

School Model

The benefits of physical activity and play go beyond sports. Special Olympics Young Athletes helps children interact with each other and develop important communication, learning and self-help skills. Starting motor activities early is very important for children with intellectual disabilities. Children who receive support at an early age will be more capable of doing challenging movements as they grow older.

Structure

Frequency

At least one time a week for a minimum of 8 weeks

Timing

30-45 minute sessions

Setting

Indoors or outdoors. Any space can be used!

Coaches

Educators, physical educators, counselors, administrators

Inclusion

Open for all students in the class to participate

Volunteers

Family members, older students, school staff



Implementing in the School

Safety and Space

- Not too big; not too small. Make sure the space matches the needs of the activity and your group size.
- Indoor vs outdoors. Young Athletes is great for indoors and outdoors – but be mindful of spacing and safety.
- One space vs two spaces. If the class is large, you can consider dividing the class into two groups.

Structure

- Establish a routine. Routines provide clear expectations.
- Plan for rest breaks. Provide a place where children can rest if they become overstimulated.
- Encourage different modes of movement to transition between activities.
- Use music to signal transitions.
- Unified Partners. Have older children or children without ID support younger children.

Engage Family Members

Initial Meeting—host an introduction meeting at the start of the school year

Weekly newsletters and emails—easy way to connect with parents weekly!

At home activities—share the Activity Guide with parents so they can practice the activities at home

Volunteer—Invite family members to volunteer

Young Athletes Examples for Unified Schools & UCS

SO Pakistan

Our Young Athletes actively participate in our comprehensive school engagement programs, particularly Unified Sports. We also incorporate our young athletes into our leadership program through our Unified Champion Schools initiative. Currently, we are in the process of implementing the Young Athletes program in special schools where our youth leaders assume roles as coaches and facilitators. They organize and lead all Young Athletes activities independently, fostering a sense of leadership from a young age. The Young Athletes collaborate with them, and this model will be passed on to future groups and future activities.

SO Kenya

The Curriculum Support Officers are key individuals in growing our Young Athletes initiative. We work directly with them, as mandated by the Ministry of Education. They provide guidance and leadership for our programs in the schools we work with. For example, in our Unified Champion School activities, now in their fourth year, we work with almost 300 schools across 21 counties. In each of these counties, a Curriculum Support Officer ensures the successful implementation of our projects in the schools, following the Young Athletes training we provide. In the case of special schools, they partner with neighboring mainstream schools ensuring integration at the same educational level.

