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All resources within this playbook can be found at:
resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources
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Thank you to Hasbro Children’s Fund for supporting the production of this playbook.
What are Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools?

Unified Champion Schools promote social inclusion by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities through sports and other activities. Students who “Play Unified” become better at helping others, standing up for each other, and sharing responsibility.

Unified Champion Schools are based on the premise that lasting change must start with youth. In elementary schools, adults foster youth leadership by facilitating age-appropriate leadership roles and providing learning experiences that explore what it means to be a leader. Students might be mentors for younger student athletes, set up sports skill stations, and discuss books that promote leadership qualities, for example. These experiences lay a strong foundation for middle and high school years when students take more initiative in planning and implementing Unified opportunities. Ultimately, students become advocates for communities that promote respect and dignity for everyone.

Key Characteristics of Unified Champion Schools

• Unifying programming
• Positive school climates
• Sports as a catalyst for social inclusion
• Development of students’ leadership skills

Core components

Inclusive Sports provide opportunities for students with and without intellectual disabilities to participate in a variety of fitness and sports activities alongside one another.

Inclusive Youth Leadership encourages students with and without intellectual disabilities to take on leading roles as they work with adults in the school to create a socially inclusive environment through sports and other activities.

Whole School Engagement opportunities are awareness and education activities that promote respect and social inclusion and reach the majority of students and school staff members.

Outcomes

Unified Champion Schools
• reduce bullying and exclusion.
• promote inclusive friendships.
• overturn negative attitudes.
• decrease hurtful language in schools and the community.
• develop students’ leadership skills.
• create communities of caring and respect.

Over 6,000 elementary, middle, and high schools use Special Olympics Unified Programming.

Become a Unified Champion School!
How to Use This Playbook

This guide is packed with information and ready-to-use resources designed to help elementary school communities increase social inclusion. There’s a lot of information, but keep in mind that this guide is a tool. Different parts of it will be useful to your school at different times. To help you find what you need when you need it, check out the highlights below.

Get background information
Read the overview and introduction to gain a stronger understanding of Unified Champion Schools. These sections include information and data that are valuable in helping school administrators, staff members, and other stakeholders understand the Unified approach and how it benefits school communities.

Need a brief description of the program that you can copy and share with others? See page 59.

Find out what other Unified Champion Schools do
Every school is different, so it’s important that the Unified Champion Schools program is tailored to fit your school community. Check out the real-life examples of four different Unified Champion Schools on pages 19–26 to spark ideas of what the program might look like at your school.

Establish a leadership team
See pages 27–30 to learn the ins and outs of creating a leadership team that will guide the implementation of the Unified Champion Schools program. Use the monthly agendas on pages 31–39 to streamline planning for team meetings.

Plan inclusive sports and other activities
Check out the sections for the three components of Unified Champion Schools—Whole School Engagement (pages 61–124), Inclusive Youth Leadership (pages 125–134), and Inclusive Sports and Fitness (pages 135–148). The beginning of each section explains how that component contributes to the Unified strategy. Look through the ideas in these sections to determine what activities are a good fit for your school. It works well to have a combination of ongoing activities and one-time events.