditional SO Sports. These activities generally take place outside of the school.

On the school level, the liaison feels supported by the State Program for Project UNIFY, as materials are provided for activities, but they tend to think about Project UNIFY and Special Olympics as separate, unconnected entities. In the mixed model, ‘Project UNIFY’ – or at least the whole-school awareness and youth leadership components – are organized by a liaison and occur in the school, and Special Olympics provides students with and without disabilities the opportunity to interact outside of the school through the sports component. While both sports and school programming can be strong when Project UNIFY is implemented in this way, there is often a lack of connection between the different elements of Project UNIFY programming.

“A good model is one that has a Traditional SO team in place, with athletes there competing in SO. That’s the core. Then the students can relate better to individuals with ID. Sports give them that common bond ... that initial – ‘wow, we have something in common’ factor that gets them to know each other. From there, student leaders need to be the ones.”

“[The State Program] keeps track of the financials, pay for all transportation, pay for all bowling leagues expenses, etc. ... The YAC at each building decides how they will implement the goals and objectives at their site, and each lead teacher has a budget that her YAC can utilize for in school activities.”

### 3. Bottom-Up Model

In the bottom-up model, the State SO Program believes that individual schools know what is best in terms of adapting and implementing Project UNIFY. As a result, the State Program encourages schools to figure out how to make Project UNIFY work for them, in a way that is most beneficial to their staff, students, and communities. The State Program recruits schools that are implementing existing programs that are complementary to the values of Project UNIFY, or schools with priorities that align with the goals and objectives of Project UNIFY.

In this model, the State Program utilizes grassroots strategies to get schools involved with Project UNIFY; they build relationships with schools at the ground level and through several tiers of support – from local volunteer coordinators, to area directors, to state Project UNIFY managers. While some states employ this strategy because they believe that grassroots efforts are the best way to reach schools, other states may lack the capacity to provide a higher level of involvement in the school.

In the bottom-up model, the State Program provides schools with the funding and materials that they need to be successful, but has little involvement in planning or organization at the school-level. In these schools, Project UNIFY may be viewed as a program that supplements what a school is already doing and provides additional funding so the school can expand or strengthen its efforts.

“There are different ways of running Project UNIFY – it’s tailored to each school. ... There are not goals per se for each school, because staff identifies school strengths. ... The goal is to make it an ingrained part of the school – that creates an inclusive place for all students regardless of disability.”

### ***Summary of Project UNIFY Partnerships***

Given the variation in many areas of establishing and maintaining partnerships, it is clear that continuing to improve upon partnerships between State SO Programs and schools can serve as an ongoing goal in the efforts to continually strengthen Project UNIFY programming. Both Project UNIFY schools and State Programs are often eager to work together to provide opportunities for students. It is important, however, that this eagerness does not preclude State Programs and schools from taking the steps to ensure a successful relationship. It is important that schools and organizations think about *why* they should engage in a partnership and if so, *how* they are going to develop and sustain the relationship. Not surprisingly, the most successful partnerships are those that have been well thought out and have strategies in place that address how both parties will work together toward their common goal. Certainly, many State SO Programs have many of the elements necessary for successful partnerships. However, continuing to examine how State Programs and schools can partner most effectively to advance the goals of Project UNIFY can be beneficial to the development, improvement, and sustainability of the program.

## VIII. Conclusions and Recommendations

Beyond documenting the implementation of Project UNIFY and the collaboration that exists between State SO Programs and schools, the results of the Year 4 evaluation suggest that Project UNIFY has important value for the State SO Programs, schools, and students involved. For the first time, the evaluation was able to capture the mutual benefits afforded to all parties involved in Project UNIFY, including increased opportunities for inclusive programming in the schools and enhanced partnerships between schools and State Programs. State Programs reported that the educational community has changed the way they view Special Olympics as an organization, and school liaisons and administrators perceived an impact on how students with and without ID interact. Moreover, while the results of the Year 3 evaluation suggested the potential for Project UNIFY to impact students directly, the results of the Year 4 evaluation furthered and expanded the documentation of this impact. Overall, students participating in Project UNIFY reported more positive attitudes toward students with ID and inclusion than students who did not participate. Beyond their attitudes, the promising results of the Year 4 evaluation also demonstrated that students participating in Project UNIFY reported interacting in more ways with their peers with ID than those students who did not participate. Given Project UNIFY's mission of supporting the social inclusion of students with ID, this documentation of the interactions taking place in schools was paramount.

Given the results of the Year 4 evaluation, it is evident that the continued refinement of Project UNIFY has had an impact. Not only does the extent of Project UNIFY programming taking place in a school play a role in liaisons' perceptions of value, but the extent of students' involvement in Project UNIFY has an impact on the experiences students have and on students' interactions with their peers with ID. While reflecting on these positive findings, it is also important to remember that the impact of Project UNIFY can only reach as far as its messages and goals are carried. At present, not all schools are able to implement the robust programming demonstrated by many of the schools represented in the evaluation. As State Programs continue to introduce new schools to Project UNIFY, this range of programming development among Project UNIFY schools will certainly continue. Nonetheless, the results of the Year 4 evaluation suggest that continuing to provide students with and without ID with opportunities for participation in Project UNIFY programming drawn from all three components, and attracting more students to these opportunities, are important areas to emphasize moving forward.

As SOI embarks on the fifth year of Project UNIFY, it is clear that they are poised to build upon these evaluation results, as well as past experiences and success, to focus on building the sustainability of Project UNIFY in schools by supporting not only the depth and breadth of programming in the schools, but also on the quality of that programming. Therefore, in the spirit of continual development and improvement of Project UNIFY, the following recommendations are offered.

*Continue to encourage schools toward Category 1 status, placing an increased emphasis on the implementation of initiatives from all three components.*

In Year 4, SOI established a two-tiered designation system for participating schools, requiring State Programs to designate schools still developing Project UNIFY programming as Category 2 and schools implementing more comprehensive Project UNIFY programming as Category 1. Establishing school-level guidelines provided more clarity on how schools might implement initiatives from the three components to create well-rounded Project UNIFY programs, while retaining the flexibility and autonomy that allow schools to fit Project UNIFY programming within the goals of the school. The results of the Year 4 evaluation, however, demonstrate that schools struggled to fulfill the Project UNIFY guidelines, as only two thirds of designated Category 1 and 2 schools successfully met the specific requirements. Thus, it is clear that more work and support may be required from State Programs to assure that schools are able to implement programming based on the present guidelines.

This guideline-based implementation of Project UNIFY is all the more important given the evidence that schools successfully implementing all three components of Project UNIFY saw more positive results compared to schools implementing less robust programming. In schools with three components, liaisons report larger impact from Project UNIFY compared to liaisons from schools with fewer components. Moreover, students without disabilities who had the opportunity to participate in all three components, and took advantage of that opportunity, reported interacting more with their peers with ID than did students who participated in fewer components. This suggests that as students become more involved with Project UNIFY, there is more opportunity for inclusive interaction.

While the continued expansion of Project UNIFY will entail the continued existence of schools building their programming at Category 2 status, it is important that schools do not remain Category 2 indefinitely. The results of the evaluation show that the greatest impact on both schools and students is most evident in those Category 1 schools that are successfully fulfilling the requirements; that is, providing opportunities for inclusive sports, youth leadership, and whole-school involvement. Continuing to work with both State Programs and schools to elucidate how schools can best implement well-rounded programming will be a vital step in assuring the impact of Project UNIFY moving forward.

*Assure that State Programs provide regular communication, support, and professional development consistently across all schools.*

Since the creation of Project UNIFY, SOI has relied on State Programs to form partnerships with schools to carry out the ground-level work required for implementing school-based Project UNIFY programming. To facilitate these partnerships, SOI provides general recommendations regarding the types of support State Programs should be providing to schools, including regular communication, consistent collaboration and technical assistance, and the provision of materials and/or funding. Despite these recommendations, however, communication and support from State SO Programs to schools remain inconsistent and uneven. For instance, a third of liaisons reported communicating with their State Program less than once a month, and an additional 12% reported never communicating with their State Program. Similarly, while most schools received support from their State Program in the form of

materials, just over a quarter did not, and only a third received direct monetary funding for Project UNIFY programming. Finally, while almost three-quarters of State SO Programs reported providing opportunities for professional development, over a third of the liaisons were unaware of these opportunities in their state.

The Year 4 evaluation demonstrated that these types of support have an impact on the programming schools are able to implement. For example, schools that received direct support from their State Program (i.e., monetary support and/or resources and materials), were able to implement more extensive Project UNIFY programming than schools who did not receive this type of support. Thus, to facilitate the implementation of quality school programming, it is imperative that State Programs understand and embrace their role as partner. State Programs must communicate with all participating schools in their state – not just some, as it is through this communication that schools learn of available resources, professional development opportunities, and more generally, receive new ideas and overall support for programming. At the same time, communication with schools aids State Programs in gaining a better understanding of the challenges faced by schools and how they can best support the implementation of Project UNIFY. For states to adequately support their Project UNIFY schools, consistent communication is essential.

*Support the sustainability of Project UNIFY beyond the liaison by ensuring buy-in and support of administrators in Project UNIFY schools.*

Although general recommendations have been established for how State Programs should be supporting schools (as discussed above), SOI has allowed State Programs a great deal of freedom in developing and sustaining partnerships with schools. As a result, there is some disagreement among State Programs regarding the direct involvement of administration in Project UNIFY and what that involvement should entail. While most State Programs view the support of the administration in a school as an important element of Project UNIFY, few reported speaking with an administrator when recruiting new schools to participate. Instead, most State Programs rely on the liaison when initiating Project UNIFY and communicating with a school, as has been the case since Project UNIFY's inception.

While placing liaisons as the central figures responsible for the implementation of Project UNIFY is practical, it is possible that for Project UNIFY to be sustainable, additional efforts are needed to both gain and ensure administrator support and involvement in the program. Currently, only half of the liaisons believe that Project UNIFY would likely continue in the school without their direct involvement. While attrition is a pervasive concern for any program that depends on the dedicated support of volunteers, this is something that must be addressed if Project UNIFY is to be a sustainable program in the schools. Not surprisingly, those liaisons who reported the involvement of the administration in the decision-making around Project UNIFY were more confident that the program would continue without their personal involvement. Clearly, administrator involvement and support can serve as a step in the right direction toward ensuring the sustainability of Project UNIFY; certainly, resting the responsibility for sustainability of Project UNIFY upon a single individual is not a viable or preferable model.

*Create training materials and professional development opportunities for school liaisons regarding how to foster youth leadership in Project UNIFY.*

One of Project UNIFY's main goals is to foster youth leadership, providing students with and without ID opportunities to have a voice and to take on active, leading roles in their schools and beyond. Despite the centrality of this goal, providing youth with leadership opportunities at the school-level may be the most challenging component of Project UNIFY for schools to implement. When exploring trends in programming from schools implementing Project UNIFY over the past three years, the data suggest that the youth leadership component is implemented only secondarily to the sports and/or whole-school awareness components. In those schools that provided opportunities for leadership, most often the opportunities consisted of students helping the liaison in the planning and implementation of events; less often were students taking on higher levels of leadership such as taking on the lead role in planning and implementation. Clearly, if youth leadership is to become an achievable goal, additional support is needed.

The results of the Year 4 evaluation indicate that there are many participating schools that have highly engaged, dedicated youth who are poised to take on leadership roles and responsibilities. In some instances, the lack of youth leadership may not be driven by a lack of student interest but rather by liaisons' uncertainty or confusion about how youth leadership should operate in Project UNIFY. Currently, there is no prescribed method or definition for what leadership opportunities entail, nor what role adults should take in fostering youth leadership. As such, even in cases in which liaisons believe they are providing opportunities for youth leadership, there is a great deal of variation and unevenness in the provision of these opportunities and in how liaisons are conceptualizing the notion of youth leadership. Providing liaisons with information about what types of youth leadership opportunities should be provided through Project UNIFY, and the training and information needed to foster this leadership, is an important next step in fulfilling this important objective of Project UNIFY. In turn, student leadership may aid in spreading awareness about the program within the school and among students. As one administrator said, "[The] biggest piece is that [Project UNIFY] is student driven. That's going to carry this further than any other program that we decided to put into place."

*Foster and support the inclusion of students with disabilities in leadership roles by providing training materials and professional development for school liaisons on how to ensure students with disabilities are included as Project UNIFY leaders.*

As stated above, providing opportunities for youth leadership in Project UNIFY is often challenging for liaisons. In addition to more clearly defining the expectations for youth leadership in Project UNIFY and providing training to liaisons as they support youth, attention must be paid specifically to the role of students with ID. While liaisons reported that students with ID were involved in planning and implementation of Project UNIFY in Year 4, it was clear from interviews with liaisons and school site visits that even those schools excelling in involving students without disabilities in leadership positions struggled to know how best to include students with ID. While there were opportunities for students with and without ID to interact during Project UNIFY and for students with ID to be present during

meetings, too often the actual planning was left to the students without disabilities. That is, the planning was taking place by students without disabilities for students with disabilities. Certainly, this is not the aim of Project UNIFY.

Even for the best-intentioned liaisons and schools, it can be challenging to include students with and without ID as equals. In many cases, this may be the result of liaisons who simply do not know how to engage students with ID as leaders. To fully engage students with ID in leadership roles and achieve inclusive youth leadership in Project UNIFY, liaisons need more training on how to do so intentionally and effectively.



## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Characteristics of school liaisons (N= 1073)

	<b>Percent of Liaisons</b>
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	20%
Female	80%
<b>Age</b>	<i>m</i> =43 years
<b>Type of teacher</b>	
Special Education	54%
Adaptive Physical Education	7%
General Education	10%
Physical Education	7%
Administrator	12%
<b>Number of years at school</b>	<i>m</i> = 8 years
<b>Previous SO involvement</b>	78%
<b>Years involved</b>	<i>m</i> = 9.5 years

**Table A2.** Characteristics of students participating in the survey administered at the end of the year only

	Middle School		High School	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
<b>Total number of schools</b>	12		31	
<b>Total number of students</b>	1659		4332	
<b>Gender</b>				
Male		44%		46%
Female		56%		54%
<b>Grade</b>				
6		19%		
7		31%		
8		50%		
9				26%
10				26%
11				22%
12				24%
<b>Race</b>				
White		62%		82%
Black		36%		14%
Hispanic		34%		18%

**Table A3.** Characteristics of students participating in the survey administered at the beginning and end of the school year

<b>Middle School</b>		
	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Total number of schools</b>	9	
<b>Total number of students</b>	971	
<b>Gender</b>		
Male		47%
Female		53%
<b>Grade</b>		
6		31%
7		45%
8		24%
<b>Race</b>		
White		80%
Black		19%
Hispanic		23%

**Table A4.** Breakdown of Category 1 and Category 2 schools by state<sup>34</sup>

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Response Rate</b> <sup>35</sup>	<b>Category 1 Schools</b>	<b>Category 2 Schools</b>
<b>Arizona</b>	99	54%	28% (15)	72% (38)
<b>Colorado</b>	53	77%	73% (30)	27% (11)
Connecticut	15	93%	43% (6)	57% (8)
Delaware	11	100%	46% (5)	55% (6)
Georgia	37	100%	51% (19)	49% (18)
Hawaii	37	95%	6% (2)	94% (33)
Iowa	32	56%	50% (2)	50% (2)
<b>Idaho</b>	20	80%	100% (18)	0
Illinois	57	61%	38% (6)	63% (10)
Indiana	11	36%	0	100% (35)
Louisiana	27	96%	35% (9)	65% (17)
Massachusetts	10	70%	100% (7)	0
<b>Maryland</b>	55	87%	43% (20)	57% (27)
Maine	19	79%	73% (11)	27% (4)
<b>Michigan</b>	52	73%	34% (13)	66% (25)
<b>Missouri</b>	32	50%	56% (9)	44% (7)
<b>North Carolina</b>	122	85%	71% (74)	29% (30)
Nebraska <sup>36</sup>	63	19%	64% (7)	36% (4)
<b>New Hampshire</b>	48	71%	24% (8)	77% (26)
New Jersey	74	36%	65% (17)	35% (9)
New Mexico	11	55%	67% (4)	33% (2)
N. California	199	18%	17% (6)	83% (30)
Nevada	71	70%	6% (3)	94% (47)
New York	15	7%	0	100% (1)
Ohio	15	100%	60% (9)	40% (6)
Oklahoma	11	91%	70% (7)	30% (3)
<b>Oregon</b>	29	66%	53% (10)	47% (9)
Pennsylvania	11	27%	0	100% (3)
Rhode Island	26	73%	63% (12)	37% (7)
<b>South Carolina</b>	83	88%	48% (35)	52% (38)
S. California	11	55%	0	100% (6)
<b>Texas</b>	129	57%	50% (37)	50% (37)
Utah	7	43%	33% (1)	67% (2)
Virginia	144	67%	31% (30)	69% (66)
Vermont	27	48%	69% (9)	31% (4)
Washington	60	33%	30% (6)	70% (14)
Wisconsin	40	70%	61% (17)	39% (11)
Wyoming	13	85%	46% (5)	55% (6)

<sup>34</sup> Bold indicates that the state is High Activation<sup>35</sup> The response rate includes only those who completed the survey fully enough to be included in the dataset. Partial responses were not counted toward the response rate.<sup>36</sup> 19 NE schools were not sent the survey until just before the due date due to an error. NE had 25% response rate without those 19 schools.

**Table A5.** Percentage of schools that included each initiative as part of Project UNIFY by state

	Number of Schools	R-Word	Unified Sports	Traditional SO Sports	Partners Club	SO Sports Day	Fans in the Stands	Get Into It	Fundraising	Youth Leadership Training	Young Athletes
<b>Arizona</b>	53	42%	55%	35%	42%	17%	21%	8%	15%	26%	8%
<b>Colorado</b>	41	63%	51%	34%	39%	51%	17%	37%	22%	24%	34%
Connecticut	14	43%	100%	7%	57%	0	36%	21%	29%	64%	0
Delaware	11	100%	18%	18%	27%	27%	55%	46%	11%	73%	55%
Georgia	37	68%	65%	70%	42%	43%	49%	38%	38%	11%	57%
Hawaii	35	17%	14%	31%	26%	40%	11%	11%	11%	11%	14%
Iowa	4	100%	75%	75%	50%	50%	25%	75%	25%	25%	25%
<b>Idaho</b>	18	56%	22%	11%	39%	11%	17%	78%	44%	56%	22%
Illinois	16	69%	44%	75%	44%	25%	13%	63%	44%	63%	81%
Indiana	35	29%	26%	31%	14%	34%	6%	11%	9%	6%	57%
Louisiana	26	77%	39%	85%	19%	31%	58%	27%	15%	8%	15%
Massachusetts	7	100%	100%	57%	57%	43%	14%	14%	29%	57%	14%
<b>Maryland</b>	48	33%	92%	23%	35%	15%	4%	4%	42%	21%	8%
Maine	15	73%	80%	100%	21%	7%	13%	40%	27%	7%	13%
<b>Michigan</b>	38	90%	55%	55%	63%	26%	29%	50%	32%	18%	18%
<b>Missouri</b>	16	94%	44%	69%	44%	38%	50%	44%	100%	19%	38%
<b>North Carolina</b>	104	78%	30%	54%	52%	40%	39%	24%	38%	19%	31%
Nebraska	12	33%	17%	25%	17%	17%	8%	8%	17%	8%	50%
<b>New Hampshire</b>	34	32%	50%	35%	15%	29%	15%	3%	74%	38%	9%
New Jersey	27	85%	41%	15%	37%	22%	22%	48%	19%	7%	44%
New Mexico	6	33%	33%	33%	33%	33%	0	17%	17%	50%	67%
N. California	36	25%	19%	69%	31%	53%	25%	11%	25%	14%	22%
Nevada	50	26%	60%	32%	18%	32%	10%	6%	10%	8%	12%
New York	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ohio	15	100%	73%	93%	53%	80%	67%	40%	27%	13%	53%
Oklahoma	10	100%	100%	90%	100%	20%	70%	70%	50%	50%	30%
<b>Oregon</b>	19	79%	53%	16%	63%	11%	11%	11%	53%	37%	5%
Pennsylvania	3	100%	33%	67%	33%	0	0	0	0	33%	0

	Number of Schools	R-Word	Unified Sports	Traditional SO Sports	Partners Club	SO Sports Day	Fans in the Stands	Get Into It	Fundraising	Youth Leadership Training	Young Athletes
Rhode Island	19	74%	100%	32%	58%	16%	53%	16%	26%	42%	21%
<b>South Carolina</b>	73	51%	53%	67%	62%	44%	70%	78%	18%	16%	40%
S. California	6	83%	0%	33%	17%	83%	83%	0	33%	67%	17%
<b>Texas</b>	74	87%	41%	55%	58%	43%	50%	60%	18%	14%	15%
Utah	3	67%	67%	33%	0	0	0	0	67%	0	0
Virginia	96	12%	9%	24%	10%	42%	16%	4%	3%	4%	38%
Vermont	13	46%	100%	8%	23%	8%	15%	8%	53%	8%	15%
Washington	20	40%	60%	30%	20%	10%	10%	5%	20%	20%	15%
Wisconsin	28	79%	39%	21%	52%	14%	18%	39%	21%	29%	25%
Wyoming	11	91%	36%	36%	27%	0	9%	27%	46%	18%	9%

**Table A6.** Primary focus of Project UNIFY by State Programs

	Number of Schools	Sports-based programming	Youth leadership	Whole-School awareness programming	All equally emphasized
<b>Arizona</b>	53	X			
<b>Colorado</b>	41				X
Connecticut	14				X
Delaware	11				X
Georgia	37				X
Hawaii	35				X
Iowa	4		X		
<b>Idaho</b>	18		X		
Illinois	16				X
Indiana	35	X			
Louisiana	26				X
Massachusetts	7				X
<b>Maryland</b>	48	X			
Maine	15				X
<b>Michigan</b>	38				X
<b>Missouri</b>	16				X
<b>North Carolina</b>	104				X
Nebraska	12				X
<b>New Hampshire</b>	34	X			
New Jersey	27				X
New Mexico	6	X			
N. California	36				X
Nevada	50				X
New York	1			X	
Ohio	15				X
Oklahoma	10				X
<b>Oregon</b>	19		X		
Pennsylvania	3				X
Rhode Island	19				X
<b>South Carolina</b>	73				X
S. California	6	X			
<b>Texas</b>	74				X
Utah	3			X	
Virginia	96				X
Vermont	13			X	
Washington	20	X			
Wisconsin	28		X		
Wyoming	11			X	

**Table A7.** Starting point of Project UNIFY by State Program

	Number of Schools	Sports-based programming	Youth leadership	Whole-School awareness programming	All equally emphasized
<b>Arizona</b>	53	X			
<b>Colorado</b>	41			X	
Connecticut	14	X			
Delaware	11			X	
Georgia	37	X			
Hawaii	35		X		
Iowa	4			X	
<b>Idaho</b>	18		X		
Illinois	16	X			
Indiana	35			X	
Louisiana	26			X	
Massachusetts	7	X			
<b>Maryland</b>	48	X			
Maine	15			X	
<b>Michigan</b>	38				X
<b>Missouri</b>	16		X		
<b>North Carolina</b>	104		X		
Nebraska	12	X			
<b>New Hampshire</b>	34	X			
New Jersey	27			X	
New Mexico	6	X			
N. California	36	X			
Nevada	50	X			
New York	1			X	
Ohio	15				X
Oklahoma	10	X			
<b>Oregon</b>	19			X	
Pennsylvania	3				X
Rhode Island	19	X			
<b>South Carolina</b>	73				X
S. California	6			X	
<b>Texas</b>	74		X		
Utah	3			X	
Virginia	96	X			
Vermont	13	X			
Washington	20			X	
Wisconsin	28			X	
Wyoming	11			X	



## Appendix B

**Selection of Schools:** In the summer of 2011, the evaluation team met with the 11 State SO Programs identified as High Activation to discuss the requirements and procedures for selecting schools for the evaluation. Each of the 11 High Activation SO State Programs were asked to select approximately six schools to participate in the evaluation. These states were asked to select a mix of both middle and high schools that were willing and able to participate in this more intensive evaluation and who demonstrated comprehensive and exemplary Project UNIFY programming. Once State SO Programs identified the six schools, they were asked to send a list of these schools to the evaluation team by early October 2011.

After identifying the schools, each State SO Program was required to identify a liaison in each of the schools participating in the more in-depth evaluation. Once identified, an introductory email was sent to liaisons to explain the evaluation and to ask for the best time to schedule an initial phone call. If the evaluation team did not receive a reply from a liaison after two weeks (during which time three emails and phone calls would be made), State SO Programs were asked to either reach out to the liaison personally or to provide a replacement school. School lists were finalized by November 2011.

**Selection of Students:** The procedure for the student surveys relied heavily on the assistance of liaisons in identifying students to participate and overseeing the administration of surveys. Based on experiences in the Year 3 evaluation before materials were sent to the school, principals or other school administrators were contacted to explain the importance of the evaluation and the specific guidelines developed by the evaluation team for the survey administration. These specific guidelines were created in response to the problems with survey administration encountered in Year 3 which resulted in a small non-representative sample due to teachers' administration of the survey with convenience samples. Therefore, to select classes to participate in the student surveys in Year 4, administrators and liaisons were asked to consider all classes being taught during one specific class period (avoiding the first and last periods of the day as well as lunch periods). Using a list of all academic classes taught during that period, administrators and liaisons were told to arrange the teachers last names alphabetically and select classes in alphabetical order until the total number of students in the selected classes approached between 100-150 students.

**Student Survey Procedures:** After classes were selected using the procedures outlined in the "Selection of Students" above, permission forms were mailed to the liaison to distribute approximately one week prior to administering the survey for both the end of year and pre-post survey. A second mailing, containing the student surveys, also included directions for distributing and collecting surveys, as well as instructions for teachers to read aloud when administering the surveys to students to ensure fidelity of implementation across classes and schools. Students were told to place completed surveys in a large envelope on the teacher's desk. The teacher was asked to fill out information on the front of the envelope indicating the name of the teacher, the name of the class, the number of students enrolled in the class, the number of students who completed the survey based on attendance and parent permission, and any pertinent notes about the survey distribution and completion. The liaison collected these sealed envelopes from all of the teachers and mailed them back to the evaluation team in a pre-paid box. For any schools that had missing information on the returned survey packets, the evaluation team contacted the liaison for more information about the classes in which the surveys were conducted.

The same procedures were used for both the surveys administered to students at the end of the school year (April/May 2012), and those administered to students at the beginning and end of the year (pre- and post- Project UNIFY implementation) (October/November 2011 and April/May 2012). For pre- and post-survey administration however, administrators and liaisons were asked to select classes that would stay together throughout the entire school year to ensure that the evaluation team would be able to match student data from both the pre- and post-survey administration without collecting identifying information.

Generally, the surveys administered at the end of year, and the pre- and post-surveys were distributed in, on average, 8 classrooms per school. Classroom types ranged from academic (e.g., social studies, English, science) Some schools distributed surveys during homeroom or study halls, but in general almost all liaisons followed instructions and had the survey administered in regular education academic classrooms.