

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS



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 from all areas of the school, including students with and without intellectual disabilities, teachers, administrators and parents. 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 school.

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 school, it is eligible to receive national banner recognition.

Special Olympics Unified Sports®: A fully inclusive Unified sport program that engages students with and without intellectual disabilities. Examples include such things as building fundamental sport skills through Unified PE, Young Athletes (ages 2-7) activities or Junior Athletes (ages 8-12).

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

- 1 Special Unified Sports and/or Young Athletes are available for students across multiple grade levels of the school. (For instance, Young Athletes for PK-2 and Junior Athletes for grades 3-5, and/or Unified PE for all grade levels. *If the school only serves one grade band, Unified Sports must be available for all students.*)
- 2 Unified Sports and/or Young Athletes activities occur regularly over the course of the school year and include a culminating event or competition (For instance, weekly training in lead-up to an event; Unified PE throughout the year with a culminating Field Day; or quarterly Junior Athletes offerings with a culminating exhibition.)
- 3 Each sport/activity has an adult coach/educator who has received Special Olympics training at the state and/or national level on Unified Sports, Young Athletes, and/or Junior Athletes. (For instance, in-person training with the Special Olympics state Program, or courses taken on the [Special Olympics LMS](#) or [NFHS Learn site](#).)
- 4 Special Olympics Unified Sports programming is officially recognized by the school in a similar style as other sports/activities. (For instance, games/events are featured on the morning announcements; students/teams are recognized in the yearbook; fans are invited to culminating events.)

Inclusive Youth Leadership: Inclusive Youth Leadership programming develops leadership skills* in youth 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 with and without intellectual disabilities work with adult guidance and support to learn about inclusion and to lead advocacy, awareness, inclusion and other Unified Champion Schools activities throughout the school year.

**IYL leadership skills are those that develop students' 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 other inclusive student group made up of students with and without intellectual disabilities meets at least monthly throughout the school year for social and leadership activities. These can be classroom-based, during the school day, or extra-curricular. (For instance, a group of students with and

without intellectual disabilities meet for lunch every Friday to learn about leadership and to help plan school wide events; an inclusive student announcements group that shares responsibilities for morning announcements; a Unified reading club that helps plan and lead the Young Readers activities. Importantly, a club in which students without intellectual disabilities are the only leaders or function as “helpers” does not meet this standard.)

- 6 Students with and without intellectual disabilities have opportunities to build leadership skills and take leadership roles during Unified Club (or other) meetings and events, sports/activity training sessions, planning of awareness activities, or while promoting inclusion throughout the school. The youth are all valuable contributors to the group and work collaboratively. One group of youth is not there to help the other group. (Examples include students with and without intellectual disabilities doing morning announcements together, hosting assemblies, serving as safety patrols, and leading Unified Sports activities.)
- 7 The inclusive club/group has an adult liaison who helps the group provide input to the school’s UCS leadership team and other school leaders on school wide activities. (For instance, the liaison meets with the club/group prior to leadership team meetings to provide input on upcoming events; the club/group members work with the liaison to share their ideas for a school wide Spirit Week.)

Whole-School Engagement: Awareness and education activities that promote inclusion and reach the majority of the school population. Examples include such things as school-wide Young Readers activities, “Fans in the Stands” or cheer teams for culminating events, poster contests, essay contests, Respect Campaigns, Spread the Word campaigns, or a school assembly with an inclusion theme.

A national banner school has achieved the following standards:

- 8 At least two whole-school engagement activities are implemented per school year. (For instance, a Spread the Word campaign is held during the month of March; Unified Pairs from the club lead a school wide reading activity; a Junior Athletes exhibition includes the student body as Fans in the Stands.)
- 9 The Unified Club or inclusive student group works alongside school staff to plan and lead the awareness activities. (For instance, students with and without intellectual disabilities develop promotion announcements during Spread the Word week; Unified Pairs from the Unified PE class lead stations during Field Day.)

Sustainability: Strategies and plans which ensure the three Unified Champion School components will continue and are part of the school culture. Examples include such things as fundraising, an active UCS leadership team, professional development, integration with other school priorities, and family/community engagement.

A national banner school has achieved the following standards:

- 10 The school is currently financially self-sustainable or has a financial plan in place to sustain the 3 components (Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement) into the future. (For instance, the UCS school liaison is a designated staff position; costs for Unified Champion Schools activities are included in the annual budget; after-school activity coaches and sponsors receive stipends.)
- 11 The UCS leadership team (roster required) regularly monitors and reports on social inclusion and plans for strategic improvement by completing all Special Olympics state Program and national reports and surveys. (For instance, using the Social Inclusion Scale as part of measuring school climate; completing and returning the school liaison report.)
- 12 Unified Champion Schools is integrated into the culture of the school and supported by a wide range of staff and community members including a certified school liaison. (For instance, general and special education teachers lead and participate in UCS opportunities; social inclusion is included in the school improvement plan; students with and without intellectual disabilities have numerous opportunities to connect socially and academically; training and resources are available for adults; community partnerships are established.)