

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES



Overview:

A Special Olympics Unified Champion School has an inclusive school climate and exudes a sense of collaboration, engagement and respect for all members of the student body, staff, and community. A Unified Champion School receiving national banner recognition is one that demonstrates commitment to inclusion by achieving the 12 standards described below. These standards are based upon implementation of the 3 components of Special Olympics Unified Sports®, inclusive youth leadership and whole-school engagement. National banner schools must also demonstrate they have a plan in place to sustain these activities into the future.

While the components are listed individually, they should be implemented in coordination with each other and supported by a leadership team composed of representatives with and without intellectual disabilities, including students, community members, faculty and staff. Research has proven that when all 3 components are incorporated, there is a deeper impact on the individual participants as well as the overall culture and climate of the campus.

National Banner School Components & Achievement Standards:

The 12 standards of excellence listed below were developed by a national panel of leaders in education and Special Olympics North America. When the standards have been met by a college, it is eligible to receive national banner recognition.

Special Olympics Unified Sports®: A fully inclusive sports or fitness program that combines an approximately equal number of participants with and without intellectual disabilities. Examples include such things as Unified Intramural Sports, Unified Sports Clubs, intercollegiate or extramural Unified Sports, Unified Fitness, or Unified clinics and trainings.

A national banner school has achieved the following standards:

- 1 Unified Sports is offered in at least 2 seasons or school terms throughout the school year. (For instance, a Special Olympics College Club meets weekly for Unified Fitness classes in the fall and Unified teams (students and athletes) participate in a Unified division of intramural sports in the spring)
- 2 Unified Sports occur regularly over the course of each season or school term and includes competition or a culminating event. (For instance, weekly Unified Intramural Sports leagues competitions or weekly training prior to a state Special Olympics tournament or a rivalry game against another college)
- 3 Each sport/activity has designated captains or coaches that have received state and/or national training on Special Olympics Unified Sports. (For instance, training with a local Special Olympics Program or the Special Olympics Unified Sports Coaching Course [available online.](#))
- 4 Unified Sports is officially recognized by the college in a similar style to other campus sports programs (intramural sports, club sports, general clubs, or intercollegiate athletics).

Inclusive Youth Leadership (IYL) programming develops leadership skills* in students and/or community members with and without intellectual disabilities, preparing them to be champions of inclusion in their schools, communities, workplaces, and in the broader Special Olympics movement throughout a lifetime of inclusion. Students/community members with intellectual disabilities and students without intellectual disabilities work together to lead advocacy, awareness, inclusion, and other Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools activities throughout the school year. Importantly, a club/group in which students without intellectual disabilities are the only leaders or function as “helpers” does not meet this standard.

*IYL leadership skills are those that develop students' and athletes' innovation, openness, empathy, bravery, grit, accountability, and ability to lead collaboratively.

A national banner school has achieved the following standards:

- 5 A Unified Club or inclusive group made up of students and/or community members with and without intellectual disabilities meets at least once per month throughout the school year, offering leadership or skill development opportunities for all members. (For instance, a Special Olympics College Club plans and leads Unified activities at a neighboring PK-12 school; or a student organization collaborates with an inclusive postsecondary education program to coordinate an awareness campaign on campus through planning and leadership by those with and without intellectual disabilities.)

- 6 Members with and without intellectual disabilities build leadership skills and serve in meaningful leadership roles during the inclusive club/group meetings and events, sports/activity training sessions, planning of awareness activities, or while promoting inclusion throughout the school. The members are all valuable contributors to the group and work collaboratively. (For instance, a Unified Club with executive board members with and without intellectual disabilities; or a student-athlete council with Unified pairs as co-chairs of committees.)
- 7 The inclusive club/group has a faculty/staff advisor. The club/group is officially recognized by the college in a similar style as other student groups (For instance, a Unified Sports Club is listed on the campus recreation website with all other athletic clubs or a member of the Special Olympics College Club attends and votes in student government meetings; or the president and Unified chair of a student-athlete council meets monthly with their staff advisor to report on activity.)

Whole-School Engagement: Awareness and education activities that promote inclusion and reach the broader campus community. Examples include such things as Unified College Championship Week, Spread the Word or similar respect campaigns, Homecoming Week rallies, “Fans in the Stands” for Unified Sports teams, or student fundraising.

A *national banner school* has achieved the following standards:

- 8 At least two engagement activities that connect to the campus community are implemented per school year. (For instance, a Unified Flag Football exhibition takes place during halftime of a varsity football game in the fall and participation in the Unified College Championship Week in the spring.)
- 9 Both students and/or community members with and without intellectual disabilities plan and lead these engagements. (For instance, students with and without intellectual disabilities work together to plan a Spread the Word campaign, creating promotion and announcements to the campus community, hosting an informational table and encouraging others to sign the inclusion-pledge poster.)

Sustainability: Strategies and plans which ensure the three Unified Champion School components (Special Olympics Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership and Whole School Engagement) will continue and are a part of the campus culture. Examples include such things as succession plans, having multiple groups/departments involved as planners and implementers, fundraising, alignment with institutional values, and community engagement.

A *national banner school* has achieved the following standards:

- 10 The Unified program is financially self-sustainable and/or has a financial plan in place to sustain the three components into the future. (For instance, Campus Recreation includes Unified divisions in the budget for facility maintenance and student personnel; inclusive student organizations issue annual membership dues and plan fundraisers; the college participates in revenue sharing fundraisers such as Polar Plunge; intercollegiate athletics assists with uniforms and equipment as in-kind donation through apparel agreements.)
- 11 There is a succession plan for students and/or community members in leadership positions to prepare for when members graduate or transition out of their current role(s). (For instance, executive board elections are held one semester prior to officers' terms ending; there are written bylaws, operating procedures, and position descriptions for student organizations.)
- 12 All areas of campus that administer the Unified program connect at least once per school term. This integrated leadership team (roster required) communicates plans and strategic improvement with the local Special Olympics Program and completes state and/or national reports and surveys. (For instance, the Unified Club executive board, the intramural director, an inclusive postsecondary education staff, and the local Special Olympics area director meet each semester to share upcoming Unified Sports and event offerings. At the end of each semester, they report engagement to their Program.)