

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MIDDLE 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 sports or fitness program that combines an approximately equal number of students with and without intellectual disabilities. Examples include such things as Unified PE, Unified Fitness, Interscholastic or intramural Unified Sports,

A national banner school has achieved the following standards:

1. Special Olympics Unified Sports is offered in at least 2 seasons throughout the school year. (For instance, Unified PE for at least two marking periods, and/or Interscholastic Unified Bocce in winter, and a Unified Fitness Club in the spring.)
2. Special Olympics Unified Sports participation occurs regularly over the course of each sport season or school term and includes competition or culminating event (For instance, multiple weeks of training during a sport season leading ending in competition; or a Unified Field Day to culminate Unified Fitness Club activities.)
3. Each sport/activity has an adult coach who has received state and/or National training on Unified Sports (For instance, in-person training with Special Olympics state Program, or courses taken on the [Special Olympics LMS](#) or [NFHS Learn site](#).)
4. Unified Sports is officially recognized by the school in a similar style as other athletics/activities. (For instance, Unified Sports is listed in the activities section for students; transportation/equipment/uniforms/practice space is provided for Unified sporting events; information and recognition is shared over school announcements; the sports team is recognized during assemblies and school events; and/or a stipend is offered to coaches.)

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.

**YL 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 similar student group made up of students with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) meets at least monthly throughout the school year to offer leadership opportunities/training for all members. (For instance, a Unified Club with co-leaders for each officer/leadership role/responsibility – one with an intellectual disability and one without; leadership skills training for all members of the club with and without intellectual disabilities; specific shared leadership roles for planning 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 (ID) have opportunities to build leadership skills and take leadership roles during Unified Club 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 planning and leading whole school engagement activities about inclusion; Unified Sports teams planning and leading skill building sessions for the local elementary school; Unified Club members collaborating with the Student Council to identify more opportunities for inclusion; an inclusive leadership class highlighting IYL skills through announcements/newsletters/school based social media.)
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. The club is officially recognized by the school in a similar style as other clubs/activities. (For instance, the liaison meets with club members who serve on the leadership team prior to each meeting to review the agenda; the club is included within the activities section and is highlighted in the yearbook; and/or stipends are offered to teacher leaders.)

Whole-School Engagement: Awareness and education activities that promote inclusion and reach the majority of the school population. Examples include such things as a Spread the Word Campaign, Pep Rallies or "Fans in the Stands" for Unified Sports teams, Respect Campaigns or student fundraising.

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; a student vs. staff Unified basketball game is held at the end of the semester with Fans in the Stands; a Cool School Plunge raises awareness about inclusion and funds for Special Olympics; a welcoming assembly is held at the beginning of the school year to spread inclusion and belonging.)
9. Students with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) **plan and lead** the awareness activities. (For instance, students with and without ID work together to come up with events, timelines, and goals for a whole school engagement event, Unified pairs from the Unified Club develop and read promotion announcements encouraging others to sign the inclusion banner during Spread the Word week; Members of the Unified Fitness Club share activities with advisory period teachers to include on Wellness Wednesdays.)

Sustainability: Strategies and plans which ensure the three Unified Champion School components (**Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership and Whole School Engagement**) 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 into the future. (For instance, club sponsor/coaching stipends are included in the annual budget; a booster club supports Unified Sports team needs; the UCS school liaison is a designated staff position.)
- 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 school climate assessments; 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 liaison. (For instance, general and special education teachers lead or 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 (lunch, advisory, electives), training and resources are available for adults; community partnerships are established.