



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools**

Inclusive Youth Leadership



Getting
Ready



Establishing a
Leadership Team



Whole School
Engagement



Inclusive Youth
Leadership



Inclusive Sports
and Fitness



Special Olympics
Resources



Inclusive Youth Leadership: Leadership for All

Inclusive youth leadership provides students with and without intellectual disabilities leading roles as they work with adults in the school to create a socially inclusive environment.

What does inclusive youth leadership look like?

- students leading warm-up drills for Unified PE classes
- older students acting as mentors for younger students
- students planning and completing a community service project with adult assistance
- students brainstorming socially inclusive activities and getting feedback from their peers

Why is it important?

Inclusive youth leadership

- enhances the school's efforts to improve school climate.
- increases student independence.
- develops students' sense of responsibility for contributing to a positive school climate.
- promotes key social and emotional skills.
- encourages choice and decision-making skills.
- heightens awareness of the strengths and talents all students possess.



Start with students.

Unified Champion Schools are based on the premise that in order to have the most significant impact, change must start with youth. When students have active leading roles in creating a socially inclusive school, the effects are stronger and more likely to last.

Unified Champion Schools make a difference.

Data from older students shows the impact that Unified Champion Schools have:

- 87% of students have learned how their emotions and **attitudes can affect others**.
- 84% of students have become better at **sharing responsibility**.
- 81% of students have learned about the challenges of **being a leader**.
- 63% of involved school staff feel that students are open to and accepting of differences, and that the program increased the **sense of community** in the school.



What Are the Goals of Inclusive Youth Leadership?

- **Everyone leads:** Students representing the diversity of the student body will be engaged in leadership roles.
- **Everyone contributes:** All students will have equitable opportunities to contribute to the school community in meaningful ways.
- **Everyone has a voice:** Administrators and teachers will value the insight of all students as they develop a socially inclusive school environment.
- **Everyone is a champion for themselves and others:** Students with and without disabilities will gain the skills, knowledge, and disposition to become advocates for themselves and their peers.

Principle of meaningful involvement

A socially inclusive school ensures that students with and without intellectual disabilities are active and valued participants in the school community.

Indicators of meaningful involvement

- **Opportunities:** All students have opportunities to use their unique skills and qualities to contribute to the success of the school.
- **Intentional involvement:** Students with and without intellectual disabilities are purposefully engaged in leadership roles in formal and informal settings.
- **Intergenerational collaboration:** Students and adults work together to enhance the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of each individual.

What school staff is saying

"...it gives some of the kids who have the quieter voice, or maybe don't want to do the big leadership opportunities, [it] gives them more **opportunity** to do this in smaller settings where they're more comfortable, too."

"Because to be a leader in [UCS], you don't have to be the smartest person. It's not a competition. It just takes being a **good person**."



Get Started With Inclusive Youth Leadership

Inclusive youth leadership in an elementary school may begin as guided leadership with adult support. The skills and knowledge students develop in elementary school lay the foundation for more independent youth leadership in middle and high school.

The leadership opportunities in elementary schools vary, but a common first step is to have a planning meeting with your school's Unified Leadership Team. Start by discussing topics such as the ones below. Once you agree on one or more ideas for promoting inclusive youth leadership, use the action plan form on page 133 to organize the details.



Topics to discuss

- What types of inclusive youth leadership opportunities does our school have, need, or want to incorporate?
- What leadership opportunities would be a good starting point?
- Where do we already have formal and informal leadership opportunities for students? Are these inclusive opportunities, involving typical as well as atypical leaders?
- What inclusive youth leadership opportunities are valued by students with and without intellectual disabilities?
- How do we nurture leadership partnerships of students with and without intellectual disabilities?
- Who will be the adult coordinator for inclusive youth leadership?

Need ideas? Check out these suggestions.

- Incorporate leadership skills into the curriculum. (page 129)
- Promote student leadership during inclusive sports experiences. (page 130)
- Have leadership lunches. (page 130)
- Start a Unified Club. (page 131)





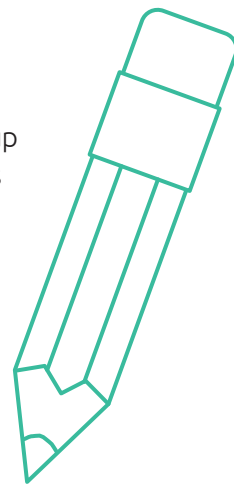
Activities to Promote Inclusive Youth Leadership

Inclusive youth leadership opportunities are times when adults step back and let students with and without intellectual disabilities take leadership roles in their schools. Check out the ideas below and on pages 130–131 for encouraging students to actively promote acceptance, respect, and social inclusion. Don't be limited to these suggestions, though. Engage students as leaders in as many ways as you can.

Incorporate leadership skills into the curriculum.

—**Literature:** Read books that promote leadership qualities. (See the suggestions below.) Follow up by asking students questions such as “Whom do you admire in this book and why?” and “What does this book teach us about being a leader?”

- *One* by Kathryn Otoshi (standing up for oneself and others)
- *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson (creativity, problem solving, establishing a vision)
- *Horton Hatches the Egg* by Dr. Seuss (commitment, trustworthiness)
- *The Little Engine That Could* by Watty Piper (perseverance)
- *The Hundred Dresses* by Eleanor Estes (standing up for others)
- *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein (putting the interests of others first)



—**Writing:** Have students write invitations to Unified Champion Schools events, such as Unified Sports Day, or design flyers to send home. After an inclusive event, have each student write about it in a journal. Encourage students to include how they felt during the event, how they grew as a result of the experience, and how the event contributed to a positive school environment.

—**Math:** Have students keep track of scores during a Unified Sports event. Another option is to have students use their math skills to help plan the event. For example, they might determine how many cases of bottled water are needed for the athletes.

—**Language:** Have groups of students research quotes that promote leadership, respect, and acceptance. Invite students to discuss what the quotes mean to them. Then, have students create banners to showcase the quotes throughout the school. These are great choices:

“Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible.” (Dalai Lama)

“Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.” (William James)

—**Research and technology:** Divide students into small groups and have each group research a different aspect of Special Olympics, such as how it started, how it has changed over the years, and what countries participate. Have students use a presentation program such as PowerPoint, Google Slides, or Prezi to share what they learned during a Unified Champion Schools event.





More Ways to Promote Inclusive Youth Leadership

- **Ensure that existing leadership opportunities are inclusive.**

Does your school have classroom representatives for student government? How about a school news club or safety patrol? While clubs such as these may be open to all students, it might take deliberate efforts to ensure that students with and without disabilities feel welcome. Have current club members invite friends with intellectual disabilities to join. Having co-leaders—one with and one without an intellectual disability—is an effective approach.

- **Involve students in planning Unified Champion School activities.** As events are planned, invite students with and without intellectual disabilities to share their opinions and preferences. It will lead to the growth of their leadership skills and help ensure that the activities will be embraced by all students. For example, students can take the lead on planning the Respect Campaign.

- **Promote student leadership during Unified Sports experiences.**

Have students

- weigh in on which sports they want to do each semester.
- set up skill stations for sports practices.
- lead warm-up drills.
- serve as peer coaches.
- decide how to promote an upcoming event, such as Unified Sports Day.
- take leadership in running various activities for younger students in the Young Athletes program.

- **Have leadership lunches.** Establish a regular meeting time such as every Friday during lunch. Over several lunches, show an interested group of students with and without intellectual disabilities a movie with a leadership theme, such as *The Lorax* or *Dolphin Tale*. (Since every group of students is different, preview your movie selection to ensure that it is a good fit for your group.) After each viewing, follow up with a group discussion. Ask students questions such as the ones below.

- What did you learn about leadership?
- How does the plot relate to real life?
- Would you have acted differently than the main character? Why or why not?

- **Start a peer mentoring program.** Pair older students with younger students who have intellectual disabilities. Have the mentors help the younger students complete whole school activities or train for Special Olympics competitions.





Start a Unified Club

Create a nonacademic school-based club that brings students with and without intellectual disabilities together. Whether you call it a Unified Club, a Respect Club, a Friend Club, or something else, set the goals of promoting acceptance, socially inclusive friendships, and student leadership. The club will become an influential core group of students who promote social inclusion. Since district policies on school clubs vary, be sure to share your plans with your school principal.

School Schedule
M T W T F

- **Schedule:** Establish a schedule that works with the school's structure and schedule. Consider scheduling meetings before school, after school, or during lunch.
- **Management:** As the club gets up and running, gradually hand over more responsibilities to students to help plan meetings or lead parts of them. You might designate a student to be a timekeeper, for example. As students develop leadership abilities, you'll be giving them the tools they need to advocate for unity and respect.
- **Activities:** What kinds of activities would the club do? The possibilities are limitless, but the goal is for students to help plan and participate in social and community activities that increase understanding, acceptance, and respect of individual differences. For example, club members might help adults plan parts of various whole school engagement activities. (See ideas starting on page 61.)
- **Social connections:** While students will get to know each other as they plan activities, it's important to ensure that there are other opportunities to develop friendships, too. Consider these options:
 - **Icebreakers:** Start each meeting with a brief activity that helps students get acquainted.
 - **Lunch mates:** On a designated day each month, arrange for club members to sit together at lunchtime.
 - **Family fun:** Periodically arrange a get-together—such as a picnic or hike—outside of school for club members and their families.

Student applications or not?

Some Unified Champion Schools have experienced success with an application process for **general education students** who are interested in joining a **Unified Club**. It helps ensure that students take the responsibility seriously and want to join the club for the right reasons. However, an application process might deter students who aren't popular or "star students" from applying which is counter to the unified strategy. Each school should consider its school community and decide what will work best. Ideally, a school would reach out to all students in some way.



Inclusive Youth Leadership: Tips for Success

Reach out to atypical leaders: Intentionally involve students who might not immediately come to mind as leaders, including students with disabilities or disengaged learners. This is a critical step in understanding the school experience from multiple perspectives. It also builds students' self-esteem and increases their sense of belonging. When students feel connected to school, they're more likely to attend regularly and become more invested in academic achievement.

- **Involve diverse students:** Spread leadership opportunities to a wide range of students. Be intentional about developing the leadership skills of all students.
- **Establish equal partnerships:** Avoid consistently assigning students without intellectual disabilities the role of "helper" and students with intellectual disabilities the role of "helpee."
- **Support staff members:** Periodically provide opportunities for teachers to share ways they foster inclusive youth leadership in their classrooms. Encourage them to share their challenges, too. Their colleagues are bound to have helpful suggestions.
- **Step back:** Always look for times adults can step back and let students lead. Guard against taking control of all decisions simply because it's faster and easier. Try to give only the help that is needed to allow each student to be as independent as possible.
- **Make social inclusion a lifestyle:** Help students learn to model social inclusion throughout their daily interactions at school, not just during a special event or activity. Having co-leaders with and without intellectual disabilities works well to provide leadership opportunities.
- **Encourage reflection:** Provide ongoing opportunities for students to reflect on their leadership skills.
- **Share accomplishments:** Use the school's website or social media to share photos, videos, and stories of social inclusion activities.



Unified Champion Schools

Inclusive Youth Leadership Action Plan Form

Strategy/Activity	Tasks	Date of Completion	People Responsible
Connects with: <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Sports <input type="checkbox"/> Whole School Engagement <input type="checkbox"/> Other			
Connects with: <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Sports <input type="checkbox"/> Whole School Engagement <input type="checkbox"/> Other			



Special Olympics on Social Media

Connecting with Special Olympics on social media is an opportunity to **see and share stories within the movement that can inspire others!** Learn from other state Special Olympics Programs and educators about what has worked in their implementation of Unified programming, and share success stories of your own. Share photos, videos, and articles too! **By highlighting these best practices and inspirational stories on social media, the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools community continues to grow.**

Here's where to find us.

Special Olympics:



@SpecialOlympics



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Special Olympics North America:



@SONorthAmerica



@SONorthAmerica

Be sure to @tag your State Special Olympics Program when sharing stories!



Follow these hashtags:

#ChooseToInclude

#PlayUnified

#LiveUnified

#UnifiedGeneration