

Strategies for Schoolwide and Community Engagement

UCS Family Engagement Toolkit

Designed For

Program leads, Special Olympics liaisons, and school administrators.

Time Estimate

Varied.



Build Equitable Schoolwide and Community Engagement

Why would I use this tool?

Program leads, SO liaisons, and school administrators **all** play a role in **equitable family engagement**. This includes strengths-based communications and collaborations that advance Unified Champion Schools (UCS) and impact participating students, families, and schools.

Equitable family engagement means building reciprocal partnerships with families, learning from their perspectives, and collaborating with them to ensure your programs are inclusive.

This resource provides proven internal and external facing communication and engagement strategies. The internal-facing strategies focus on informing students, school personnel, and community partners about UCS programming. The external-facing strategies focus on how administrators can help their school's SO liaison in addressing perennial issues for UCS programs such as transportation, marketing, school recognition, and disability stigma.

When should I use this tool?

You can use this tool in your planning process to identify creative and strategic ways to promote UCS programs in the school building and community.



How should I use this tool?

Program leads can use this resource to support SO liaisons in their schoolwide and community outreach and engagement efforts.

SO liaisons can use this resource to consider which communication and engagement strategies might work best for their school and community context.

Both **Program leads and SO liaisons** can use this resource to engage the school administrator in conversations about the UCS program and how they can best support it through internal and external facing strategies.



Strategies for Schoolwide and Community Engagement in Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools

Equitable family engagement in Unified Champion Schools (UCS) programs requires collaboration with Special Olympics Program leads and liaisons, district leaders, school administrators, special education teachers, general education teachers, coaches, and physical education teachers. This collaborative approach ensures that everyone feels informed and connected to students and families who are involved in UCS programs.

Below are internal and external-facing strategies that schools can put into practice to advance Unified Champion Schools and have a greater impact on participating students, families, and schools.

Internal-Facing Strategies for Schoolwide and Community Engagement

Below are strategies that Program leads, SO liaisons, and administrators can use to inform school staff and students about UCS, the first step to engagement.

STRATEGY	LEAD		
	Program Lead	SO Liaison	Administrator
<p>Hold a school-wide UCS information session or lunch-n-learn to inform staff and teachers of the school's Unified Champion Schools program and activities and to welcome their participation in UCS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share this 4-minute video of Fisher Magnet Upper Academy (Detroit, MI) with school staff or others for an introduction to the 3 Component Model of Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®. 	X	X	X
<p>Host a UCS orientation or training for participating school staff on how to incorporate UCS components into the curriculum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include all staff working directly with UCS (e.g., coaches and school-level aids), not just the SO liaison. Be explicit about the different UCS roles at a school and their responsibilities and expectations. Share a Special Olympics UCS organizational chart so that school staff understand how Special Olympics UCS is structured. 	X	X	
Incorporate UCS information into onboarding for any new school staff member.		X	X



STRATEGY	LEAD		
	Program Lead	SO Liaison	Administrator
<p>Include information on UCS in first-year orientation or when students transition from one school level to the next.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask current and former students to serve as UCS ambassadors who attend first-year orientation to talk about UCS opportunities. 		X	X
<p>Create a UCS leadership team or committee composed of school leadership, UCS staff, other school staff, a student, and a family member; consider rotating positions every year to build awareness and support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To access the Special Olympics guide on establishing a leadership team, click here. 		X	X
<p>Obtain the school administrator's commitment and convey the role they can play in leveraging their external facing presence to collaborate and communicate with allies to help address perennial challenges to engagement.</p>	X	X	

External-Facing Strategies for Schoolwide and Community Engagement

Collaboration and communication also need to extend outside the school building. Administrators play a crucial role in helping to address perennial challenges by engaging district and community partners and supporters in external-facing strategies.

- Transportation.** Work with the district to include UCS as a line item in the budget and secure additional resources to provide transportation access to athletes and families. Other means of transportation could include:
 - pairing up parents (one of which has a car), or
 - offering prepaid rides to families and athletes for key or important events.

Parent volunteers who have passed background checks may also be able to travel to UCS events with students on school or district-provided transportation.



SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT

Obtaining Resources across District Office, Athletic Department, and Student Government

Lincoln High School, Tacoma, Washington

The school district has a line item for Unified Champion Schools in its budget that covers the cost of transportation to all athletic events and coaches' stipends.

Funds from the school's athletic department and student government fundraising efforts are combined to cover other program costs. The Unified Team Members, for example, will run the concessions stand during home football games to raise funds and gain valuable work experience.

- **UCS Inclusion Across School.** Encourage the school to collaborate with the Unified coach to develop or contribute to the school's athletics web page and/or social media to include Unified Sports highlights and information as part of the school's broader activities. For example, the website could spotlight each of the Unified athletes and partners with a photograph of the students and brief description of the sport they participate in.
- **Community Outreach.** Establish relationships with local newspapers, radio stations, or podcasts and share information about your school's Unified program. Use these opportunities to recognize sponsors or contributors and to connect with potential sponsors. Invite media to events or to speak with teachers, students, and families about the benefits of Inclusive Youth Leadership, Unified Sports, and/or Whole School Engagement.
- **Disability Stigma.** Work with community partners such as other schools—including daycare facilities and preschools—clinics, libraries, and faith-based institutions to address the stigma associated with students with disabilities and special education. Begin with informing the community about different types of intellectual or developmental disabilities and the importance of early intervention and inclusion.



Accessibility and Inclusion Self-Reflection: Disability Inclusion

Use the Harvard University Implicit Association Test (IAT) to assess your own implicit bias toward people with disabilities, and consider ways to promote disability inclusion at your school.

PAUSE
AND
PONDER

1. Take the Harvard University Implicit Association Test
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>
 - Scroll down to the bottom of the page and select 'I wish to proceed'
 - Select 'Disabilities IAT'
 - Start the test

2. Reflect on Disability Inclusion at Your School
 - How is your school (or school district) advancing attitudes toward disability inclusion?
 - In what ways does your school promote inclusion?
 - Where are the opportunities for growth in the area of equity and inclusion?
 - How can UCS programs contribute to advancing equity and inclusion in your school?



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For questions or comments about the Toolkit, please contact:

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