



# WHOLE SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE





# An Introduction to Whole School Engagement

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools provide opportunities for all students to learn about and practice social inclusion through sustained engagement, whether during an assembly, as part of a sports experience, or through planned activities that reach the interdisciplinary team or whole school. Through whole school engagement opportunities integrated with inclusive youth leadership and Special Olympics Unified Sports® components, the school becomes a powerful community that represents new ways of thinking and acting.

While many possibilities exist for promoting social inclusion through school assemblies and planned activities, the cafeteria, hallways and classrooms also provide opportunities to nurture positive peer relationships with students of all abilities. The expectation is that respect, acceptance and engagement are norms for the entire school environment. The result is a middle level school where all students feel they play a meaningful part in school events, extracurricular activities, sports, and informal interactions that occur in the cafeteria or hallways.



## **Social Inclusion In Action**

Identify the importance of all students serving in leadership capacities in which they demonstrate their skills and are recognized for unique contributions.

# GOALS OF WHOLE SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

- Students with and without intellectual disabilities interact socially and develop mutually beneficial friendships.
- Students with and without disabilities hold more positive attitudes toward, and demonstrate a greater understanding and acceptance of, each other.
- Schools become communities of acceptance where students with and without intellectual disabilities feel welcome and contribute meaningfully to all school activities, opportunities and functions.
- The school climate is enhanced by nurturing development, learning and achievement through engaging environments where students, teachers, administrators, parents and community members feel connected, safe and successful.

## Whole School Engagement is an important component because it:

- Engages the entire school community in building awareness and understanding of the benefits that can be experienced when each individual is recognized, honored and supported.
- Creates a socially inclusive school climate and expands ownership of the efforts beyond a passionate few to the larger community, creating a ripple effect of actions and advocacy.
- Enhances the school climate by nurturing development, learning and achievement through engaging environments where all feel connected, safe and successful.
- Creates communities of acceptance where students with disabilities feel welcomed and valued as meaningful participants in school activities, classroom learning and leadership opportunities.
- Models to the larger community that inclusivity can and does have positive outcomes for all members of the school or community.

**There are opportunities for every student to contribute to achieving the goals of the team or school. In Unified Champion Schools, such contributions are realized when students and staff are involved as participants in a whole school or team activity and when students with and without intellectual disabilities serve as teammates on a Unified Sports team, are leaders or members of an inclusive school club or extracurricular activity, or actively serve on the school's or team's intergenerational leadership team.**

# Implementing Whole School Engagement

When first engaging your whole school in advancing social inclusion, have a planning meeting with your school's Inclusive Leadership Team. Be sure students are engaged as co-leaders throughout the process either at the interdisciplinary team or school level. Young adolescents respond positively to opportunities to connect what they are learning to real-life situations (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010).

Remember to always be on the lookout for appropriate opportunities to hand over decision-making and leadership to young people. The roles that adults and youth play will vary from school to school. The questions and checklists found below will be answered and completed by youth, youth and adults working together, or adults as appropriate for your particular school environment.

## Topics to discuss with the Unified Champion School Leadership Team

- How do we engage all students in the activities and events around the school?
- What types of whole school activities does our school or team need or want to incorporate?
- Where do we already have formal and informal opportunities for students to understand and begin to incorporate social inclusion?
- What types of whole school activities (e.g., assemblies, pep rallies, school-wide events) do we already do in our school? Do any of these activities support social inclusion? Can they? If not, how can they be revised to support the social inclusion of all students?
- What types of whole school activities are valued by students with and without intellectual disabilities at the school?
- Are there any existing clubs, teams, classes or school groups that might be interested in planning and leading a whole school activity?
- Who will be the adult advisor/coordinator for various activities?

How did it feel when other students watched your games?

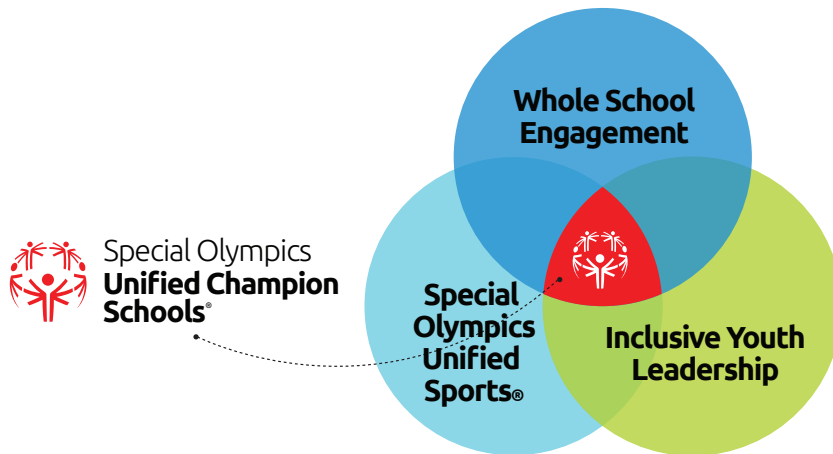
“

It felt good... to be noticed

- Unified Champion School Student With ID ”



# Integration of the Three Components through the Lens of Whole School Engagement



While each component is introduced separately, the greatest value comes when the separate components are integrated into various activities or learning opportunities. As reflected in *This We Believe*, an integrated curriculum is an important basis of middle level education, and emphasizes the importance of youth engagement. “Curriculum is integrative when it helps students make sense of their lives and the world around them, and when students are empowered to share in making significant, meaningful decisions about their learning” (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010). The following are examples of how the three components can be integrated with an emphasis on Whole School Engagement.

Example Activity	Whole School Engagement	Inclusive Youth Leadership	Unified Sports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fans in the Stands attend and cheer for all athletes during every Unified Basketball game.</li> </ul>	X	X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Unified PE class hosts a Unified Sports Festival to promote wellness and the importance of physical activity for all students.</li> </ul>	X	X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Unified Sports teams provide demonstrations during assemblies, lunch or exploratory periods.</li> </ul>	X		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pep rallies are held for all intramural and interscholastic Unified Sports teams.</li> </ul>	X		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The National Junior Honor Society creates a school-wide campaign with posters, a video, and small group presentations to increase awareness of social inclusion and foster respect among all students.</li> </ul>	X	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The seventh grade team works on an R-word door decorating contest, engaging students with and without intellectual disabilities in planning and implementation.</li> </ul>	X	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Unified Club works with the school PBIS leadership committee to incorporate social inclusion as part of the school-wide expectations for student behavior.</li> </ul>	X	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The social studies class incorporates lessons on social inclusion into their team’s interdisciplinary unit on social justice and includes an article in the school’s newsletter.</li> </ul>	X	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The inclusive Student Council or National Junior Honor Society coordinates a Spread the Word campaign to raise consciousness of the school and community about the hurtful effects of exclusive language, and to promote acts of inclusion.</li> </ul>	X	X	



## Enhancing Whole School Engagement Experiences



- Include school administration early in the process.
- Share the goals for whole school engagement with the school community.
- Select and plan an initial activity that is manageable, energizing and appealing to the whole school.
- Build upon activities that are already being offered to make them socially inclusive activities.
- Develop a process for engaging all students in whole school activities, ensuring the development of socially inclusive attitudes, values, knowledge, skills and actions.
- When building awareness, nurturing inclusive relationships, and building expectations for inclusive behavior, provide opportunities in both structured and unstructured settings.
- Provide consistent opportunities to engage a broad range of stakeholders throughout the school and wider community in developing, implementing and sustaining a wide range of inclusive activities.
- Connect with your State Special Olympics Program for support and sharing successes.
- Share photos, videos and stories of social inclusion activities and events using the school's website or social media.



## Getting Started with Whole School Engagement

An important feature of creating a socially inclusive school is engaging the entire school community. Whole School Engagement activities advance social inclusion knowledge and skills, and positively impact the school climate. An inclusive school climate that fosters understanding and respect for all can influence how students think and act, both within and beyond the school.

School-wide opportunities that are focused on social inclusion raise awareness and create an educational environment where respect and acceptance are the norm and all students feel included and engaged. This welcoming community cultivates a positive school climate and enhances other school-wide efforts such as PBIS. Whole school activities offer a platform for young adolescents to positively impact their school community by promoting social inclusion. While these activities can vary from school to school, some examples include:

- **Spread the Word campaigns.**
- **Fans in the Stands.**
- **Unified Sports field days.**
- **The play, *It's Our School, Too!***
- **Discussions in advisor-advisee (e.g., Special Olympics Activities and Lessons).**

As schools continue with the Unified Champion Schools strategy, students and adults within the school can identify activities unique to their school or community. Implementation of whole school activities and events provides opportunities for integrating Unified Sports or inclusive youth leadership efforts. This integration enhances the spread of social inclusion throughout the school.



### Have a “Mix it Up” day on campus:

On a specific day, randomly assign students to sit at different tables for lunch—it is a great chance for students to start conversations and talk with new people. This will allow students to step out of their comfort zone and make new friends.



## Examples of Whole School Engagement Activities SPREAD THE WORD

# SPREAD THE WORD INCLUSION



Some Unified Champion Schools choose to implement a Spread the Word campaign. In 2019, Spread the Word to End the Word became Spread the Word (STW), with a focus not just on the elimination of a word but on the creation of a new reality: inclusion for all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The global engagement campaign remains committed to empowering grassroots leaders to change their communities, schools, and workplaces, now through a call to their peers to take action for inclusion. With this change, Spread the Word will give school leaders around the world the tools needed to create socially inclusive places to learn, work, and live.

The following are a few ideas for promoting and growing a Spread the Word Campaign in a middle level school:

- Host a rally modeled after pep rallies.
- Hang informational posters around the school.
- Create and distribute STW stickers.
- Sell STW T-shirts.
- Make announcements on the school's "morning news," website or e-newsletter.
- Provide opportunities for students to sign a pledge of inclusion—posters or banners for physical signatures or perhaps computers for online pledging.
- Reach out through social networks (if allowed by school policy).
- Use other types of communication—email, texts, phone calls—to make sure you reach everyone you want to reach.

“I personally think that we should add more weeks of respect into the year.”

- Unified Champion School Student With ID





## Examples of Whole School Engagement Activities

### FANS IN THE STANDS

Fans in the Stands is a program that supports unity and taps into core values of acceptance, empowerment, respect, inclusion, dignity, courage, strength, pride, confidence and fun. It helps ensure that individual students and Unified teams have cheering fans whenever and wherever they compete. Everyone loves to have people cheer them on, and middle level students are no different. Fans in the Stands lets students with intellectual disabilities know that their sports competitions are as important as anyone else's, and it makes the whole school aware of the abilities of athletes with intellectual disabilities.

Students are already accustomed to cheering on their school athletes, so being Fans in the Stands for all students is an easy next step. The following are a few ideas that will inform and engage students, and they can fit well into almost any school environment.

- Set up a station in the cafeteria where students can sign up to be Fans in the Stands.
- Create a promotional announcement for the school's "morning news."
- Organize a poster or T-shirt design contest, with judging done by Unified teams.
- Distribute Fans in the Stands stickers during lunch, at school sports events, or at other appropriate times.
- Bring students, faculty and staff together for a Fans in the Stands pep rally—or include a Fans in the Stands component as part of a regular school-wide pep rally.

*HINT: Similar ideas will work equally well for efforts such as the R-word Campaign.*



### Example: Fans in the Stands

"At our school, some members of the Unified Club were also part of the school's Unified Sports team, so for one club activity they decided to cheer on the players. As Fans in the Stands, they made posters and shirts to encourage the team. The Unified Sports players were so happy to see that their friends from the Unified Club had shown up to cheer them on. After the game, all members of the Unified Club and the Unified Sports team had a pizza party where they were able to share stories about the game and the great plays that were made. This is an effective way for all of the friends to bond over sports and encourage each other to do their best."

- Unified Champion School Student Without ID



## Plays and Film Clips

***Movies that Move*** offers a collection of clips from films and TV shows to spark classroom discussion. The themes include different abilities; the power of words; acceptance; and youth leadership, and are perfect for advisory discussions. Based on a partnership with Film Clips for Character Education, *Movies that Move* is designed to promote inclusion and critical thinking. With titles ranging from Henry Potter to the Lord of the Rings, discussions are engaging for young adolescents.

***It's Our School, Too!*** is a play written for a cast of 10-20 youth with and without intellectual disabilities. The short scenes are based on true stories from students about the things that happen every day in our schools. The play can be performed on a blank stage, using just chairs, or you may create an elaborate set. There are three sections of the play (Opening, the R-word and Closing) where you can choose either to use the line suggestions in the script or create new lines that relate more to the students.

The play is a powerful vehicle for portraying and generating discussions on issues of exclusion and inclusion in schools today. It would be a great presentation for the entire school, and could be perfect for classroom or advisory discussions. To access the script for this play, refer to the Resources section at the back of the Playbook.

“ We have so many friends who are part of the Unified Basketball team that we wanted to go out and cheer for them. ”

- Susan, Unified Club Member



## Examples of Whole School Engagement Activities RALLIES AND UNIFIED SPORTS DAYS



**Rallies and Assemblies** are perfect ways to bring students together in a large setting to learn about social inclusion; inform and excite students about new initiatives (e.g., R-word Campaign); and celebrate achievements. Students love to gather in large numbers to express their enthusiasm for something they care about, whether it's a team or a cause. Respect Rallies give students of all abilities the opportunity to come together and voice their collective support for acceptance and inclusion. Youth passion about a topic and organization become the basis for an informative and encouraging activity, and present a wonderful teaching opportunity.

**Unified Sports Days or Festivals** provide an opportunity for the school's various Unified teams to compete and teach others. Interdisciplinary teams can have bocce tournaments, play Unified soccer, or have specific skills stations, while the Walking Club can increase its total number of steps. These are ideal ways to support individual fitness while having fun. Be sure to see additional information in the Resources section for this type of event.

“ That was very exciting. All of my friends were cheering for me and I felt happy. ”

- Unified Champion School Student With ID,  
Talking about a Unified Pep Rally





## Getting Started Checklists and a Plan

In the Resources section at the end of the Playbook, you will find tips and “Getting Started Checklists” for the whole school engagement activities discussed earlier. These activities can be customized and expanded to best address your identified needs and fit into the structure of your school. As you continue with Unified Champion Schools, new activities can be implemented to meet the needs of students and the school.

After reviewing all of your options, create a Whole School Engagement plan so you identify specifics on what you are going to do, when it will be done, and by whom. Adults and youth should be working together on the steps in each checklist plan for engaging the entire school. The template for the “Whole School Engagement Action Plan” can be found in the Resources section at the back of the Playbook.

