

INCLUSION THROUGH YOUTH ACTIVATION



THE PROBLEM

Young people today face many challenges, from achieving personal and academic success to feeling emotionally and physically healthy and safe. Unfortunately, the typical school and social environment for young people can be fraught with obstacles that hamper their learning and that negatively impact their overall happiness and development. These challenges are compounded for some students due to the presence of an intellectual disability. While progress has been made, many students with disabilities experience social isolation and rejection, and even victimization in the form of bullying. And, in many cultures, young people with disabilities are educated separately from peers without disabilities, or do not attend school at all.



THE SOLUTION: SPORTS AS THE FOUNDATION FOR INCLUSION

With sports as the foundation, the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® (SOUCS) program offers proven activities that equip young people with tools and training to create sports, classroom and community experiences that improve attitudes and behaviors among all young people, both with and without intellectual disabilities. These work to:

Reduce
bullying
and
exclusion

Promote
healthy
activities and
interactions

Overtur
n
stereotypes
and negative
attitudes

Eliminate
hurtful language
in schools
and elsewhere

Engage young
people as leaders
of a new, positive
social movement

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools is a program for schools Pre-K through university that intentionally promotes meaningful social inclusion by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities to create accepting school environments, utilizing three interconnected components: Special Olympics Unified Sports®, inclusive youth leadership, and whole school engagement. **At its core, this Unified strategy is about unifying all students—with and without disabilities—using sports as a catalyst for social inclusion and attitude and behavioral change.**

Note: Unified Champion Schools does not intend for students to simply be recipients of programming; instead, young people are the architects of lasting change and community building; Adults serve as allies to youth, rather than managers of youth.



THE OUTCOME

Since its founding, Special Olympics has been built on the premise that lasting change must start with young people. The goal is to inspire a transformation in attitudes of the next generation, **the Unified Generation**, so that their actions toward those with disabilities will be radically different and more inclusive than ever before.

Unified Champion Schools are based on the evidence that students who “play unified” become better at helping others, standing up for each other and sharing responsibility. These students gain patience and the ability to compromise.

..... THROUGH UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS

- Schools and community environments become more welcoming to people of all abilities
- Socially inclusive school climates become free from teasing, bullying and the exclusion of any group of students
- Students with disabilities are routinely included in and feel a part of all social activities and opportunities
- Young people with and without disabilities are playing sports together and socially interacting
- Students without disabilities hold more positive attitudes toward their peers with disabilities
- Special Olympics is viewed as a school and community partner that offers inclusive programming that benefits all students

..... PRESENT REACH

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools is in 12,247 schools in 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

As many as 21.6 million inclusive experiences are taking place through Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools programming.

SOUCS has a dedicated approach to increasing programming in urban schools. As of 2025, there are 3,484 Unified Champion Schools in city school districts, doubling over the last 7 years (98% growth).

..... GOAL FOR THE FUTURE

Expand Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools in the U.S. to include 20,000 schools by 2030.