Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®
District Growth Implementation Toolkit

DECEMBER 2021

Special Olympics Mission

The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in sharing gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools is an education and sports based strategy powered by an engaged youth community that increases athletic and leadership opportunities for students with and without intellectual disabilities, while creating communities of acceptance for all. Unified Champion Schools programming includes three main educational components in schools:

- Special Olympics Unified Sports®
- Inclusive Youth Leadership
- Whole-school awareness activities

Introduction to District Growth Implementation

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools has identified school district/city district growth as a strategic priority for Programs. This toolkit is designed to provide support for implementation.

The toolkit is organized according to the implementation stages identified in the UCS District Implementation online course (on the LMS) and used in various technical assistance and professional development events. Each item may be used on its own or in combination with other items within the toolkit based on Program needs. Sample documents are included as templates so that Programs may apply appropriate branding and edit to fit their context.

Every resource listed in this Toolkit can be found on the Learning and Development webpage.

DISTRICT IMPLEMENTATION TOOLKIT

1. Preparing Stage

The Preparing Stage is designed for Programs to gather information about their own and the district's readiness to implement Unified Champion Schools. Resources like the ***online District Growth and Implementation Course*** and the ***Education 101 webinar*** provide training for Program staff about the process itself and the key roles and concepts which will be critical for success.

In addition, the toolkit includes a ***Program Capacity Reflection*** which provides a template for Programs to consider their own readiness for district level implementation. Importantly, it aligns Program readiness with the same Characteristics for Socially Inclusive Schools that are used within the Socially Inclusive School District Rubric. The tool provides descriptions of what Programs may look like at different levels of readiness. It is intended to generate conversation and to help Programs identify areas where they may need to develop their own capacity as they serve districts.

The toolkit also includes a ***School District Framework review tool*** which helps Programs identify key information about districts in which they may be planning expansion. This tool is particularly valuable as it helps Programs identify district goals which may align with the UCS strategy and provide early talking points and strategies for district level leadership teams.

Finally, for those Programs working or planning to work in "urban" or city-based school districts, the toolkit provides a ***Community Asset Mapping tool*** to help Programs identify potential partners along with existing strengths and challenges within the community.

In all, the tools within this section of the toolkit provide background information and insights which build any Program's capacity to initiate district/city-wide implementation of Unified Champion Schools from initial conversations to relevant staffing to partnership development.

The following resources may be used in the Preparing Stage:

1. Unified Champion Schools District Implementation Course on learn.specialolympics.org
2. Program Capacity Reflection
3. School District Framework Tool
4. Community Asset Mapping Tool

2. Planning Stage

The planning stage of district implementation begins with early meetings between the Program and district leadership and results in a partnership agreement, a set of implementation priorities and strategies with which to begin, and district leadership team to guide the process.

This toolkit includes several **sample agendas** from district level leadership meetings. It is often the case that initial meetings engage key decision makers who may not be permanent members of the leadership team but are crucial for early steps. The toolkit also includes **sample crosswalks** between UCS components and district level goals which you may customize to use in early meetings as a way of demonstrating the alignment between UCS and the district's existing priorities.

A key priority for this stage is a partnership agreement between the Program and the school district. That process is detailed, and samples are included in the **SONA Partnership Resource**.

Among the additional tools included for this stage are the **Characteristics of Socially Inclusive Schools** (Framework for Social Inclusion) and the **Socially Inclusive School District (SISD) Rubric**. The Characteristics help define the processes that support implementation of the UCS components and lead to its sustainability over time. Using the Characteristics to help frame district level implementation supports broader thinking than simply 'checking off,' for instance, if all schools have a Unified Sport in place, by placing emphasis on the need for professional development, communication, partnerships and continuous improvement at the district level. They also help various leaders within the district understand their roles beyond direct implementation (e.g., the district leader of communication ensuring all district newsletters/websites/social media uses inclusive language.)

The **SISD Rubric** serves as a reflection tool for district leaders and leadership teams. It provides indicators for each of the Characteristics and descriptions of what emerging, inclusive and highly inclusive district policies and practices look like for each. The Rubric is intended to generate conversation and reflection by diverse stakeholders in ways which then lead to clarity around action steps and, often, greater understanding of social inclusion overall. The Rubric, a customizable guide for district use, and talking points about the Characteristics are included for your use.

Finally, this section of the toolkit also includes a school level reflection tool called the **Characteristics of Socially Inclusive Schools (CSIS) Survey**. Like the SISD Rubric, the CSIS survey presents indicators for school leadership teams to consider about their own practice. Although it is intended for school leadership team use, it is included here as a resource since district level teams may decide to prioritize its use in district schools.

The following resources may be used in the Planning Stage:

1. Characteristics of Socially Inclusive Schools Resources

     • Social Inclusion Framework/Characteristics of Socially Inclusive Schools (CSIS)

     • CSIS combined attributes talking points

     • CSIS Survey

2. Socially Inclusive School District (SISD) Resources

     • SISD introduction

     • SISD Rubric

     • SISD Rubric Guide

3. Partnership Planning Resource

4. Sample Leadership Team Agendas

5. Sample Strategic Plan Crosswalks

3. Doing Stage

The doing stage is what Programs know best! This is when the district leadership team has put its plan into action and identified schools and strategies get started. The priorities will vary from district to district, so the toolkit for this stage includes a ***crosswalk of SONA UCS resources*** matched to their appropriate audience (teachers, students, administrators, etc.) and the Characteristic of Socially Inclusive Schools which the resource specifically supports. This crosswalk will help Programs identify which resources to provide, and, perhaps as importantly, how to use those resources to help district leadership teams make the connection from the activities and programming of Unified Champion Schools to the Characteristics of the rubric they used in the planning stage. For instance, if they identified a need to grow in the area of professional development, a Program may help the district plan training for all school liaisons using the online courses designed for educators. Or, if the leadership team identified unifying programming as a need area, the Program might identify resources for each grade level which could support implementation of Unified Sports.

This section of the toolkit also includes a ***sample implementation timeline.*** District/City-wide implementation plans will, in most cases, be multi-year, and include both short term and long-term goals. This sample presents a template for the first year which may be built upon over time.

It is important that Programs engage in calendar planning and regular check ins with the district leadership team during this stage. Just like a school level leadership team, the district team will monitor, adjust and celebrate strategies as they are used and should continuously assess their own role in the implementation process. For instance, the district plan may include a strategy to implement Unified Sports in targeted high schools. Programs will provide support in that effort and likely work with athletic directors and others at the schools themselves. The district leadership team, meanwhile, should be involved in determining and defining how those teams and coaches will be supported by the district itself. Will the coaches receive stipends like other varsity sports coaches? Will the teams be provided transportation for competitions like other teams in the district? How will the district team know the effort has been successful and where will they share that story? These are the sorts of conversations and steps that lead to sustainable implementation over time. We have included a ***sample agenda for a regular monitoring meeting*** within the toolkit to help with this process.

The following resources may be used in the Doing Stage:

1. Resource Crosswalk

2. SISD Implementation Timeline

3. Leadership Team Launch Agenda

4.   Evaluation Stage

The evaluating stage is all about making sure the district is making progress toward sustainable implementation of Unified Champion Schools and social inclusion. It will largely be driven by the goals and milestones the district leadership team developed during the planning stage.

The tools included for this stage are the grade level versions of the **National Recognition Program Standards** and the **rubric** that Programs and the Certifying Body use to evaluate applications for banner status. Whether or not a school ever decides to apply for banner status, implementation of these standards demonstrates a level of sustainability and integration with other school priorities that research shows leads to real impact on students and the community. These are public tools and can be shared broadly with leadership teams and school liaisons to help them move toward achieving national recognition.

Importantly, though, this stage provides opportunities to celebrate the stories and the small wins along with the big accomplishments. District leadership teams will need reinforcement and recognition as they pursue this work, so Programs must help them understand that "just" the story of a student who had been non-verbal with peers, now talking to her partner is worthy of recognition. "Just" the story of identifying school liaisons for each building is a worthy accomplishment with potential for significant impact.

To help document the changes, district leadership teams may return to the Socially Inclusive School District rubric they used during the planning stage. Sometimes their reflection will change quite a bit from the first time they used the rubric based on the actions they have pursued. Other times they will actually be a bit harder on themselves as they reflect because they now understand what social inclusion and the Unified Champion Schools strategy really looks like. Either way, returning them to that conversation after a period of time offers insight about next steps and shifts the team back into planning mode.

The following resources may be used in the Evaluation Stage:

1. National Banner School Standards

2. Banner Recognition Rubrics

5. Celebration Stage

The truth is that every stage should be a celebrating stage! There is no need to wait until a district team becomes state champion or a Unified Pair becomes U.S. Youth Ambassadors. Each step along the way offers opportunities to tell the story of Unified Champion Schools and the movement to create socially inclusive communities.

This stage is often rooted in communication. It is about sharing data and stories, often in combination, with the entire community. While this may align most strongly with the district leaderships team's efforts regarding the communication characteristic, Programs should also embrace opportunities to talk about what is happening within the district with their peers, partners, policymakers and donors. The tools for this stage include ***sample press release templates***, ***sample celebration agendas***, and a reminder to include these stories in all newsletters, social media and online presence.

The following resources may be used in the Celebration Stage:

1. Sample Press Releases

2. Sample Agendas

3. Elements of a Newsworthy Story