Introduction:

Since the inception of [Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®](https://www.specialolympics.org/our-work/unified-champion-schools) (UCS), engaging with education leaders has been an important aspect of implementation and expansion. Based upon the National Education Leaders Network (NELN), each state Program is encouraged to design and implement an Education Leaders Network (ELN). **Each ELN is to provide insights, direction, opportunities and access to education conversations, initiatives, and collaborations to advance the Unified Champion Schools strategy in policy and practice.**

This diverse network brings together state education, civic, corporate, social and equity leaders positioned to advance Unified Champion Schools with their constituents and within their networks. Through their work, they help to advance Unified Champion Schools within the state.

The following identify the purpose, potential members, and responsibilities of a State ELN for each Program to consider as they design their local network:

**The purpose of the State Education Leaders Network is to:**

* Enhance current relationships with education leaders.
* Secure support from the state’s major education stakeholders to advocate for Unified Champion Schools.
* Understand the current and projected education and civic landscape of the state with corresponding opportunities for Unified Champion Schools to participate and contribute.
* Share information on Unified Champion Schools with their constituents so that they become aware of Unified Champion Schools and corresponding adoption opportunities.
* Provide access to state, district and local networks focused on youth development, leadership, and engagement.
* Identify events, forums, conferences, and interactions for Unified Champion Schools to present programmatic information to a broad range of educators, parents and community and business leaders.

“A strong ELN is a key to creating a sustainable culture change through Unified Champion Schools. While the majority of work gets completed by the work and frontline staff, the access to resources, strategic planning and established communication channels comes through the ELN.”

– Tim Martin, CEO, Special Olympics Arizona

Members

Each state should determine the ELN make-up and the specific attributes of members, given the state Program’s current collaborations, programming, and needs. However, the following is a list of attributes and affiliations common to effectively engaging education leaders as members of a State Education Leaders Network.

* Representative from the state’s Department of Education/Office of Public Instruction
* Representative of the state’s association of School Administrators
* Executive Director of the state’s School Boards Association
* Executive Director of the state’s middle school association
* Executive Director of the state’s elementary or secondary principals’ association
* Teacher well versed in Unified Champion Schools strategies and a leader within his/her school and/or district
* Representative from the state’s counselor association
* Service-learning leader, in most cases this is an individual from the state department of education responsible for additional federal funding
* District superintendent experienced in and supportive of Unified Champion Schools and respected by his/her peers
* School principal knowledgeable about Unified Champion Schools and respected by his/her peers
* Business leader committed to youth engagement
* Youth leader from a Unified Champion School and/or university student experienced in Special Olympics
* Human rights leader
* University college leader or faculty member committed to youth engagement and social justice
* Representative from the state’s PTA
* Representative from the state’s athletic association

The number of ELN members is determined by each state; however, 10-15 is a common number. Some programs start small and increase the number of members as the ELN is established, and other Programs will identify the full number of members at the beginning.

Suggested Responsibilities for ELN Members:

* Provide leadership and access to education systems and opportunities to increase awareness of the Unified Champion Schools strategy and how it aligns with their action plans, mission, and strategies.
* Meet three to four times a year virtually and in-person and communicate via e-mail more frequently to provide insights and respond to inquiries about Unified Champion Schools issues.
* Contribute to Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools’ resources (e.g., authoring articles or op-eds, reviewing resources, suggesting uses/distribution) and participate, as possible, in forums and conferences representing Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools.
* Identify and advocate for opportunities for Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools to participate in, contribute to and benefit from state and local collaborations to advance the mission and strategies of Unified Champion Schools.
* Participate in Special Olympics activities, sports and events to show their support and become more aware of Special Olympics programs and opportunities.
* Make connections with members of state organizations, suggest involvement in state conferences and make connections with other education leaders.

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Assistance

Special Olympics North America (SONA) Unified Champion Schools staff and consultants are available to assist Special Olympics state CEOs and their staffs to identify, recruit and select State Education Leaders Network members and establish this critical organizational component. In addition, some Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools partner organizations can provide access to their state networks and individuals and encourage them to participate in the State ELN.

Example Agenda Items For Face-To-Face Meeting

Given that the purpose of the ELN is to:

* Enhance current relationships with education leaders;
* Secure support from the state’s major education stakeholders to advocate for Unified Champion Schools;
* Understand the current and projected education and civic landscape of the state with corresponding opportunities for Unified Champion Schools’ participation and contributions;
* Share information on Unified Champion Schools with their constituents so that they become aware of Unified Champion Schools and corresponding adoption opportunities;
* Provide access to state, district and local networks focused on youth development, leadership and engagement; and
* Identify events, forums, conferences and interactions for Unified Champion Schools to present programmatic information to a broad range of educators, parents, and business leader.

One Way to Frame an ELN Meeting Agenda is to Focus on Three Processes

1. **Information (information shared before or during the meeting that increases ELN Members’ knowledge of Unified Champion Schools, their responsibilities and how they fit within the state and national organizations). However, it is important that this is information that is best shared through a meeting and not simply through an email or newsletter.**

›› What do the ELN Members need to know about each other?

›› What do they need to know about your Program?

›› What do they need to know about Unified Champion Schools? (characteristics, research, programs, engagement strategies, scope of work in your state and throughout the U. S.)

›› What do they need to know about SOUCS resources?

›› What do they need to know about their contributions and responsibilities?

›› What do they need to know about how their work connects with other Program efforts (including the Youth Activation Committee) and national Unified Champion Schools efforts?

1. **Deliberation (guided engaging conversations that take place during the meeting that provide insights with implications for your Program).**

›› How do the elements of Unified Champion Schools align with current and projected school priorities, programs, strategies and partnerships? (For example, identify a greater focus on health, a commitment to inclusion, enhance student leadership, focus on school climate, use of sports as a platform for inclusion).

›› What opportunities exist to implement Unified Champion Schools in schools in your state? This includes cost sharing.

›› In your district/school, how are initiatives successfully integrated and sustained? What are those elements and the sequence of implementation?

›› What is the most effective information and strategy to inform and influence district and school leaders to consider, adopt and/or adapt school-based strategies? It is important to understand how leaders are influenced so that your Program can create strategies and resources to effectively advance the Unified Champion Schools strategy in schools.

›› What meetings, forums, conferences, workshops and other venues are available for members of the ELN to share Unified Champion Schools information with their peers?

1. **Decision-Making (collective decisions that need to be made during the meeting).**

›› Prioritize the opportunities surfaced in the “deliberations” session. What is the consensus of the ELN Members on which opportunities/strategies are most timely and effective to advance Unified Champion Schools throughout your state?

›› What resources do the ELN Members need to implement the identified strategies?

›› How can the ELN best be organized? How can it be structured for members to work together on all tasks and in small groups to focus on specific tasks (e.g., resource development, advocacy, working with the YAC).

›› How often and in what structure should the ELN schedule member interactions?

›› What specific ways can the ELN contribute to the National Education Leaders   
 Network?

Summary

A quality Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools State ELN engages state and local education leaders to assist the state organization to deepen and broaden support for Unified Champion Schools. While the education landscape and the current collaborations are different in every state, this overview provides information and strategies for states to consider, adopt or adapt to engage education leaders in this important work.

**Education Leaders Network (ELN) Sample Agenda**

10:00 - 10:15: Welcome and Introductions

10:15 – 10:45: Current Status Review

* Unified Champion Schools
* SOAZ/ AIA Unified Sports® Schools
* Curriculum Schools
* Unified Champion Schools Calendar

10:45 – 11:15: Healthy Athletes Curriculum

* Fact Sheet Handout

11:15 – 11:30: Open Expansion/ Capacity Discussion

* Youth Activation Committee (YAC) development, growth, implementation
* YAC = area where most growth is needed
* Council Development

11:30 – 11: 50: ELN Project Discussion

11:50 – 12:00: Set Date for Next Meeting

* Look at dates 3-4 months from now

State Specific Example

**Special Olympics Arizona Education Leaders Network Committee Meeting Minutes: 1/18/2012**

**Call to Order: 10:00 AM**

Members present: Tim Martin, Brian Quinn, Nadine Armstrong, Scott Brown, Lori Ramsey, Daniel Dodge, Becky Raabe, Deb Randazzo, James Lee, Larry Clausen, Sr., Michele Staples, Deb Taylor, Chris Corey, Jim Braden, and Austin Montoya

Members absent: Chuck Schmidt, Gerry Corcoran, Denton Santareli, Matt Mixer, Isaac Sanft, Dave Alison

Minutes taken by: Austin Montoya.

Call to order: Brain Quinn called the meeting to order at 10:00AM.

**Meeting Review:**

* Brian Quinn introduces the “List of Unified Champion Schools” handout to the group and discusses the progress in signing on schools for Youth Activation, SOAZ/AIA Unified Sports®, and Unified Sports® P.E. Curriculum.
* Scott Brown talks about the progress of his schools (93 and counting).
* Scott Brown explains that 100 schools will descend upon Chandler High School to compete in the largest invitational track meet in the southwestern United States where two Unified Track events will take place on the Saturday of the meet. An estimated 4,000 people will be in attendance for this track meet. The date of the track meet will follow.
* Deb Randazzo
  + Talks about her curriculum update. Avondale, Higley, Bullhead City, Sunnyside, and Vail school districts are now on the board of the Young Athletes program (Elementary Curriculum)
  + Goes over an explanation of the Young Athletes program (For 2 ½ to 7 years of age that works on gross motor skills).
  + Talks about Disability Awareness Week which has been a big hit within the school districts.
  + Talks about how she and Brian Quinn will be training 50 Physical Education teachers at the AZ Dept. of Education Health Education Conference. Each teacher will receive the curriculum and will be trained in how to get the curriculum approved by their school/district.
  + Asks the ELN group how to get the word out about the Physical Education Curriculum.
* Tim Martin talks about how the curriculum is very easy to implement because the activities are in place for the teachers to present to their classroom.
* Brian Quinn passes out the Youth Activation Program Guide which is for a student leader-ship group for a Unified Sports® club to run all activities related to Unified Champion Schools/Youth Activation in their school.
* Daniel Dodge states that the program guide is organized like a “menu,” and he finds that very helpful.
* Tim Martin talks about ALPS University and educated the group on the details/specifics (handouts provided to all); and wants to see a focus put on Unified athletes and partners at-tending the ALPS University.
* Brian Quinn asks the group for thoughts on new ideas for Youth Activation activities and asks the committee if there are any student athletic group leaders that he could tap into for Youth Activation.
* Scott Brown states that a lot of high schools do not necessarily have a leadership council, but a lot of the students would be able to be easily identified by the coaches and/or athletic directors at their school.
* Jim Braden states that Character Matters has been implemented at each of the high schools in his district.
  + Each of the high schools will have a Captains Corner, where all of the captains of all of the athletic programs will meet once a week, and the Captains Corner will be involved very closely with Unified Sports®.
* The Special Education department had a special homecoming for their students, and non-special education students invited the special education students to the traditional dance.
* Brian Quinn asks the group if they have any marketing ideas for Unified Champion Schools
  + Larry Clausen, Sr. provides the group with an Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council handout and talks about how Youth Activation could tie in to the Council’s goals.
  + The Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council has the power to sponsor events up to $5000. Basically, the Council can support events or activities that promote the Council’s goals.
* Tim Martin talks about the LETR “Make That Change” program (A quarter mile of quarters lined up on a schools track). Chandler School District has raised $7000 dollars in the past two and a half weeks just for Unified Champion Schools. A quarter mile of quarters is about $4600 dollars.
* He also shares information about the Unified Tax Credit – Legislation to allow for Unified Sports to be an additional tax credit donation for participating schools.
* Larry Clausen, Sr. asks a question about the Law Enforcement Torch Run being an annual run. Tim Martin states that even though it is an annual run for the Summer Games, LETR is the biggest fundraising group year-round for Special Olympics Arizona. LETR has raised over $500,000 dollars through various events.
* Jim Braden asks if the AIAAA has placed Special Olympics Arizona on their September 2012

Conference Agenda? Michele Staples states that this subject will definitely be discussed at the September 2012 Conference.

* Daniel Dodge states that ROTC community service involvement might be a good lead, because they are a big service provider on his campuses. The ROTC is always looking for community service involvement opportunities.
* Brian Quinn asks Larry Clausen, Sr. about the $5000 sponsorship opportunity. Larry Clausen, Sr. states that in order to receive the sponsor-ship, the activity or event must tie in to one of the Council’s three goals. In addition, the Council has to be prominently displayed as a sponsor.
* Nadine Armstrong talks about the Healthy Athletes program (handout provided); Tim Martin talks about sponsoring the AZ Dept. of Education Health Education Conference on January 28th to present the Healthy Athletes Program (8 week curriculum) to over 50 registered nurses who will hopefully pick that up and teach in each school.
* Brian Quinn talks about the Youth Activation Committee handout and solicits ideas to pro-mote the program.
* Ideas include:
  + SOAZ/AIA Unified Sports® leaders to pro-mote at their schools
  + Post great photos on Facebook; Becky Raabe talks about the positive aspects of Facebook
  + Have an email bank to spread news electronically
  + Link up to participating School District websites
  + Positive news in the paper (Community Sections of the AZ Republic)
  + Tap into city television channels
  + Athletes sit in on IEP meetings / AZ Center for Disability Law
  + Larry Clausen, Sr. offers ideas about partnering with Raising Special Kids to help network the program
* Michele Staples talks about the AIA Luncheon Awards and the Nick Sundberg Award for Athlete & Partner of the Year.
* Brian Quinn informs the group of the Spread the Word >> Inclusion campaign on March 7th.
* Athlete, Chris Corey, talks about his experience participating in the R-Word campaign.

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| Becky Raabe | Program Specialist for the Parent Information Network, Department of Ed |
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| Brian Quinn | Youth Leadership & Unified Sports Director, SOAZ |
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| Deb Randazzo | Athlete Outreach Coordinator, SOAZ |
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| Chris Khoury | Unified Sports Athlete, RS Kellis HS |
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| Chuck Schmidt | COO, Arizona Interscholastic Association |
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| Dan Dodge | Executive Director, Arizona Association of Student Councils |
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| Dave Allison | Superintendent, Gilbert Schools |
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| Deb Taylor | Special Education Teacher, Liberty HS |
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| Denton Santerelli | Superintendent, Peoria Unified School District |
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| Gerry Corcoran | State Director, FEA- Future Educators of America |
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| Jim Braden | Athletic Director, Dysart School District |
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| Jim Lee | Superintendent, Paradise Valley Schools |
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| Kathy Khoury | Parent of Unified Sports Athlete |
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| Larry Clausen | Executive Director, Developmental Disabilities Planning Council |
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| Lori Ramsey | Executive Assistant, SOAZ |
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| Matt Mixer | AZ Adaptive PE Director |
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| Naman Shah | Youth Activation Committee member & STUGO President, North Canyon HS |
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| Scott Brown | Director of Unified Sports/ AIA Academy |
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| Tim Martin | CEO, SOAZ |
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**Special Olympics Arizona**

**Education Leadership Network (ELN) Roster (Example)**

*In alpha order by 1st name*

Frequently Asked Questions

**Q. How many members should we have on the ELN?**

A. It varies by state; however. the norm is between 10 and 15 members.

**Q. How often should the ELN meet?**

A. Face-to-face meetings occur either quarterly or twice a year, supported by more frequent virtual meetings. Initially, it is recommended to host a face-to-face meeting for everyone to get to know each other and from that meeting determine the frequency and types of formal interactions.

**Q. How does the ELN fit into the State Program organization?**

A. Some states align the ELN with their State Program Board and ask one of the Board members to act as the ELN chair; other states organize the ELN as an ad hoc committee that reports to the CEO/Executive Director. In addition, there is a benefit to aligning the placement of the ELN in the organizational structure with the State Youth Activation Committee (see the SOAZ organizational chart).

**Q. Is there a prescribed term or term limit for members of the ELN?**

A. Each State Program determines this; our suggestion is at least an initial two-year term to ensure continuity during the development of the ELN.

**Q. Does the ELN need By-laws?**

A. In most cases that level of formality is not needed. One of the reasons aligning the ELN with the State Program Board is a good idea, is to provide some structure to the group’s purpose and role.

**Q. What are the types of individuals representing organizations that should be on the ELN?**

A. Leaders from organizations and networks from the state, district and school levels make for the best ELN composition as each of these levels impact how schools are organized and conduct their work.

Contact

For more information, please contact Andrea Cahn at [acahn@specialolympics.org](mailto:acahn@specialolympics.org) or your SONA liaison.