



# Elementary School Playbook

A GUIDE FOR GRADES K-5



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools**



U.S. Office of Special  
Education Programs



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools**



## Acknowledgments

This document would not be possible without the insights and input of the following individuals. Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools is grateful for the contributions made by each person to promote social inclusion in our schools.

**Andrea Cahn**, Project Director

**Leigha Bannon**, Project Coordinator

## Reviewers

**Betty Edwards**, Special Olympics National Education Leaders Network Chair and Partnership Consultant

**Rebecca Ralston**, Senior Manager, Young Athletes, Special Olympics

**Kara Harmon**, Director of Program Services, Special Olympics South Carolina

All resources within this playbook can be found at:

[resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources](https://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources)



# Table of Contents

## Overview

Become a Unified Champion School! ..... 3

How to Use This Playbook ..... 4

## Getting Ready

What Does a Socially Inclusive Elementary School Look Like? ..... 6

Why Do We Need Socially Inclusive Elementary Schools? ..... 7

How Do We Get Changes in School Environments to Stick? ..... 8

What Is the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Strategy? ..... 9

How Does the Unified Champion Schools Strategy Support School Initiatives? ..... 11

The Numbers Tell the Story: Why Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Are Needed ..... 13

How Does the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Strategy Work? ..... 14

Tips for Implementing the Unified Champion Schools Strategy ..... 15

How Does It All Come Together? ..... 17

What Do Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Look Like? ..... 19

## Establishing a Leadership Team

Why Is a Leadership Team Important? ..... 28

Who Should be on the Leadership Team? ..... 29

How to Start a Leadership Team ..... 30

Leadership Team Agendas ..... 31

Putting Your School on the Path to Becoming More Socially Inclusive ..... 40

    Social Inclusion Assessment, Adult Leadership Team Member Version ..... 41

    Social Inclusion Assessment, Student Leadership Team Member Version ..... 51

    Social Inclusion Assessment: Discussion Questions ..... 56

    Goal-Setting Form ..... 57

Establishing a Leadership Team: Tips for Success ..... 58

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Informational Handout ..... 59

## Whole School Engagement

Whole School Engagement: Welcoming for All ..... 61

What Are the Goals of Whole School Engagement? ..... 62

Get Started with Whole School Engagement ..... 63

Examples of Whole School Engagement Activities ..... 64

    Morning Announcements ..... 65

    Inclusion Throughout the Day ..... 70

    Respect Campaign ..... 71

    Fans in the Stands ..... 74

Thank you to Hasbro Children’s Fund for supporting the production of this playbook.



# Table of Contents

## Whole School Engagement *(continued)*

Social Media Posts .....	76
News to Use .....	86
Looking for Leaders: An Elementary School Play .....	92
Whole School Engagement: Tips for Success .....	101
Whole School Engagement Action Plan Form .....	102
Mini-Lessons	
Glad to be Me .....	103
Keep Trying! .....	109
We Are All Unique .....	115
Together We Are Stronger .....	120

## Inclusive Youth Leadership

Inclusive Youth Leadership: Leadership for All.....	125
What Are the Goals of Inclusive Youth Leadership?.....	126
Get Started with Inclusive Youth Leadership.....	127
Activities to Promote Inclusive Youth Leadership.....	128
Start a Unified Club.....	130
Inclusive Youth Leadership: Tips for Success .....	131
Inclusive Youth Leadership Action Plan Form.....	132

## Special Olympics Unified Sports® and Fitness

Special Olympics Unified Sports® and Fitness: Activities for All .....	134
What Are the Main Models of Unified Sports? .....	135
What Are the Goals of Inclusive Sports?.....	136
Get Started with Unified Sports.....	137
Unified Sports Opportunities .....	138
Checklist for Unified Sports Player Development and Competitive Models.....	141
Checklist for Unified Sports Recreation Models .....	142
Checklist for a Unified Sports Day .....	143
Unified Sports: Tips for Success .....	144
Unified Sports and Fitness Action Plan Form .....	145

## Special Olympics Resources

Resources: Tested and Ready.....	147
Action Plan Form .....	149

Thank you to Hasbro Children's Fund for supporting the production of this playbook.



# Become a Unified Champion School!

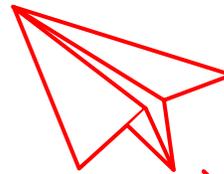
## What are Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools?

Unified Champion Schools promote social inclusion by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities through sports and other activities. Students who “Play Unified” become better at helping others, standing up for each other, and sharing responsibility.

Unified Champion Schools are based on the premise that lasting change must start with youth. In elementary schools, adults foster youth leadership by facilitating age-appropriate leadership roles and providing learning experiences that explore what it means to be a leader. Students might be mentors for younger student athletes, set up sports skill stations, and discuss books that promote leadership qualities, for example. These experiences lay a strong foundation for middle and high school years when students take more initiative in planning and implementing Unified opportunities. Ultimately, students become advocates for communities that promote respect and dignity for everyone.

### Key Characteristics of Unified Champion Schools

- Unifying programming
- Positive school climates
- Sports as a catalyst for social inclusion
- Development of students’ leadership skills



### Core components

**Special Olympics Unified Sports®** provide opportunities for students with and without intellectual disabilities to participate in a variety of fitness and sports activities alongside one another.

**Inclusive Youth Leadership** encourages students with and without intellectual disabilities to take on leading roles as they work with adults in the school to create a socially inclusive environment through sports and other activities.

**Whole School Engagement** opportunities are awareness and education activities that promote respect and social inclusion and reach the majority of students and school staff members.

### Outcomes

Unified Champion Schools

- reduce bullying and exclusion.
- promote inclusive friendships.
- overturn negative attitudes.
- decrease hurtful language in schools and the community.
- develop students’ leadership skills.
- create communities of caring and respect.

Over **6,000 elementary, middle, and high schools** use Special Olympics Unified Programming.





## How to Use This Playbook

This guide is packed with information and ready-to-use resources designed to help elementary school communities increase social inclusion. There's a lot of information, but keep in mind that this guide is a tool. Different parts of it will be useful to your school at different times. To help you find what you need when you need it, check out the highlights below.

### Get background information

Read the **overview and introduction** to gain a stronger understanding of Unified Champion Schools. These sections include information and data that are valuable in helping school administrators, staff members, and other stakeholders understand the Unified approach and how it benefits school communities.

Need a **brief description** of the strategy that you can copy and share with others? See page 59.

### Find out what other Unified Champion Schools do

Every school is different, so it's important that the Unified Champion Schools strategy is tailored to fit your school community. Check out the real-life **examples** of four different Unified Champion Schools on pages 19–26 to spark ideas of what a program might look like at your school.

### Establish a leadership team

See pages 27–30 to learn the ins and outs of creating a leadership team that will guide the implementation of the Unified Champion Schools program. Use the **monthly agendas** on pages 31–39 to streamline planning for team meetings.

### Plan Unified Sports and other activities

Check out the sections for the three components of Unified Champion Schools—**Whole School Engagement** (pages 60–123), **Inclusive Youth Leadership** (pages 124–132), and **Unified Sports® and Fitness** (pages 133–145). The beginning of each section explains how that component contributes to the Unified strategy. Look through the ideas in these sections to determine what activities are a good fit for your school. It works well to have a combination of ongoing activities and one-time events.

#### Quick start

Looking for a simple idea that can be used right away to promote a positive, inclusive school climate? See the ready-to-use **weekly announcements** on pages 65–69.



# Getting Ready



Getting Ready



Establishing a Leadership Team



Whole School Engagement



Inclusive Youth Leadership



Unified Sports and Fitness



Special Olympics Resources



## What Does a Socially Inclusive Elementary School Look Like?

Imagine a school where no student is excluded because of a disability or the services required to meet the child's needs. All students are engaged in positive ways; a variety of experiences are offered that build on individual strengths and appreciate diversity.

As you enter the school, you see students with and without disabilities waiting at the entrances, ready to welcome students and visitors with big smiles and positive greetings. You see colorful posters and banners on the hallway walls with messages of caring, respect, and responsibility and with many students pictured.

You see students pausing in the hallway to high-five students who recently competed in a Special Olympics track and field meet. The school is a place of respect where differences are accepted and the achievements of all students are celebrated.

You see a physical education class where students with and without intellectual disabilities take on leadership roles by setting up sports skill stations. The students participate alongside each other and call one another by name as they cheer and give encouragement. In another class you see students in Young Athletes learning to jump, kick, throw, and catch, with older students coaching and mentoring.

In the cafeteria, you see students with and without disabilities sitting at the same table and talking about their plans for recess. You see students in a book club eating with a teacher as they discuss the ways leadership is demonstrated in a book they read.

During recess all students are engaged in play with other children. No students sit off to the side by themselves. Everyone is included.

Every student is given an opportunity to meaningfully contribute and participate, and students are recognized for their similarities and strengths rather than disabilities. All around you is evidence that students feel that they are a valued part of the school.



**As long as all students participate in an event, isn't it socially inclusive?**

Not necessarily. For example, during a traditional field day, students with special needs might be isolated from their peers and travel through sport and fitness stations in a segregated group. A Unified Sports or Game Day is different. It integrates all students. Students with disabilities participate alongside students without disabilities as peers.





## Why Do We Need Socially Inclusive Elementary Schools?

### The influence of the school climate is far-reaching.

Successfully meeting the needs of all students hinges largely on the climate of the school. The school climate is the quality and character of school life. It impacts every aspect of students' school experiences, from their social and emotional well-being to their academic achievement. A positive school climate promotes student learning and increases student motivation to learn.

### A positive school climate is inclusive.

Creating a sense of belonging is a critical element in establishing a socially inclusive school environment. Students with disabilities are more likely to experience social isolation within school and participate in fewer school-based social activities and clubs than their peers without disabilities. Social isolation can have negative effects on students' academic performance, behavior, and health. A positive school climate creates the conditions where diversity is valued and every student is a contributing member. It creates a sense of belonging for all students. It ensures that students with and without disabilities have frequent opportunities to interact.

### The elementary school years are optimal years for students to develop empathy and social awareness.

This is a particularly critical time for students to experience social inclusion. Around ages six to seven years old, students become cognitively capable of understanding someone else's perspective and developing empathy. Bullying and other negative behaviors are less likely to occur in school environments where students understand and appreciate differences. Plus, attitudes of acceptance that are formed early are likely to stick for life.

### Does talking about differences single kids out?

Sometimes teachers are concerned that if they acknowledge differences, they're also spotlighting those differences. However, experience at Unified Champion Schools shows that opening the conversation so students can ask questions about disabilities doesn't single kids out; instead it's an important step toward **building knowledge, understanding, and acceptance** and helping to ensure that a lack of understanding doesn't lead to bullying and other harmful behaviors.



### Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Research

- There is a strong relationship between **school connectedness** and regular school attendance.
- Children with disabilities are **two to three times** more likely to be bullied than their peers without disabilities.





## How Do We Get Changes in School Environments to Stick?

*Here's what a leading educational researcher says.*

- **Lots of voices.** Start with school leaders. They'll have a chance to ask questions and create and share a vision for implementation. For change to take hold, all school stakeholders must be involved and connected with the process from beginning to end. Students, teachers, parents, administrators, and others must know that they have a voice and also be aware that their involvement is not simply an option, but instead, is a valued and extremely critical component for sustainable, student-centered change.
- **Where are we—and where do we want to be?** For change to be more than the “flavor of the month,” a school must figure out the gap between the where we are and where we want to be. That takes leadership. Building the leadership skills of children, adults, and others who support the school is key.
- **Collaboration counts.** Research suggests that working and planning in isolation leads to few or no significant gains. Educators need time that's dedicated to rich collaboration.
- **No add-ons.** Tying changes to the curriculum and to the smooth management of the classroom and school provides a springboard for higher levels of sustained success. If the curriculum is tied in—such as through the lessons in this handbook, starting on page 103—and the school atmosphere improves, the changes are more likely to take hold.
- **Change is hard; celebrate successes.** Team members will be asking themselves, *Who will embrace the change? Who will avoid it? Will students learn more? Who will lead the next stage? How will we know if we're succeeding? Will the change stick?* Frequent, authentic celebrations go a long way toward energizing and encouraging your team.

A sustainable change is in the best interest of the entire school. With Unified Champion Schools, that positive impact will be lasting, life-changing, and well worth all of the hard work.

— Adapted from the research of Dr. James Davis, Program Coordinator, Coastal Carolina University, Conway, SC.



The **form** starting on page 41 makes it easy to assess your **school's progress** toward social inclusion.



# What Is the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Strategy?

## The vision

Since its founding, Special Olympics has been providing quality sports opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities across the globe. Today, Special Olympics serves as a **driving force for social inclusion**. The vision is to create a world where “people of all abilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, are welcomed in their communities and join with others to learn, work, compete, and play with the same rights and opportunities as others.”

## Youth are a central focus

Special Olympics views students as “powerful and effective advocates...open-minded to new things” and as having “the courage of conviction to step up and defend their beliefs. For this reason, [Special Olympics] find(s) that young people are some of the most powerful and effective advocates on behalf of acceptance.”



## An inclusion strategy for schools

Since 2008, Special Olympics has been actively engaged in the development and implementation of a school-based strategy supported and endorsed by the US Office of Special Education Programs at the US Department of Education. The **Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools strategy** is aimed at promoting social inclusion through intentionally planned and implemented activities to produce system-wide change.

With sports as the foundation, the Unified Champion Schools program has three main components: **Unified Sports, inclusive youth leadership, and whole school engagement**. Unified Champion Schools share a climate of acceptance where students with disabilities feel welcome and are routinely included in, and feel a part of, all school activities, opportunities, and functions.



## Unified Champion Schools promote a school climate that

- is free from bullying and exclusion.
- combats stereotypes and negative attitudes.
- eliminates hurtful language.
- promotes healthy activity and interactions.
- is welcoming and values the engagement of all students.

## Youth as leaders

The Unified Champion School strategy is not designed so that teachers and other adults create programs and students participate. Instead, students with and without intellectual disabilities become architects of lasting change and community building; adults serve as *allies to youth*, rather than *managers of youth*. An important part of the Unified Champion Schools strategy is that goals and work are shared by youth and adults. In elementary schools, adults help students develop age-appropriate leadership skills that lay a strong foundation for middle and high school years when students take an even more active role in planning and implementing unified sports and events.



## Within Unified Champion Schools

Here's what you'll see:

- Students with and without intellectual disabilities have opportunities for physical activity and for building positive peer relationships across the school setting—in hallways and lunchrooms, in classrooms and gymnasiums, and on athletic fields.
- Students with and without intellectual disabilities have opportunities to interact with their peers and to learn and grow.

At its core, the Unified Champion Schools strategy is not just about including students with disabilities, but **unifying all students**; moving from adult-led programming to **student-led mobilization and action**; and transitioning from sports as recreation to **sports as a catalyst for social inclusion** and change.

More information on how schools can promote social inclusion can be found at <https://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/>.



## How Does the Unified Champion Schools Strategy Support School Initiatives?

The Unified Champion Schools strategy enhances a number of key educational goals, benefitting all students, not just those with special needs. The initiatives found below are frequently a part of school improvement plans designed to increase student success. **If you are already focusing on any of these initiatives, becoming a Unified Champion School will enhance your existing emphasis.**

### Provide a positive school climate free of bullying.

Context matters. A school climate can foster or undermine students' development, learning, and achievement. Students perform better academically, socially, and emotionally when they are meaningfully engaged, contributing members of a school with a positive and caring school climate. The Unified Champion Schools program creates **safe and accepting school climates** for all students, providing a clear path to eliminating negative behaviors such as teasing and bullying and building **positive, caring, authentic relationships** among students with and without disabilities.

### Promote a culture of strong engagement.

Students who are highly engaged in school feel connected. They know they are **valued contributors** to the school community. They are more motivated to attend school, participate in class and school activities, have stronger academic achievement, and are less likely to engage in negative behavior such as bullying.

The Unified Champion Schools strives to engage **all youth as leaders**, not just the high-achievers and the "doers." **Atypical leaders**, such as students who are introverts, students with intellectual disabilities, or students who are at risk for poor academic performance, have many opportunities to develop leadership skills. These experiences boost their self-esteem and increase their engagement in the school community.

### Maximize academic achievement and develop 21st century skills.

The positive, socially inclusive environment evident in Unified Champion Schools contributes to strong or improved academic achievement. In addition to students forming a foundation of core skills, students have experiences that develop competencies critical for 21st century learning, such as **communication** and **collaboration** skills, **creativity**, and **critical thinking**. As diverse students interact in socially inclusive learning activities, they develop the foundation for effective leadership skills.





## Support the physical health of all students.

Regular physical activity doesn't just improve a student's overall physical health. Additional benefits include increased concentration and problem solving, which can lead to better academic performance, self-esteem, and social skills such as teamwork. Unified Champion Schools promote physical health and fitness by providing a variety of **Unified Sports and fitness** activities.

## Advance the social-emotional development of all students.

Social-emotional skills influence a student's connectedness to school, classroom behavior, and academic achievement. Students with poor social-emotional skills become less connected to school as they move from elementary to middle to high school. This negatively affects their school performance, behavior, and health. The Unified Champion Schools strategy enhances social-emotional development through sports and games that foster cooperation and teamwork as well as through a variety of socially inclusive activities. The strategy increases students' key competencies of social-emotional learning, including **self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, self-management skills, and decision-making skills**.



## Cultivate partnerships with parents and the community.

Without a doubt, the role that families play in a child's education is critical. When families partner with schools, students attend school more regularly, perform better academically, and demonstrate more positive attitudes and behaviors.<sup>1,2</sup> When other community members lend their support as well, the entire community sees the benefits. The Unified Champion Schools strategy **engages families and other community members** at all stages—from planning and implementing activities to celebrating students' successes.

Unified Champion Schools perform better than other schools on most school climate measures such as respect for **diversity, social and civic learning, school connectedness, and engagement**.



## The Numbers Tell the Story: Why Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Are Needed

4

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools strategy promotes a socially inclusive school climate where acceptance, respect, and human dignity for all students are the norm. Within Unified Champion Schools, students without disabilities hold more positive attitudes toward their peers with intellectual disabilities, are more tolerant, and realize the impact their words and actions have on others. As the facts and figures below show, a Unified Champion School equitably supports students with and without intellectual disabilities and fosters meaningful opportunities for every student to contribute to the school community.

2

Unified Champion Schools at the middle school and high school level report the following<sup>3</sup>:

- 92% observed heightened **awareness** of students with intellectual disabilities.
- 91% observed a more **socially inclusive environment** as a result of the strategy.
- 90% observed increased opportunities for students with and without disabilities to **work together**.
- 86% observed an increase of students with intellectual disabilities **participating** in school activities.
- 84% observed **reduced bullying**, teasing, and offensive language.

7

Students learn **pro-social skills** in Unified Champion Schools:

- 69% learned about standing up for something.
- 67% learned about working with others.
- 59% learned about helping others.
- 57% learned about becoming more patient.
- 50% learned about identifying qualities they have in common with students of different abilities.

3

“My son has improved his social skills.... His world-view of ‘this is what I can do and this is how I have to do it’ has been expanded beyond the limitations of the educational program that he’s in. He looks for ways that he can meet society at his level and in his way, rather than hiding from his peers who are not special needs. There’s nothing good enough that I can say about this program. It’s a necessity.”

—Parent



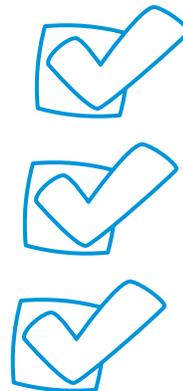
## How Does the Special Olympics Unified Champion School Strategy Work?

The strategy is designed to be woven into the fabric of the school, enhancing current efforts and providing rich opportunities that lead to meaningful change in creating a socially inclusive school that engages and supports all learners. What a Unified Champion School looks like varies from school to school; but the basic building blocks remain the same.

### Three main components

A Unified Champion School implements three components, each of which is intertwined with the others in a cohesive effort to increase social inclusion throughout the school. Each component enhances the strategy in different ways, so it is important for all three components to be implemented. The components are:

- **Whole School Engagement:** Awareness and education activities that promote respect and social inclusion and reach the majority of students and school staff members.
- **Inclusive Youth Leadership:** Encouraging students with and without intellectual disabilities to take on leading roles as they work with adults in the school to create a socially inclusive environment through sports and other activities.
- **Unified Sports:** Opportunities for students with and without intellectual disabilities to participate in a variety of fitness, play, and sports activities alongside one another.

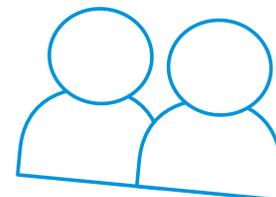


### Inclusion tip

In working toward becoming a socially inclusive school, it is important for the entire school community to remember that **all students are peers first**. The subgroups to which they belong are secondary to their status as peers.



# Tips for Implementing the Unified Champion Schools Strategy



## Facilitate relationships.

The interactions between students and the authentic friendships they form are at the crux of the Unified Champion Schools strategy. Young people can make a difference through friendships. However, the structure and schedule of many schools provide limited opportunities for authentic relationships between students with and without intellectual disabilities to flourish. The Unified strategy changes that. It creates situations in which relationships can grow.

## Encourage everyone to contribute.

By offering a combination of Unified Sports and youth leadership options, as well as a variety of activities that engage students throughout the school, the entire school community has a part in building a socially inclusive climate. At Unified Champion Schools that climate is one free from teasing, bullying, and exclusion.

## Fit the program to your school environment.

Every school has different resources, visions, and challenges. That's why the implementation of the Unified Champion Schools strategy varies by school. The strategy is most effective when a team of leaders strategically moves the school community forward in creating intentional opportunities for social inclusion.

## Invite input from staff at different grade levels and students of different ages and abilities.

An inclusive Unified Champion School Leadership Team helps ensure that efforts are thoughtfully planned and implemented to support the school's initiatives and priorities. Because students and adults experience the school from different perspectives, both groups must be engaged to create lasting change.

## Provide opportunities across the three program components.

Creating a socially inclusive school makes social inclusion a way of life. Inclusive opportunities should incorporate a combination of the three program components and multiple opportunities for all students to be engaged in a variety of ways.





## Examples of how the program components work together

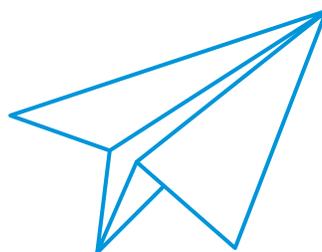
The PE teacher provides an inclusive obstacle course experience.

- **Youth leadership:** Students with and without intellectual disabilities help design and set up the course.
- **Unified sports:** Students improve their physical fitness as they complete the course.

The school holds a respect campaign that includes class and schoolwide activities.

- **Youth leadership:** Each teacher tasks his or her students with treating others the same way each student himself would like to be treated. Students are responsible for brainstorming ideas, deciding on a plan, and carrying out the plan.
- **Whole school engagement:** The respect campaign is launched with a schoolwide rally featuring a motivational speaker. All students and staff members sign a banner with a pledge to use words of respect.

*(Find more ideas for planning a respect campaign on pages 71–73).*





# How Does It All Come Together?

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools has identified seven **key characteristics** of effective socially inclusive learning environments.

Characteristics are divided into two categories: core processes and operational processes. They're both important. Core processes address the unique aspects of creating a socially inclusive environment. They are:

- establishing a vibrant role for inclusive youth leadership
- creating and sustaining relationships between students with and without intellectual disabilities, focusing on abilities and not perceived limitations
- unifying programming to eliminate separation
- fostering school and community collaborations to promote inclusive environments.

Operational processes are tasks that any organization seeking a sustainable change would need to address. They are:

- communication
- professional development
- continuous improvement.

*Element 1*

**Inclusive Youth Leadership**

*Element 2*

**Creating & Sustaining Relationships**

*Element 3*

**Unifying Programming**

*Element 4*

**School/Community Collaborations**

**Core Processes**

**Operational Processes**

*Element 5*

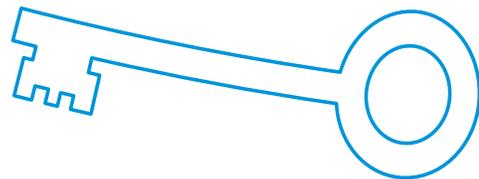
**Communication**

*Element 6*

**Professional Development**

*Element 7*

**Continuous Improvement**





This chart shows how these characteristics intertwine with the three components of Unified Champion Schools and might be demonstrated in schools. Many activities can reinforce more than one component of the strategy.

Examples of the Components of Socially Inclusive Schools	UCS Components
<b>Youth leadership</b> Students set up sports skill stations and lead warm-up drills for Young Athletes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive Youth Leadership</li> <li>• Unified Sports</li> </ul>
Students write invitations or design flyers to be sent home for a Unified Sports Day.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive Youth Leadership</li> <li>• Whole School Engagement</li> </ul>
<b>Creating and sustaining relationships</b> Students with and without intellectual disabilities are paired during recess to enjoy noncompetitive games together as Recess Buddies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unified Sports</li> </ul>
The school hosts an inclusive Family Bowling Night.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unified Sports</li> <li>• Whole School Engagement</li> </ul>
<b>Unifying programming</b> All students have the opportunity to participate in inclusive school clubs, such as a gardening club, student council, an art club, and the school safety patrol.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive Youth Leadership</li> <li>• Whole School Engagement</li> </ul>
Students participate in Unified Physical Education classes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unified Sports</li> </ul>
<b>School and community collaborations</b> Students with and without intellectual disabilities complete community service projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole School Engagement</li> <li>• Inclusive Youth Leadership</li> </ul>
An adult Special Olympics athlete speaks at a schoolwide rally for a Respect Campaign.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole School Engagement</li> </ul>
<b>Communication</b> The school principal gives weekly morning announcements that promote respect, responsibility, and social inclusion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole School Engagement</li> </ul>
The Unified Champion Schools leadership team reaches out to students and parents for feedback about a recent Unified Sports Day.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole School Engagement</li> <li>• Inclusive Youth Leadership</li> <li>• Unified Sports</li> </ul>
<b>Professional development</b> Instruction about inclusive teaching strategies is provided for all teaching staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole School Engagement</li> </ul>
Coaches for Special Olympics Unified Sports complete an online training course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unified Sports</li> </ul>
<b>Continuous improvement</b> Teachers provide opportunities for students to reflect on socially inclusive activities and how their participation has influenced them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive Youth Leadership</li> </ul>
The Unified Champion Schools leadership team completes an end-of-the-year assessment and sets goals for the next school year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole School Engagement</li> <li>• Inclusive Youth Leadership</li> </ul>



## What Do Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Look Like?

### Example #1:

Harbison West Elementary School  
Columbia, SC



### Read All About It: Totally Awesome!

Plenty of awesome things are happening at Harbison West Elementary School in Columbia, SC—including a program called Project Au-Some that's brimming with **inclusive youth leadership** and **whole school engagement**. Students and staff advocate for kindness, empathy, acceptance, and community, all while having lots of fun.



Project Au-Some and the UCS program began in 2015. Preschool teacher Beth Reilly visited fifth-grade teacher Brenna Lamprey's class to read *My Brother Charlie*, a story about a girl and her twin brother, Charlie, who has autism. That launched a discussion about the autism spectrum, behaviors that students with autism might show, and how students with and without autism are similar. Ms. Reilly explained that some of the students in her class had autism.

Once students understood more about autism, the fifth graders were invited to volunteer to spend time with Ms. Reilly's preschoolers. "To our amazement, every fifth grader volunteered their time," Ms. Lamprey recalls. Since so many wanted to help, students were chosen randomly and visited the younger class in groups of three. During the visits they participated in all kinds of teacher-led activities, from shaving cream writing to an obstacle course to pumpkin carving. After each meeting Ms. Reilly led discussions. On Fridays the groups shared pictures and talked about their week.

The experiences didn't stop there. The fifth grade Big Buddies began researching various physical and intellectual disabilities and what it meant to be advocates for their preschool pals. Soon the fifth-grade volunteers were working with Ms. Reilly to brainstorm ideas and help plan lessons.

"The opportunity to provide the Big Buddies with leadership roles, while learning about empathy and acceptance, became contagious throughout our school family," Ms. Reilly says. The students shared their learning with peers and community members during Exceptional Students' Week and through a project-based learning unit on disabilities. They also used their skills in planning a preschool field day. What a great finale to an amazing school year!



## Growing, growing

As the next school year started, Project Au-Some grew even more; 23 classes were paired as buddies. Literature continued to play a major role in helping students learn to relate to one another. “Books are helping students to gain a deeper understanding of individual differences and giving them an opportunity to connect their feelings about characters to real-world situations,” Ms. Lamprey says. “Big Buddies are continuing to learn and grow through these literary and real-world experiences.”

Project Au-Some spread to two of the middle schools in the district as Club Au-Some. Club members visit the elementary school once a semester to lead activities they’ve planned. Big Buddies are getting involved outside of school as well as supporting the South Carolina Autism Society’s Strides for Autism walk.

Harbison West also has unified physical education classes. Students get to play, learn, and have fun together in their PE classes all year long.

There’s no other word for it: the UCS program at Harbison West is totally Au-Some!



## Books, books, books

Here are some of the titles students have read.

*Since We’re Friends*, by Celeste Shally

This story of two boys—one of whom is a student with autism—shows the authentic ways they make their friendship work.

*All My Stripes*, by Shaina Rudolph and Danielle Royer

Zane worries that his “autistic stripe” is all that anyone sees.

*My Brother Charlie*, by Holly Robinson Peete and Ryan Elizabeth Peete

This book is about a boy with autism, as told by his twin sister.

*The Paper Bag Princess*, by Robert Munsch

This unusual princess is supposed to marry the prince, but first she has to save him from a dragon.

*The Most Magnificent Thing*, by Ashley Spires

A little girl demonstrates perseverance and imagination as she tries over and over to make something magnificent.

*Going Places*, by Peter and Paul Reynolds

A go-cart contest inspires imagination and teamwork.

*Confessions of a Former Bully*, by Trudy Ludwig

Best for upper elementary and middle school students, this book is written from the perspective of an 11-year-old girl as a consequence for her acts of bullying.

*Sky Color*, by Peter H. Reynolds

After observing the world carefully from different points of view, Marisol is inspired to expand her thinking about the color of the sky.

*Oliver*, by Birgitta Sif

A little boy uses his imagination for companionship, with his toys as his companions, until one day he meets a new friend.

*Wonder*, by R.J. Palacio

This book and movie are about a boy born with facial differences that have kept him from attending school. Now his challenge is convincing his new classmates that he is just like them.



# What Do Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Look Like?

## Example #2:

Hinkle Creek Elementary School  
Noblesville, IN

## Inclusion Revolution: Disability Awareness Week

At Hinkle Creek Elementary School in Noblesville, Indiana, Disability Awareness Week is held in May, and it's bursting with opportunities for **inclusive youth leadership, whole school engagement, and Unified Sports**. Located north of Indianapolis, Hinkle Creek is one of ten schools in the Noblesville Schools district. Hinkle Creek has 961 students; just over 17% of the school's student population has been identified as having a disability.

Disability Awareness Week programs teach the importance of including all students. Inclusive student leaders design events and make morning announcements about the events to get the entire school motivated and involved.

Throughout the week students and staff read books, watch videos, and discuss topics such as the many ways we are the same and different. They also talk about sharing our gifts, saying hello to people we don't know, and the Special Olympics R-Word Campaign.

During the week staff members and student leaders help fundraise for Special Olympics Indiana's Unified programs plus the school district and county Special Olympics programs. In 2016 the district raised over \$12,000.



## "JUST SAY HI"



## INCLUSION REVOLUTION



## Let the games begin

Hinkle Creek Elementary began UCS in 2016 with more than 50 students with and without disabilities participating. For 12 weeks both general education and special education students practiced during PE classes and recess before participating in a district-wide Unified Game Day.

The Unified Game Day had lots of pageantry and excitement. A staff member jogged the torch into the high school stadium with a Hinkle Creek student. Students participated in running, throwing, jumping, and wheelchair events.

Mark Booth, Noblesville Schools Director of Special Education, says that parents often told him that they didn't know what to expect at the event—but that they were thrilled with the outcome. "They tell me that this was one of the most amazing things that their child has ever been involved in," Mr. Booth says. "There are tears of joy that they've found something that their kids can be a part of."

The entire week of activities makes Hinkle Creek a special place for both general and special education students. Through their involvement in the UCS program, Hinkle Creek Elementary has become a UCS Banner School.

### A Glance at Hinkle Creek Events

#### Daily themes:

**Just Say "Hi" Monday**—Say "Hi" to someone that you do not know.

**Inclusionary Tuesday**—Create posters or write essays about the benefits of being inclusive.

**Accessibility Wednesday**—Think of a way to help a friend.

**Universal Thursday**—Partner up with someone different to complete an assignment.

**Unified Friday**—Make plans to be partners with a new friend on projects in the future.

There's even an **Inclusionary Oath** that students take:

I am proud to be an inclusive [list your school mascot here].

I will EMPOWER everyone to join in and participate.

I will ENGAGE with all learners.

I will INSPIRE everyone to join our inclusion revolution.

A strong [list your school mascot here] community includes everyone!



Watch a **video** of the Noblesville Schools Unified Game Day at  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyUZSilt79U&t=16s>.



## What Do Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Look Like?

### Example #3:

Meadow Brook Elementary School  
Forest Hills Public Schools  
Grand Rapids, MI

## Linking Students Makes All the Difference

At Meadow Brook Elementary School, K–4 students have the opportunity to sign up to be LINKS—that is, Loyal, Interested, Nurturing, Kind Students. One hundred and thirty five students participate in LINKS/UCS; each student in the cognitively impaired program has a LINKS partner for each school day, leading to lots of opportunities for **inclusive youth leadership, whole school engagement, and Unified Sports**.

Inclusion occurs throughout each school day, every day. Students from two cognitively impaired classrooms have LINKS partners during classroom inclusion, specials, lunch, recess, field trips; through bus buddies; and more. When possible, students keep these partners throughout the years to allow friendships to deepen and bonds to grow.

### Making plans

Each year the UCS program at Meadow Brook has a new theme, colors, t-shirt design, and wristbands. Students wear their t-shirts to events and Youth Activation Committee meetings throughout the year. Every student, teacher, and staff member that participates in UCS/LINKS in the school gets a shirt. (See the list of some of Meadow Brook’s unique and inspiring themes.)

Several times each month the inclusive Youth Activation Committee meets during lunch to brainstorm and plan for UCS activities. Afterwards, students participate in inclusive matches of bocce ball. Matches take place in two or three areas of the school, and staff are assigned to each. There are two to three special bocce ball events each school year against other schools or adult teams including school district staff and school board members, which increases awareness throughout the community. Each year when the ISD maintenance staff visits to play bocce ball, they make the day extra memorable by bringing medals made out of cookies for the students. Field day and the school carnival feature the school’s inclusive sport of bocce ball as well.





## Plans in action

Service learning projects are inclusive as well. Groups of students work together to decorate brown bags for the Kids Food Basket, which provides meals and food for families in need. The cheerful, hand-decorated bags always add a nice touch and help show extra care and concern for students and families.

Fixing up the school's courtyard is another popular inclusive activity. The courtyard is enclosed in the center of the school building. There's always something to do; students weed, rake, spread mulch, and plant so everyone can enjoy a beautiful space.

Each year there's a school-wide campaign focused on Respect for All, which happens around Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Students see large displays in the hallways and attend an assembly (families are invited too). As a follow-up, one year students worked together to create a display with a huge fish mural and the theme "We may all be different; in this school we swim together." Other ideas have included having each student decorate a foot, symbolizing "taking a stand/taking a step" toward respect for all; signing a slip of paper (confetti) to create a mural encouraging kids to "throw kindness around like confetti" creating unique glasses surrounding the book *Wonder* and the theme "We Are All Wonders," with the tagline "Look with kindness and you will always find Wonder."

At the end of each school year, Meadow Brook holds an awards ceremony for students and families. All participants and guests view a slide show. Participants (students and staff) receive a medal and a certificate and enjoy cake to celebrate the year.

"Being a part of the Unified Champion Schools Family has transformed our school," says Ginny Grit, LMSW, School Social Worker at Meadow Brook. "We pride ourselves on being a school that is welcoming and inclusive, embraces abilities, respects all, and celebrates differences."

### Meadow Brook's recent UCS program themes:

- Be a HERO (Helping Everyone Respect Others)
- Not all superheroes wear capes
- Change doesn't happen from the sidelines
- TEAM (Together Everyone Achieves More)





## What Do Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Look Like?

### Example #4:

Griggs Road Elementary  
Clover, SC



### Full of Heart: Welcome to Griggs Road Elementary

Kids are kids; everyone is unique and everyone has differences. That's what students and teachers say and what you'll see again and again at Griggs Road Elementary. **Whole school engagement and Unified Sports** are a centerpiece at this Unified Champion School.

Special needs students in Ms. Phoebe O'Toole's class pair up with second, third, and fourth-grade general education buddies. Lasting friendships between buddies are easy to see throughout the school. "Students will come by to ask their buddy, 'How did your project go?' or 'How is your reading coming along? Sit by me at lunch and tell me about it,'" Ms. O'Toole says. "My students are so much more independent now that they have buddies around the school to help them."

Over the years teachers have learned that the student who makes a good buddy isn't always the child you'd expect. Students who are natural leaders or academic standouts sometimes make great buddies, but other times the best buddies are kids who "just have the heart for it," Ms. O'Toole says. Students who are quiet leaders sometimes make the biggest difference.

The staff is just as supportive. The custodial staff, the principal, the office staff, and, of course, teachers and parents all work together to help the whole student population grow.



## A peek inside

The week starts with Magic Monday at Griggs Road Elementary. Each week the whole school gathers in the multipurpose room, and everyone is recognized for achievements, setting the tone for a positive and successful week ahead.

Staff works to provide maximum opportunities for inclusion. Physical education and other specials, lunch, and field trips are all combined. Many science and social studies classes are inclusive. Special needs students push themselves to achieve in math and language arts, too, so they can participate in inclusive classes there as well. The difference even shows on standardized tests; students try harder and are scoring well, Ms. O'Toole reports.

The staff includes books such as *My Best Friend Will*, *The Sneetches*, and *Wonder* to get students thinking about what makes each person special. They also use activities from the Get Into It lessons and work to help students understand what it means to have autism, cognitive impairments, and physical impairments.



There's time for physical activity, too. Sports events and practices take place after school. Students practice bowling on a Unified team and other students serve as Fans in the Stands. In years past the school had a Unified Cheer team as well.

The send-off for students participating in the Special Olympics games is one of the highlights of the year. Ms. O'Toole says, "The whole school lines up, they wave and cheer and make posters. The kids head off to the games feeling very special and ready to succeed." Every day, in so many ways, Griggs Road Elementary is a standout UCS success story.

# Establishing a Leadership Team



Getting Ready



Establishing a Leadership Team



Whole School Engagement



Inclusive Youth Leadership



Unified Sports and Fitness



Special Olympics Resources

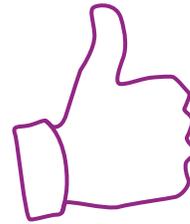


## Why Is a Leadership Team Important?

The first step to becoming a Unified Champion School is to bring together a team to lead the work. The team will be responsible for establishing the vision and overarching goals for the school, coordinating early stages of implementation, and working with leaders of specific events. The team will also monitor the success of the strategy, with an eye toward continuous improvement.

When a leadership team guides implementation of a Unified Champion Schools program, there are several significant positive effects.

- Schools that have a leadership team implement **more robust programming** than those without a leadership team.
- Schools with a leadership team report **more involvement of community members**, an outcome for which all schools strive.
- Leadership teams increase opportunities for general and special education teachers to **work together**.
- The Unified Champion Schools strategy is more likely to be **sustained** from year to year in schools that have a leadership team.



### Elementary schools with a Unified Champion Schools leadership team

- 74% use resources from Special Olympics and other sources to implement the UCS strategy.
- 65% are more likely to implement all three components of the Unified Champion Schools strategy—Inclusive Youth Leadership, Whole School Engagement, and Unified Sports.
- 57% receive funding.
- 44% collaborate with other groups in the school.
- 37% work with other schools.



## Who Should Be on the Leadership Team?

Teams vary in size and composition from school to school. The strongest teams include teachers from all grade levels, other school staff members, an administrator, parents, and students of different ages and abilities.

### Aren't students too young to have leadership roles?

Not at all. Different generations bring unique perspectives and skills to the team. Creating a sustainable, socially inclusive school environment is a goal that adults cannot achieve on their own. Involving students in decisions promotes ownership and develops students' investment in social inclusion. It also provides adults with insight on how to best engage the larger student body. It's especially important to include students with intellectual disabilities to help the team understand the school experience from multiple perspectives, not just the viewpoint of students who are typical school leaders.

### How do students participate on the leadership team?

It varies, but the common characteristic is that students with and without intellectual disabilities have a voice. In some schools, several students attend leadership meetings and offer ideas and feedback. In other schools, because of scheduling issues it's not feasible for students to attend meetings regularly. An adult liaison meets with students at a time that works better with the school schedule. For example, the liaison invites younger students' ideas, seeks their input, and gathers feedback after socially inclusive events, while older students who are more independent or have more flexible schedules attend meetings. The goal is for students to be fully involved in the process.

### Recruiting team members

Strive to include diverse members, including

- students with and without intellectual disabilities.
- students from different social and academic groups.
- students who are not typically thought of as leaders.
- teachers (both general and special education).
- school guidance counselor.
- parents of students with and without intellectual disabilities.
- a school administrator.



**Words of wisdom** often shared by older youth leaders involved in Special Olympics: "Nothing about us without us."



## How to Start a Leadership Team

Setting clear goals and deciding how the team will work together are critical first steps in building a strong team. Once that groundwork is achieved, it's easier to move forward with specific plans. Use the overview below and the agendas on page 31–39 to shape your plans throughout the year. Be sure to check out the tips on page 58, too.



### 1. Recruit team members.

Consider recruiting a teacher from each grade level or a teacher who represents grades K–2 and a teacher who represents grades 3–5. Other staff members such as special education teachers, guidance counselors, and PE teachers also bring different and valued perspectives to the team. Ideally, the team would include an administrator, parents, and students too.

The team's meeting schedule might influence who will be able to join. Some parents might not be able to attend meetings during the school day, for example, but would love to be involved. Nothing can replace the impact of having parents at the meeting, so explore various meeting times and locations. If there's no way to work it out, email, FaceTime, Google Hangouts, and virtual whiteboards might be avenues for adults who have schedule conflicts to contribute ideas and offer input.

### 2. Clarify the team's role and establish meeting procedures.

Make sure all team members understand why the team was created, why it is diverse and includes both students and adults, and what each member can contribute. Set agreed-upon rules and procedures to ensure that the team models the kind of inclusion that it is promoting throughout the school.

### 3. Find your starting point.

Before the team can plan how to implement the Unified Champion Schools strategy, it is important to consider how socially inclusive the school is currently. This will not only help the team prioritize goals and first steps, but will also serve as a baseline for measuring progress. Gathering relevant data is important for all school initiatives. An easy-to-use assessment is provided starting on page 41. This assessment is based on the Characteristics of Socially Inclusive Schools study, developed in collaboration with the National School Climate Center.

### 4. Set goals. Create a plan and take action.

Use the results of the assessment in setting realistic short- and long-term goals. Consider how the three components of Unified Champion Schools (Whole School Engagement, Youth Leadership, and Unified Sports) will help the school work toward the goals. Keep in mind that students get the most out of the program when they are involved in multiple ways. Develop action plans to carry out activities designed to meet the team's goals.

### 5. Monitor progress.

At the end of the school year, complete the same assessment that the team completed earlier and compare the results. Make notes about changes to make, new things to try, and ways to grow the program the next year.



The leadership teams of most Unified Champion Schools meet **at least once a month**.

See the next page for suggested **monthly meeting agendas**. Customize these to fit your team's needs.



## September Agenda

### Leadership Team

*The topics below are suggestions. Tailor the agenda to fit your team's needs, or divide the agenda and hold several meetings throughout the month.*

- Make any needed introductions among team members.
- Designate a notetaker.
- Discuss the purpose of the team.
- Discuss the value of having a diverse team that includes students and adults. Use questions such as these to guide discussion.
  - How will students' perspectives help us achieve our goals?
  - How will promoting leadership skills among students affect our work? How will it affect students?
- Designate an adult team member as a liaison with students if students are not able to attend a particular meeting.
- Establish meeting rules and procedures. Consider even small details such as whether there will be snacks at the meetings.
- Set a meeting schedule.
- Request an update from the team member who is the liaison with the state Special Olympics office. Encourage him or her to connect with an office representative regularly to determine Unified Champion Schools paperwork that needs to be completed, resources that are available, and events the school can be involved in.
- Consider incorporating messages that promote acceptance and social inclusion into morning announcements. (See pages 65–69 for weekly messages.) The messages can be used right away and get the team off to a strong start in working toward its goals.
- Complete the assessment form starting on page 41 to gather baseline data on the school in regard to social inclusion. Discuss the results and revisit the assessment throughout the year.
- Look ahead to the yearlong calendar and start to pencil in special events such as National Bullying Prevention Month (October), World Kindness Day (November 13), Inclusive Schools Week (first full week in December), Spread the Word Day (March), and the next state, national, and world games. The day celebrating Special Olympics founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver is on July 20, but year-round schools can mark the event.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Student Leader Tasks

- To gauge awareness in the school, ask students to poll their classmates to find out whether they have heard of Special Olympics. Have the students report their findings during the next meeting.
- Arrange for students to help give morning announcements that include the messages of acceptance and inclusion on pages 65–69.



# October Agenda

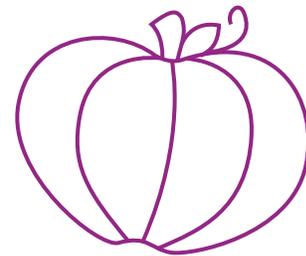
## Leadership Team

*The topics below are suggestions. Tailor the agenda to fit your team's needs, or divide the agenda and hold several meetings throughout the month.*

- Review the notes from the last meeting.
- Wrap up any further discussion of the school assessment. Ask student team members to report on the results of the poll they conducted on Special Olympics.
- Set measurable and practical goals for the year. (See the goal-setting form on page 57.)
- Ask the team's Special Olympics state office liaison to provide updates on programming, training, and deadlines.
- Determine whether the school or district has Special Olympics athletes. If so, plan to connect with the coach(es) to find dates and times for upcoming events that the school can support.
- Identify any special whole school activities that are scheduled for November, such as a Thanksgiving Day play. Discuss ways to make the activities socially inclusive if they are not already.
- Plan a small whole school engagement activity for November, such as a hallway display that all students contribute to or a Mix-It-Up Day. See page 70 for details and additional ideas. Fully involve students in discussions and decisions.
- Discuss Unified Sports options. Designate a chairperson to lead the school's inclusive sports efforts.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Student Leader Tasks

- Ask students to survey classmates to find out what Unified Sports options are most popular. Have a committee member or classroom teacher show them how to create a bar graph to report the results.





## November Agenda

### Leadership Team

*The topics below are suggestions. Tailor the agenda to fit your team's needs, or divide the agenda and hold several meetings throughout the month.*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Review the notes from the last meeting.  | <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss starting a Unified Club, such as a Friend Club or a Respect Club, that brings students with and without intellectual disabilities together. If the team is interested, designate an adult club leader. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss the whole-school engagement activity planned for this month. Work out any last-minute details.   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Get updates from the Special Olympics state office liaison and the Unified Sports chairperson. Create or revise action plans as needed.  | <input type="checkbox"/> Identify current whole-school clubs such as the school safety patrol and whole-school activities such as skate night. Discuss ways to make them more socially inclusive.                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Identify any special whole-school activities that are scheduled before winter break, such as a Winter Concert. Discuss ways to make them socially inclusive if they are not already. | <input type="checkbox"/> _____  |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> _____  |

### Student Leader Tasks

- If plans for a Unified Club are made, have students make posters promoting the club and display them around the school.
- Encourage each student to invite at least one other student to join the Unified Club.
- After the whole school engagement activity is held, have students survey their peers to get feedback on the activity. Designate time to share the findings with the leadership team.





## December Agenda

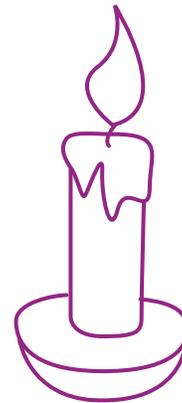
### Leadership Team

*The topics below are suggestions. Tailor the agenda to fit your team's needs, or divide the agenda and hold several meetings throughout the month.*

- Review the notes from the last meeting.
- Discuss last month's whole school engagement activity. What went well? What changes are recommended?
- Revisit the goals that were set at the beginning of the year. Is the team on track? Are any changes needed? What is working well? Where are more resources needed?
- Discuss any state Special Olympics programs with winter fundraisers, such as the Polar Plunge® event. See what opportunities are available. If the group is interested, develop an action plan.
- Discuss progress on making current clubs and schoolwide activities more socially inclusive.
- Get updates from the Special Olympics state office liaison and the Unified Sports chairperson. Create or revise action plans as needed.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Student Leader Tasks

- Ask students to share the feedback they received from peers about November's whole school engagement activity.
- If students are involved in a Unified Club, have them update the Leadership Team.





# January Agenda

## Leadership Team

*The topics below are suggestions. Tailor the agenda to fit your team's needs, or divide the agenda and hold several meetings throughout the month.*

- Review the notes from the last meeting.
- Get updates from the Special Olympics state office liaison and the Unified Sports chairperson. Create or revise action plans as needed.
- Start planning a Respect Campaign. Many schools plan a campaign to coincide with the Spread the Word annual day of awareness (held yearly the first Wednesday in March). Consider making it a week-long campaign and include a Special Needs Awareness Day. See the ideas and checklist on pages 71–73.
  - If the team decides not to include a Special Needs Awareness Day or the play “Looking for Leaders,” consider scheduling them for other months since they can be stand-alone events.
  - Designate one or more adult leaders to head up the planning.
  - Contact the state Special Olympics office for resources.
- Discuss ways to promote student leadership in the classroom and during specials such as PE and art. See the ideas on page 70. Determine how to share the suggestions with other staff members. Explore funding options for adding books that promote leadership qualities to the school library. Possibilities to consider include the parent-teacher organization and fundraising. Use the Goal-Setting Form on page 57 to develop an action plan.
- Pause at this midpoint in the year. Think back to why your Leadership Team was formed in the first place. Celebrate your progress and share stories of students whose actions have changed or who are more included in school events. Share any feedback from parents and faculty and reaffirm your commitment to an inclusive environment.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Student Leader Tasks

- Invite students to tell the group which inclusive activities held so far this year were especially enjoyable for them and why.
- If the Respect Campaign will include theme days, give students a list of possible themes and have them survey their class to determine the most popular themes. Or have students meet with their classes to brainstorm possible themes.
- Once the team works out the main details of the Respect Campaign, have students create posters and display them throughout the school.



## February Agenda

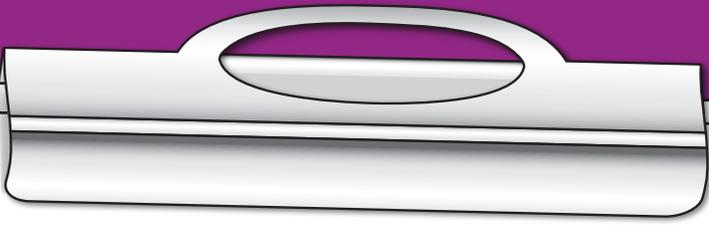
### Leadership Team

*The topics below are suggestions. Tailor the agenda to fit your team's needs, or divide the agenda and hold several meetings throughout the month.*

- Review the notes from the last meeting.
- Get updates from the Special Olympics state office liaison and the Unified Sports chairperson. Create or revise action plans as needed.
- Review plans for next month's Respect Campaign. Update plans and seek additional resources as needed. Fully involve students in discussions and decisions.
- Review plans for any schoolwide events for Valentine's Day or Heart Month. Discuss ways to make them socially inclusive if they are not already.
- Make a plan to share the mini lessons on pages 103–123 with classroom teachers. Encourage them to use the lessons prior to the Respect Campaign to build students' understanding of individual differences, respect and acceptance, and friendships.
- Ask the school liaison with the state Special Olympics office to find out whether there any local elementary competitions planned for the spring. If there are, consider having students support the athletes by being Fans in the Stands. See pages 74–75 for additional information.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Student Leader Tasks

- Have students brainstorm aspects of the upcoming Respect Campaign that are important to include on a flyer to send home to all students' families. What key terms will encourage students and families to participate? Invite students to design the flyer.
- Ask each student to report to his or her class by briefly telling students what they can look forward to during the Respect Campaign. If desired, assign students to visit and update classes that do not have representatives on the team.

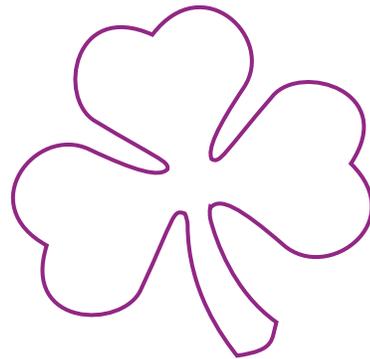


## March Agenda

### Leadership Team

*The topics below are suggestions. Tailor the agenda to fit your team's needs, or divide the agenda and hold several meetings throughout the month.*

- Review the notes from the last meeting.
- Get updates from the Special Olympics state office liaison and the Unified Sports chairperson. Create or revise action plans as needed.
- Review plans for the Respect Campaign. Update plans and seek additional resources as needed. Fully involve students in discussions and decisions.
- Start planning a year-end whole school engagement activity, such as a Unified Sports Day. Designate a chairperson and create an action plan. (See the form on page 145.) If your school typically holds a year-end Field Day, discuss how Unified Sports Day could complement or replace this event. Also, discuss ways to make the event socially inclusive if it is not already. Fully involve students in discussions and decisions.
- Discuss starting an inclusive outdoor club for spring, such as a Unified Walking Club, and create an action plan.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



### Student Leader Tasks

- Ask students to poll classmates to gauge their interest in different outdoor club options. Designate time at the next meeting to report results and ideas.
- Invite students to share what they think worked well during previous year-end sports days and what they'd like to change.



## April Agenda

### Leadership Team

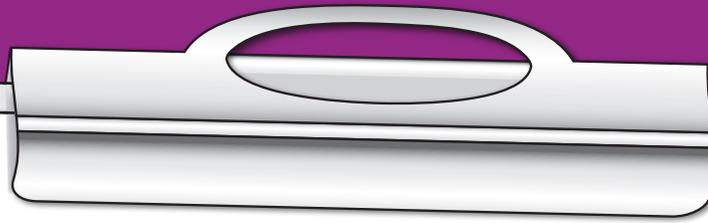
*The topics below are suggestions. Tailor the agenda to fit your team's needs, or divide the agenda and hold several meetings throughout the month.*

- Review the notes from the last meeting.
- Get updates from the Special Olympics state office liaison and the Unified Sports chairperson. Create or revise action plans as needed.
- Discuss feedback on the Respect Campaign. For future reference, note things that worked well and ideas for improvement.
- Ask the school liaison with the state Special Olympics office to share the highlights of the Respect Campaign with the state office.
- Follow up on planning for the Unified Sports Day and/or Field Day. Revise the action plan as needed. Fully involve students in discussions and decisions.
- Identify any special whole-school activities that are scheduled for the end of the year, such as grade-level picnics or field trips. Discuss ways to make them socially inclusive if they are not already. Fully involve students in discussions and decisions.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Student Leader Tasks

- Have students survey their classmates and find out what they liked most about the Respect Campaign. Have students compile suggestions to implement next year and share these with the leadership team.
- Ask each student to report to his or her class by briefly telling students about the upcoming whole school engagement activity for May. If desired, assign students to visit and update classes that do not have representatives on the team.





## May Agenda

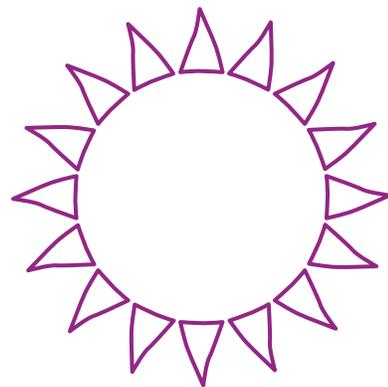
### Leadership Team

*The topics below are suggestions. Tailor the agenda to fit your team's needs, or divide the agenda and hold several meetings throughout the month.*

- Review the notes from the last meeting.
- Complete the assessment starting on page 41 to gather year-end data on the school in regard to social inclusion. Compare the results with the assessment completed at the beginning of the year.
- Get updates from the Special Olympics state office liaison and the Unified Sports chairperson. Create or revise action plans as needed.
- Identify the school's progress toward social inclusion. Celebrate the successes. Set goals for the next school year. Plan your beginning-of-the-year agenda now, while everything is fresh in your mind.
- Discuss feedback on the Unified Sports Day. To help with next year's planning, note what worked well and ideas for improvement.
- Ask the school liaison to the state Special Olympics office to share success stories from the Unified Sports Day.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Student Leader Tasks

- Invite students to tell the team what they most enjoyed on Unified Sports Day and why. Then, ask them what they would do differently next year.
- Ask each student to identify his or her favorite whole school engagement activity from the year and explain why it was a hit.





## Putting Your School on the Path to Becoming More Socially Inclusive

Gauge how socially inclusive your school is with this helpful Social Inclusion Assessment. Here's what to do:

- Have **each member** of your leadership team complete the assessment on their own. Put checkmarks in the boxes to indicate which students have impact on the topics listed and where you see evidence of a unified approach. If a category is not applicable to your school (for example, your school does not have a student council), skip it.
- Get the perspective of **student members** of your leadership team; you may find that your school looks different to students, and this perspective can be very informative. Using the student version of the assessment on pages 51–55, read and discuss each question and possible answers with students or give them a copy of the assessment to fill out. As appropriate, consider having students complete one or two sections at a time.
- To determine the **total score** for each section, count the number of checkmarks, recognizing that not every category or criteria will be applicable to every school. **The score isn't a grade; it's a way to gauge where your school is and what your school can achieve.**
- Review the assessment** at a team meeting early in the year. Look at the boxes that have checkmarks and the ones that don't. Use the discussion questions on page 56 to guide you.
- As you review the assessment, take a moment to **congratulate** yourselves on what you're doing well, **determine** what changes you can make immediately to do even better, and **discuss** improvements you can make in the future. Set a **target date** for those improvements and include those dates on a master calendar and on the agenda for future team meetings. Use the Goal-Setting Form on page 57.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## YOUTH LEADERSHIP

1. Which students influence our school's actions and decisions? Check the boxes that apply and make notes about how students are involved. Skip categories that aren't applicable.

	<b>General Education</b>	<b>Special Education</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Communications (school newspaper, announcements, bulletin boards, posters, etc.)			
Membership on student council/ student government			
Class discussions			
Selecting or leading events/ assemblies/special events			
Clubs			
Other (specify)			
Total for each column			



**Adult leadership  
 team member  
 version**

2. Many schools teach social-emotional skills. If the topics below are being taught, do you see evidence of changes in students' behavior and attitude? Check the boxes that apply and make notes about your concerns and observations. Skip topics that aren't applicable.

	General Education		Special Education		Notes
	Taught	Evidence of change	Taught	Evidence of change	
Decision making					
Conflict resolution					
Communication					
Emotional regulation/ self-management					
Empathy					
Self-awareness					
Social awareness					
Other (specify)					
Total for each column					

<b>Total Score for Youth Leadership</b>	
---	--



## CREATING AND SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

3. Where do general education and special education students have the opportunity to interact with each other? Check the boxes that apply and make notes about your concerns and observations. Skip categories that aren't applicable.

		<b>Notes</b>
	Hallways	
	Cafeteria	
	Library/media center	
	Enrichment classes/specials (physical education, art, music, etc.)	
	Core academic classes	
	Recess	
	Sports teams	
	Extracurricular clubs/service learning opportunities	
	Other (specify)	
	Total	



**Adult leadership  
 team member  
 version**

4. Which members of the school community are represented on this leadership committee or on other committees or groups working to include special education students in school programs or activities? Check the boxes that apply and make notes about your concerns and observations. Skip categories that aren't applicable.

		<b>Notes</b>
	Special education teachers	
	General education teachers	
	Administrators, support staff and other school personnel	
	Special education students	
	General education students	
	Parents	
	PTA members, parent representatives on a school-based leadership team	
	Community members	
	Other (specify)	
	Total	

<b>Total Score for Creating and Sustaining Relationships</b>	
--	--



**Adult leadership  
 team member  
 version**

## CELEBRATING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

5. For which clubs and sports does our school celebrate accomplishments? (Celebrations might include announcements, photos in newsletters and on the website, recognition at assemblies and awards programs, etc.) Check the boxes that apply and make notes about your concerns and observations. Skip categories that aren't applicable.

		Notes
	Traditional sports teams	
	Unified Sports (Young Athletes, Unified Sports teams)	
	Academic clubs	
	Service clubs	
	Fitness clubs	
	Social/fun clubs	
	Other (specify)	
	Total	

6. Does our school have a student recognition program similar to Student of the Week? Who is eligible? Who is recognized? Check the boxes that apply and make notes about your concerns and observations. (Skip this question if your school does not have these programs.)

	Eligible	Recognized	Notes
Special education students			
General education students			
Total			

<b>Total Score for Celebrating Accomplishments</b>	
--	--



## COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

7. Which community organizations collaborate with our school on inclusive events and activities? Check the boxes that apply and make notes about your results and observations. Skip categories that are not applicable.

		Notes
	Sports organizations (community recreational department lends equipment for school teams; members of local sports teams help coach Young Athletes; etc.)	
	Social service organizations (social workers teach students conflict resolution; service organizations invite students to help create a community-wide health campaign; etc.)	
	Media organizations (journalists work with students on the school newspaper; local newspaper features school events or accomplishments; etc.)	
	Public safety organizations (police or firefighters make a presentation about safety during a school assembly, etc.)	
	Health services organizations (nutritionist gives a presentation about healthy eating; doctor or nurse presents sessions on health, wellness, and movement; etc.)	
	Local business leaders (business leaders donate time, funding, or materials to support inclusive school projects; local grocery store participates in healthy eating project; etc.)	
	Religious organizations (church/synagogue/mosque help organize school canned food drive for a food pantry, etc.)	
	Other (specify)	
	Total	

<b>Total Score for Community Collaboration</b>	
--	--



## COMMUNICATION

8. Do educators discuss the importance of using inclusive language? (For example, avoiding us/ them language, not verbally grouping others by special needs such as “those special ed kids,” not using hurtful terms, etc.) Check the boxes that apply and make notes about your results and observations. Skip categories that are not applicable.

		<b>Notes</b>
	Yes, in school-wide events and posters	
	Yes, in the curriculum	
	Yes, as part of classroom discussion	
	Yes, with parents	
	Yes, with the broader community	
	Total	



**Adult leadership  
 team member  
 version**

9. Who at our school stops others from using language that is hurtful toward special education students (e.g., terms such as: retard[ed], “those kids,” slow class)? Check the boxes that apply and make notes about your results and observations. Skip categories that are not applicable.

		<b>Notes</b>
	Administrators	
	Teachers	
	School staff	
	Other school personnel who are not on site (school bus drivers, etc.)	
	Students	
	Parents	
	Community members	
	Total	

<b>Total Score for Communication</b>	
--------------------------------------	--



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

10. Does our school offer professional development about addressing the needs of the special education student population and the use of inclusive teaching strategies? Who receives this information? Check the boxes that apply and make notes about your results and observations. Skip categories that are not applicable.

		Notes
	Special education teachers	
	General education teachers	
	Administrators, support staff, and other school personnel	
	Parents	
	PTA members, parent representatives on a school-based leadership team	
	Community	
	Total	

11. When do special education and general education teachers have opportunities to collaborate? Check the boxes that apply and make notes about your results and observations. Skip categories that are not applicable.

		Notes
	Informal discussions	
	Professional development sessions	
	Regular planning time	
	Team teaching	
	Faculty meetings	
	School-wide events	
	Other	
	Total	



<b>Total Score for Professional Development</b>	
---	--

You may want to discuss each section of the assessment separately to allow the team to capture the most ideas. Fully involve students in the discussion.  
Use the Discussion Questions on page 56.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**YOUTH LEADERSHIP**

1. Which students influence our school’s actions and decisions? If you think that a group of students has influence, check the box under that heading. Add notes about what you’ve noticed or experienced. Skip categories that don’t apply.

	General Education	Special Education	Notes	
			Noticed	Experienced
Communications (school newspaper, announcements, bulletin boards, posters, etc.)				
Membership on student council/ student government				
Class discussions				
Selecting or leading events/ assemblies/special events				
Clubs				
Other (specify)				
Total for each column				

<b>Total Score for Youth Leadership</b>	
---	--

Note: Adult Leadership Team members complete one additional question in this section.



**Student leadership  
 team member  
 version**

## CREATING AND SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

2. Where do general education and special education students have the opportunity to interact with each other? Check the boxes on the left that apply and make notes in the space on the right about what you've noticed or experienced. Skip categories that don't apply.

		<u>Notes</u>	
		<b>Noticed</b>	<b>Experienced</b>
	Hallways		
	Cafeteria		
	Library/media center		
	Enrichment classes/specials (physical education, art, music, etc.)		
	Core academic classes		
	Recess		
	Sports teams		
	Extracurricular clubs/service learning opportunities		
	Other (specify)		
	Total		

<b>Total Score for Creating and Sustaining Relationships</b>	
--	--

Note: Adult Leadership Team members complete one additional question in this section.



## CELEBRATING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

3. For which clubs and sports does our school celebrate accomplishments? (Celebrations might include announcements, photos in newsletters and on the website, recognition at assemblies and awards programs, etc.) Check the boxes on the left that apply and make notes in the space on the right about what you've noticed or experienced. Skip categories that don't apply.

		<u>Notes</u>	
		<b>Noticed</b>	<b>Experienced</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Traditional sports teams		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Unified Sports (Young Athletes, Unified Sports teams)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Academic clubs		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Service clubs		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fitness clubs		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Social/fun clubs		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (specify)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Total		

<b>Total Score for Celebrating Accomplishments</b>	
--	--

Note: Adult Leadership Team members complete one additional question in this section.



## COMMUNICATION

4. Do teachers and school staff discuss the importance of not using hurtful terms, not using special needs to group or describe students, and not talking about groups of students in terms of “us” and “them”? Check the boxes on the left that apply and make notes in the space on the right about what you’ve noticed or experienced. Skip categories that don’t apply.

		<u>Notes</u>	
		<b>Noticed</b>	<b>Experienced</b>
	Yes, in school-wide events and posters		
	Yes, in the curriculum		
	Yes, as part of classroom discussion		
	Total		



**Student leadership  
 team member  
 version**

5. Who at our school stops others from using language that is hurtful to specific groups of students? Check the boxes on the left that apply and make notes in the space on the right about what you've noticed or experienced. Skip categories that don't apply.

		<b>Notes</b>	
		<b>Noticed</b>	<b>Experienced</b>
	Administrators		
	Teachers		
	School staff		
	Other school personnel who are not on site (school bus drivers, etc.)		
	Students		
	Parents		
	Community members		
	Total		

<b>Total Score for Communication</b>	
--------------------------------------	--

Note: Adult Leadership Team members complete one additional category and two additional questions in this section.

Be sure to offer your input as the Leadership Team reviews the Discussion Questions on page 56.

## Social Inclusion Assessments: Discussion Questions

Questions	Notes
<p><input type="checkbox"/> What is your school doing well? Challenge yourself to consider if the changes, attitudes, and actions are substantive or just on the surface. Are all students truly included? Is your team in agreement? Compare perspectives.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> What improvements are you able to make right away? What resources will you need to do so?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> What improvements will you make in the future? What resources will you need?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> What will be your first step? What is a feasible date for taking additional steps? Include those dates on a master calendar and on the agenda for future team meetings.</p>	

**SMART goals are**  
**S**—Specific  
**M**—Measurable  
**A**—Action-oriented  
**R**—Realistic  
**T**—Time-bound

## Leadership Team

# Goal-Setting Form

Goal	Major Tasks	Date of Completion	People Responsible
1.			
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		
1.			
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		



## Establishing a Leadership Team: Tips for Success

- **Recruit students in various ways:**
  - Seek out students who may not usually be in leadership roles to ensure that the team has different perspectives.
  - Ask teachers to recommend students for the team.
  - Work with para-educators and assistants to reach prospective students. These staff members often have an especially close relationship with their students and can have a strong influence on them.
- **Be creative with the schedule:** Make every effort to schedule meetings so students can attend. If it's not possible to work out a meeting time that fits with students' schedules, have an adult team member meet with them at a different time. The adult team member can then relay their input and feedback to the larger team.
- **Share the work:** Designate a chairperson for Unified Sports activities and a different chairperson for nonsports activities. It's also helpful to designate one person to be the main contact with the state Special Olympics office.
- **Get support from the school's administration:** Gaining support from the school principal and other administrators increases the likelihood that Unified activities will continue from year to year.
- **Keep an eye toward growth:** Don't be discouraged if the team is small at first. Once the school has a Unified event or two, interest is sure to grow. A Respect Campaign (see pages 71–73) is especially motivating.
- **Connect with other local UCS schools:** Unified Champion Schools in the same district can draw from each other as resources. Having local schools involved in the same Unified Sports is especially helpful when planning interscholastic competitions.
- **Plan multiple events:** Schools in which there are several socially inclusive activities are more likely to increase and maintain awareness than schools that have just a one-time event.
- **Maintain the team:** If a team member leaves at the end of the year, be proactive in recruiting a new member. Otherwise, the team might dwindle over time.
- **Be sure to celebrate:** Launching a Unified Champion Schools program is rewarding—but be sure to celebrate along the way. Sharing a special snack and viewing a slide show of photos taken during UCS events goes a long way toward teamwork and camaraderie.





**Informational  
handout—copy  
and share**

# Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Strategy

The Unified Champion Schools strategy is about unifying all students—with and without disabilities—using sports as a catalyst for social inclusion and attitude and behavioral change. Through a variety of Unified sport, classroom, and school experiences, Unified Champion Schools promote a school climate that

- is free from bullying and exclusion
- combats stereotypes and negative attitudes
- eliminates hurtful language
- promotes healthy activity and interactions
- is welcoming and values the engagement of all students.

## Three main components

**Unified Sports** provide opportunities for students with and without intellectual disabilities to participate in a variety of fitness and sports activities alongside one another.

**Inclusive Youth Leadership** encourages students with and without intellectual disabilities to take on leadership roles as they work with adults in the school to create a socially inclusive environment through sports and other activities.

**Whole School Engagement** experiences are awareness and education activities that promote respect and social inclusion and reach the majority of students and school staff members.

## Enhancement of school initiatives

The Unified Champion Schools strategy supports goals that many schools already have in place:

- Advance the social-emotional development of all students.
- Provide a positive school climate free of bullying.
- Promote a culture of high engagement.
- Maximize academic achievement and develop 21st century skills.
- Support the physical health of all students.
- Cultivate partnerships with parents and the community.

## Proven results

Unified Champion Schools report the following:

- 95% observed increased opportunities for students with and without disabilities to **work together**.
- 92% observed an increase of students with intellectual disabilities **participating** in school activities.
- 91% observed a more **socially inclusive environment** as a result of the program.
- 88% observed **reduced bullying**, teasing, and offensive language.

**Become a Unified Champion School. Find more information at**  
<https://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/>



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools**

# Whole School Engagement



Getting Ready



Establishing a Leadership Team



Whole School Engagement



Inclusive Youth Leadership



Unified Sports and Fitness



Special Olympics Resources



# Whole School Engagement: Welcoming for All



Whole school engagement opportunities are awareness and educational activities that promote social inclusion and reach the majority of students and school staff members.

## What does whole school engagement look like?

- a schoolwide **Respect Campaign**
- **Spread the Word campaign** that encourages people to pledge to stop using hurtful words
- a **poster contest** promoting a welcoming school climate
- **Unified recess** in which students with and without disabilities engage in physical activities together
- a **Fan in the Stands** program to make posters, hold pep rallies, and attend Special Olympics events to clap and cheer
- **mini lessons** related to social inclusion, such as the ones on pages 103–123

## Why is it important?

Whole school engagement

- teaches staff and students to embrace diversity.
- recognizes, supports, and honors the contributions of all students.
- expands ownership of the Unified Champion Schools program beyond a passionate few.
- enhances and develops key social and emotional skills.
- creates a climate where students, staff members, and parents feel safe and valued.

## Far-reaching influence

Whole school engagement activities not only reach the greatest number of students, but they also have the most direct impact on how students feel about social inclusion. A school climate that promotes respect for everyone can positively impact how students think and act at school, at home, and in the community.

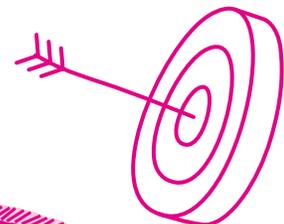
Here's what a recent survey of older students revealed:

- 99% of UCS staff feel the UCS program is **valuable to the school** as a whole.
- 93% of students exposed to Unified Champion Schools and campaigns such as Spread the Word have **improved their behavior and attitudes** toward people with intellectual differences.
- 86% of Unified Champion School staff credit the program with **reducing bullying and teasing** in their school.
- 48% of UCS staff believe there are more opportunities for general and special educators to **work together**.





# What Are the Goals of Whole School Engagement?



- **Positive interactions:** Students with and without intellectual disabilities will interact socially and develop mutually beneficial friendships.
- **Respectful attitudes:** All students will have a greater understanding of each other and will hold more positive attitudes toward each other.
- **Engagement:** The school will be a community of acceptance where students with and without intellectual disabilities feel welcome and contribute meaningfully to all school activities.
- **Connections:** The school will be an inviting environment where students, staff members, and community members feel connected. It models inclusion as a community norm.



## Principle of meaningful involvement

A socially inclusive school ensures that students with and without intellectual disabilities are active and valued participants in the school community.

## Indicators of meaningful involvement

- **Opportunities:** All students have opportunities to use their unique skills and qualities to contribute to the success of the school, and all skills are valued.
- **Intentional involvement:** Students with and without intellectual disabilities are purposefully engaged in whole school activities in formal and informal settings.
- **Intergenerational collaboration:** Students and adults work together to promote a socially inclusive school climate by expecting, nurturing, and supporting acceptance and respect.



## Valued relationships

It's hard for anyone to develop a lasting friendship through just a few interactions. One or two socially inclusive experiences isn't enough. Students with and without intellectual disabilities are more likely to develop authentic friendships when they have **frequent opportunities** to interact.



# Get Started with Whole School Engagement

How schools implement whole school engagement varies, but a common first step is to have a planning meeting with your school's Unified Leadership Team. It's an ideal opportunity to discuss topics such as those below. Once you agree on one or more whole-school activities, use the action plan form on page 102 to organize the details.



## Topics to discuss

- How do we engage students in determining the whole school activity?
- What types of whole school activities would work well at our school?
- What small activity would be great as a starting point?
- What whole school activities are already planned? How can they be revised to increase social inclusion?
- What types of whole school activities do students with and without intellectual disabilities enjoy?
- Are there any grade-level teams that might be interested in planning and leading a whole school activity?
- Who will be the adult leaders for the activities we choose?

## Need ideas? Check out these suggestions.

- Morning announcements (pages 65–69)
- Ideas for promoting social inclusion during various parts of the school schedule (page 70)
- Respect Campaign (pages 71–72)
- Fans in the Stands (page 74)
- Social media posts and school newsletter articles (pages 76–91)
- “Looking for Leaders” Play (pages 92–98)
- Mini lessons that promote social and emotional development (pages 103–123)
- Unified bowling night for students and their families
- Schoolwide service project such as a mitten drive during the winter months

### Did you know?

Sesame Street has a Muppet character named Julia who has **autism**. Learn more about Julia, view relevant videos for kids and parents, and find other resources here:

<http://autism.sesamestreet.org/>



## Examples of Whole School Engagement Activities

There is no limit to how you can involve the entire school community in socially inclusive awareness activities. Opportunities range from giving morning announcements with anti-bullying messages, to providing Unified Physical Education classes, to promoting respect with a weeklong campaign. Check out the wide variety of ideas that follow to find socially inclusive ideas that are a great fit for your school.





## Morning Announcements

Incorporate these weekly messages into morning announcements to regularly promote a socially inclusive school climate. Classroom teachers can follow up by guiding a group discussion about each announcement and having students write or draw a response in their journals.



### September: Friendship and Acceptance

**Week 1:** I'm excited because this month we're going to learn about friendship. Did you know that smiling at someone is a great way to start a friendship? A smile shows that you are friendly, and it can also make someone feel good. Try it this week. Let's make some new friends!

**Week 2:** Listen carefully to this quote: "The only way to have a friend is to be one." That's from a poet named Ralph Waldo Emerson. This week I'd like you to think about ways you can be a good friend. Try these ideas and pay attention to the results.

**Week 3:** September 18 is National Respect Day. When you show respect to someone, you act in a way that shows you care about them and accept them for who they are. This week I challenge you to try extra hard to treat others the way you would like to be treated.

**Week 4:** Did you know that people don't need to be alike to be friends? Students can be in different classes, look different, and act differently. Just think how boring it would be if everyone were alike!



### October: Say "No" to Bullying

**Week 1:** October is National Bullying Prevention Month. A bully is mean to another person. Bullying is never okay. If you see someone being bullied, tell an adult right away.

**Week 2:** Have you ever felt left out at recess or during lunch? It's not a good feeling. This week I challenge you to reach out and be a friend to someone who is left out. Remember, smiling is an easy way to help someone feel better!

**Week 3:** This quote makes me think about bullying. Listen carefully and see if you understand why: "Wrong is wrong even if everyone else is doing it. Right is right even if no one is doing it." (St. Augustine)

**Week 4:** If everyone treated others with kindness, there would be no more bullying. This week, I challenge you to do something kind each day.



# Morning Announcements

## November: Perseverance



**Week 1:** Have you ever heard the word *perseverance*? It's a long word that means trying your best to accomplish something even if it is difficult. This week think about times you needed to work extra hard to reach a goal. If you encounter a challenge, use *perseverance* to get through it.

**Week 2:** Some people need perseverance to solve math problems, or to read, or to write a great story. Some people learn fast and other people need more time. Remember, everyone can learn and succeed!

**Week 3:** Last week we talked about using perseverance to complete schoolwork. Did you know that athletes need perseverance, too? Even famous athletes need to work really hard to get better or stronger or faster. Showing perseverance helps in many aspects of your life.

**Week 4:** The harder you work for something, the greater you'll feel when you achieve it. Think of a time you accomplished something that was difficult. How did you feel? Remember that feeling the next time you're faced with a challenge.



## December: Leadership



**Week 1:** All students can be leaders. Being a leader means setting a good example, helping others, and doing the right thing. This week keep an eye out for students who set good examples. Think about things you could do to be a positive role model.

**Week 2:** Sometimes leaders help people by doing small things that make a big difference. For example, a student leader might invite a classmate who is all alone to join a game at recess. Look for ways to help others this week.

**Week 3:** When someone says they look up to a person, that means that they admire him or her. This week think about someone you look up to and why. What's one great trait that they have? Is that a trait you might have, too?

**Week 4:** Listen to this saying: "Be somebody who makes everybody feel like a somebody." That quote is from the YouTube sensation known as Kid President. Think about a time someone made you feel good about yourself. Wouldn't it be great if you could make someone else feel the same way? Try it this week.





# Morning Announcements

## January: Individuality



**Week 1:** There is no one at school, in our city, or even in the world just like you. This week think about what makes you unique, such as the way you dress, your favorite foods, and what you like to do on the weekends. You are unique!

**Week 2:** Piglet from *Winnie the Pooh* by A.A. Milne is quoted as saying, "The things that make me different are the things that make me ME." Think about this quote and what it means to you.

**Week 3:** Do you like basketball? How about kickball? Reading? Computer games? The activities you enjoy make you who you are. Students' different interests make our school stronger and more diverse!

**Week 4:** This week, say something positive to someone about a trait that makes them unique. Maybe they're always smiling, they're very helpful, or they're fabulous at jumping rope. Let them know that you value their uniqueness!



## February: The Power of Teamwork



**Week 1:** There's a big football game coming up. (Add information about the Super Bowl teams.) Now's a perfect time to talk about being a fan. Some people show support for their favorite team by wearing team colors, waving a pennant, or cheering for them. Think about ways you can show support for students who participate in sports.

**Week 2:** Athletes on a team have different roles, but they work together toward the same goal. Think about your favorite sports team. How does teamwork make them stronger?

**Week 3:** The letters T, E, A, M spell the word *team*, but they also stand for "Together everyone achieves more." Think about how we can apply that saying to our school. What can you do to make our school a true team?

**Week 4:** Teamwork isn't just for sports; it's for classrooms too. Sometimes students team up to do a project or everyone pitches in to meet a goal. See how many things you can think of that are easier or more fun to do as a team.





# Morning Announcements

## March: The Power of Words

**Week 1:** Did you know that words are powerful? Some words make people feel good. Even short phrases such as “Great job!” and “Way to go!” can make a huge difference to someone. Think about a time someone’s words made you smile.

**Week 2:** Here’s a great thought for the week: “It’s nice to be important, but it’s more important to be nice.” That quote is from John Templeton, a man who donated money to help others. Look for ways that you can follow this advice.

**Week 3:** Some words, such as mean nicknames, are extremely harmful. The hurt they cause can last forever. Remind people that teasing isn’t funny, and it isn’t kind. Be sure to use people’s real names unless they tell you a nickname that they like better.

**Week 4:** This week’s challenge is to use only positive words. Don’t say any put-downs. I’m sure you and the people around you will have a happier week!



## April: Encouragement

**Week 1:** Do you know what *encouragement* means? It means giving someone support or hope. Picture someone running in a race who is so tired that he doesn’t think he can keep running. The people on the sidelines call out, “You can do it!” That’s encouragement. This week look for encouragement in your classroom, in PE, and other places at school.

**Week 2:** People encourage others in many ways. They might give a thumbs-up, smile, or say, “Keep trying; you’re almost there!” See how many ways you can think of to encourage someone.

**Week 3:** Here’s a challenge for you: This week demonstrate an encouraging attitude. Keep an eye out for anyone who seems discouraged. Be ready to say or do something that will cheer him or her up and inspire them.

**Week 4:** This quote makes me think of encouragement. Listen carefully and see if you can tell why. “Never get tired of doing little things for others; sometimes those little things occupy the biggest parts of their hearts.” What does that tell you about encouragement?





# Morning Announcements

## May: Taking Action



**Week 1:** This month we're going to talk about making a difference. That means doing something that helps people. Remember this quote from former President John F. Kennedy: "One person can make a difference, and everyone should try."

**Week 2:** In 1962, a woman named Eunice Kennedy Shriver did something that made a big difference. She held a summer day camp in her backyard for people with special needs. That led to the start of Special Olympics, now a worldwide program!

**Week 3:** Before athletes participate in Special Olympics, they say this oath: "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me brave in the attempt." This week think about why athletes and others should be brave.

**Week 4:** Eunice Kennedy Shriver is honored each year on July 20. It's a day for people to celebrate the work she did to make a difference for so many people. Remember Mrs. Shriver as you think about ways you can make a difference.





## Inclusion Throughout the Day

Social inclusion doesn't happen with just one event; it needs to be a regular part of the school experience. Use these suggestions to promote social inclusion during various parts of the schedule.

### Arrival

- **Safety Patrol:** Recruit older students with and without intellectual disabilities for the school safety patrol. Have pairs of students carry out their assigned responsibilities.
- **Welcoming Club:** Station a pair of students at the entryway and have them welcome students, parents, and visitors each morning with smiles and friendly greetings. It's sure to start everyone's day on a positive note!

### Lunch

- **Mix-It-Up Day:** Randomly assign every student a table to sit at during lunch. This will provide students with a great opportunity to meet new people and start friendships with students they might not otherwise get to know.
- **Lunch Bunch Book Club:** Every week or two, meet with a group of interested students. As students eat their lunches, read and discuss books with positive messages about topics such as friendship, perseverance, and diversity. See the list on page 71 for a few great books as a starting place.

### Recess

- **Unified Recess:** Work with your school to set up Unified Recess in which students with and without intellectual disabilities use their recess time to engage in physical activities together. It's more fun when everyone plays! Your local Special Olympics office and your state's Special Olympics website have information to help you get started.
- **Recess Buddies:** Pair students with and without intellectual disabilities. Provide playground balls, jump ropes, and noncompetitive games to ensure the buddies have ample choices.

### Specials

- **Unified Physical Education:** Work with your school to get a Unified PE class in which students with and without intellectual disabilities play and train together. Your local Special Olympics office and your state's Special Olympics website have information to help you get started.
- **Schoolwide Display:** In art class, have all the students in the school contribute to the same hallway display. For example, you might display student-decorated fish cutouts with an inspirational title such as "We are all swimming together toward a great year!"
- **Being a Friend Means:** In art class, invite students to create a poster or a T-shirt design expressing what it means to be a good friend. Students can write a song about the topic in music class.

### Dismissal

- **Great Goodbyes:** Give each student a high-five as he or she leaves school for the day. Older students will enjoy coming up with a good-bye signal or a handshake that they can exchange with classmates and friends from other classes when they see them in the hall.
- **Dismissal Buddies:** What better way to end the day than with a friend? Pair students with and without intellectual disabilities who are headed to the same dismissal location in the school.





## Respect Campaign

A respect campaign is one of the most popular and effective Unified Champion Schools activities for elementary schools. The campaign is designed to promote acceptance and respect for students of all academic abilities.

Some schools have a weeklong awareness campaign, while others declare one day Respect Day. Activities vary from school to school, but are often planned to coincide with the Spread the Word annual day of awareness (held yearly the first Wednesday in March). Check out the ideas below and use the checklist on page 73 to plan your school's event.



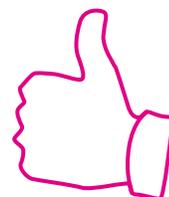
- **We're alike but different days:** Designate a different theme for each day of the school week, just as you might for a spirit week. For example, you might have a "Dare to Be Different Day" and invite students to wear silly accessories or outfits, a "Unity Day" on which students wear their teacher's favorite color, and "Literature Lovers Day" when students dress like a character from one of the books listed below. Each day, point out how students are different but also have traits in common.
- **Lessons from books:** Share books about respecting individuality, such as the ones below. Guide students to discuss what each book teaches them.
  - *It's Okay to Be Different* by Todd Parr
  - *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes
  - *Spaghetti in a Hot Dog Bun* by Maria Dismondy
  - *Spoon* by Amy Krouse Rosenthal
  - "The Sneetches" from *The Sneetches and Other Stories* by Dr. Seuss
- **Special Needs Awareness Day:** Events for the day might include activities such as visiting with therapy dogs and their owners or trainers, learning about sign language and braille, listening to a Special Olympics adult athlete tell about his experiences, and watching kid-friendly videos about living with disabilities. Classroom teachers might also read aloud books about children with special needs such as *My Best Friend Will* by Jamie Lowell and Tara Tuchel, a photo-illustrated book about an 11-year-old girl and her friend who has autism.





## Respect Campaign

- **Rally:** Have a schoolwide assembly to generate enthusiasm for promoting a respectful school climate. Consider incorporating elements like these:
  - a motivational speaker such as a Special Olympics athlete.
  - a pledge for staff and students to use respectful words and actions.
  - students performing a song that celebrates individuality.
  - a student performance of the play “Looking for Leaders” on pages 92–98.
- **Banner:** Check with your state’s Special Olympics office to get a campaign banner. Ask all students and staff members to sign the banner and pledge to use words of respect. Display the banner in a prominent school location. Create a smaller version that the “class of the week” can display outside their classroom.
- **Displays:** Ask each class to come up with a way to showcase the idea that we should treat others the way we want to be treated. Students might create a poster, a bulletin board, or a sign for the classroom door, for example. Invite other staff members, such as the kitchen staff and media specialist, to display those, too. The message will be clear—respect is a schoolwide expectation.
- **Kindness rocks:** Start a schoolwide hide-a-rock project. Invite every student to bring in a small rock and paint a kind word or a cheerful picture on it. Have students hide the rocks around the school or in the community. When someone finds the rock, the painting is sure to brighten his or her day. Search online for tips about tagging the rocks and using social media to enhance the project.



### Inclusion Matters

Instead of a Respect Campaign, some schools choose to implement a Spread the Word campaign. In 2019, Spread the Word to End the Word became Spread the Word, 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 campaign remains committed to empowering leaders to change their communities, schools, and workplaces, now through a call to their peers to take action for inclusion.

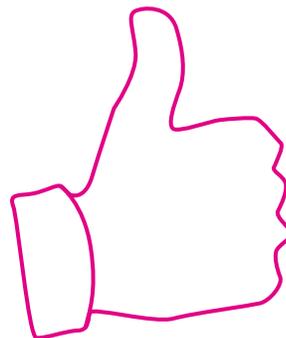
For information and resources on the Spread the Word campaign, go to [www.spreadtheword.global](http://www.spreadtheword.global)



## Checklist for a Respect Campaign

Use the ideas on pages 71–72 and the checklist below to make your school’s Respect Campaign a success.

- 1. Meet with the Unified Champion School Leadership Team to discuss holding a Respect Campaign in your school. Discuss whether to include a Special Needs Awareness Day. Develop a timeline for organizing and planning the event.
- 2. Meet with the principal to discuss plans for the campaign and ensure the administration’s support and approval.
- 3. Check with your state Special Olympics office for resources.
- 4. Communicate with school staff about the purpose of the campaign. Seek their input on activities to include. Invite student input, as appropriate.
- 5. Decide what activities the campaign will include. Clear the activities with the necessary school personnel before releasing the information to others.
- 6. Develop a plan.
  - Schedule the campaign activities.
  - Invite members of the parent-teacher organization to help plan or carry out activities.
  - Create a plan for each task that needs to be completed, including deadlines and a list of who is responsible for carrying out each step.
- 7. Share the details of the event with the school staff. Consider asking staff to assist with communication through announcements, the school website, letters sent home, the school newsletter, and local news media.
- 8. After the event, thank everyone involved in making it a success.





## Fans in the Stands

Fans in the Stands ensure that every athlete and school team has supporting fans who cheer at every game or competition. If your school doesn't have sports teams, promote service learning by starting a Fans in the Stands club for local Special Olympics competitions or Unified Sports teams. Check out the ideas below for sparking enthusiasm and team spirit among students. Then, use the checklist on page 75 for planning.



- **Get students ready:** Many young students do not understand that a sports fan can have a powerful and positive impact on a team. Discuss different ways that fans encourage a team and how words of encouragement influence an athlete's performance. Then, invite students to brainstorm what fans could say in scenarios such as the ones below:
  - A runner slows down and looks like he is ready to give up.
  - A basketball team wins a game.
  - A bocce team loses a game.
  - A soccer player is crying and says that he never wants to play soccer again.
- **Brighten the stands!** Have students make a variety of posters, pennants, and banners. Encourage students to personalize them with the team name or athletes' names. (If athletes' names are included, be sure all athletes you're cheering for are recognized equally.) Keep fans' interest high by providing different poster-making materials from event to event.
- **Give a grand send-off:** If your school has a Special Olympics team, give them a memorable send-off when they depart for a competition. Encourage students to make posters and banners. Line the halls or the school sidewalk and have students cheer for the athletes as they leave the school. Continue the celebration after the event by congratulating participants and commending students for their sportsmanship and school spirit.
- **Make some noise:** Help students come up with a few simple cheers. Cheering together is a fabulous way to build unity, and the athletes love to hear their fans.
- **Dress the part:** Use fabric paint and markers to decorate T-shirts prior to the event or have every fan wear the same color. It's a surefire way for the athletes to notice their fans in the stands.
- **Include family and friends:** At sports events, set out a table with pom-poms, noise-makers, and sign-making materials for family and friends to use in cheering on the athletes.





## Checklist for Fans in the Stands

Fans in the Stands is a campaign designed to tap into core values and powerful attributes, such as unity, acceptance, empowerment, respect, inclusion, dignity, courage, strength, pride, and confidence. It's also fun! Use the ideas on page 74 and the checklist below to get started.

- 1. Meet with the Unified Champion School Leadership Team to discuss implementing Fans in the Stands in your school. Develop a timeline for organizing and planning the event.
- 2. Meet with the principal to discuss plans for Fans in the Stands and to ensure the administration's support and approval.
- 3. Organize individual students, classes, or clubs who are interested in becoming Fans in the Stands. Use the ideas on page 74 or brainstorm your own to teach students about the influence of sports fans and how to be a fan.
- 4. Develop a calendar of all school sporting events, Special Olympic competitions, and Unified Sports events that will take place each semester. Share the calendar with the school parent-teacher organization and invite their support.
- 5. Publicize Fans in the Stands. Communicate with school staff about the dates of events. Ask staff to attend, if possible, and to assist with communication through announcements, the school website and social media, letters sent home, the school newsletter, and local news media.
- 6. Prior to each event, create items such as posters and banners. Determine who will take them to the event and distribute them.





## Social Media Posts

Whether your school uses Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, these suggested social media posts provide an easy way to keep your school community aware of, and involved in, Unified Champion School activities. We've included images sized to use on Facebook; however if you have images of students from your school, be sure to use them.





## September: Friendship and Acceptance



**Week 1:** This month we're focusing on friendship. Share a story with your child about the different ways you've made friends over the years. There's not just one way to do it!



"The only way to have a friend is to be one."  
It's from the poet Ralph Waldo Emerson.

**Week 2:** Share this quote with your child. Has your child heard those words before? What do they mean?



**Week 3:** September 18 is National Respect Day. Discuss the meaning of the word "respect" with your child.



**Week 4:** Show your child this image. Is it good for our friends to be all alike? What's the benefit of having friends who are different from us?

Suggested social media images. Images are available at  
<https://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/>.



## October: Say “No” to Bullying



**Week 1:** October is National Bullying Prevention Month. Remind your child that if he or she witnesses bullying, it’s important to tell an adult right away.



**Week 2:** No one wants to feel lonely or left out. Challenge your child to be a friend to someone who needs a friend.



**Week 3:** Share this quote with your child: “Wrong is wrong even if everyone else is doing it. Right is right even if no one is doing it.” (St. Augustine)



**Week 4:** Ask your child what act of kindness he or she has done today.

Suggested social media images. Images are available at <https://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/>.



## November: Perseverance



**Week 1:** This month we're focusing on perseverance. Share with your child goals that you have for yourself. How will you need to use perseverance to achieve them?



**Week 2:** Some people need perseverance to solve math problems, read, or write a great story. Remind your child that everyone can learn and succeed!



**Week 3:** Even famous athletes need to work really hard to get better or stronger or faster. Encourage your child to use perseverance to meet a goal this week.



**Week 4:** Describe for your child a time you accomplished something that was difficult. How did you feel?

Suggested social media images. Images are available at <https://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/>.



## December: Leadership



**Week 1:** Anyone can be a leader. Being a leader means setting a good example, helping others, and doing the right thing. This week challenge your child to be a leader.



**Week 2:** Sometimes leaders help people by doing small things that make a big difference. Compliment your child when he or she helps others this week.



**Week 3:** Who is someone you admire? Tell your child about him or her.



**Week 4:** Talk with your child about what this quote means.

Suggested social media images. Images are available at <https://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/>.



## January: Individuality



**Week 1:** Share this with your child: There is no one at school, in our city, or even in the world just like him or her. Celebrate what makes each member of your family unique!



**Week 2:** Check out this quote from Piglet in *Winnie the Pooh* by A.A. Milne. Discuss with your child what it means to you.



**Week 3:** Do you like dancing? How about basketball? Doing puzzles? The activities you enjoy are part of what makes you who you are. This month we're talking about how students' different interests make our school stronger and more diverse!



**Week 4:** This week, demonstrate for your child how to say something positive to someone about a trait that makes them unique. Be sure to let your child know that you value his or her uniqueness, too!

Suggested social media images. Images are available at <https://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/>.



## February: The Power of Teamwork



**Week 1:** Who are you cheering for in the Super Bowl? Now's a perfect time to talk with your child about being a good fan. Some people show support for their favorite team by wearing team colors, waving a pennant, or cheering for them. Think about ways you can show support for students who participate in sports.



**Week 2:** Athletes on a team have different roles, but they work together toward the same goal. Talk about a time you were a member of a team. How did teamwork make the group stronger?



**Week 3:** The letters T, E, A, M spell the word "team," but they also stand for "Together everyone achieves more." Talk with your child about how that saying applies to school.



**Week 4:** Teamwork isn't just for sports; it's for classrooms, too. Sometimes students team up to do a project or everyone pitches in to meet a goal. Talk with your child about what it's like to work on a project as a team.

Suggested social media images. Images are available at <https://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/>.



## March: The Power of Words



**Week 1:** Words are powerful. Ask your child about a time when someone's words made him or her smile.



**Week 2:** Here's a great thought for the week. How can you and your family follow this advice?



**Week 3:** Students are learning how powerful words can be. Challenge yourself to watch the words you use, being sure not to use nicknames or terms that could be hurtful.



**Week 4:** Today's challenge is to use only positive words. You can do it!

Suggested social media images. Images are available at <https://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/>.



## April: Encouragement



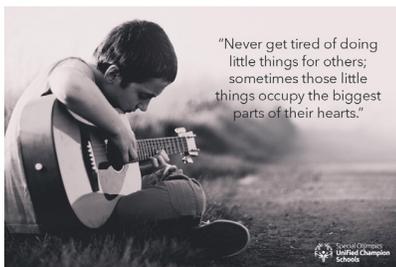
**Week 1:** Who encourages your child? This week take a moment to thank those important people in your child's life.



**Week 2:** Challenge your child to think of different ways to encourage others. Can you think of five different ways? Ten?



**Week 3:** This week demonstrate an encouraging attitude. Make it your goal to try to cheer up anyone who seems discouraged.



**Week 4:** What does this quote tell you about encouragement? Share these words with your child.

Suggested social media images. Images are available at <https://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/>.



## May: Taking Action



**Week 1:** This month we're talking about making a difference. Share these words with your child.



**Week 2:** In 1962, a woman named Eunice Kennedy Shriver did something that made a big difference. She held a summer day camp in her backyard for people with special needs. That led to the start of Special Olympics, now a worldwide program!



**Week 3:** Before athletes participate in Special Olympics, they say this oath: "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me brave in the attempt." This week think about why athletes and others should be brave.



**Week 4:** Eunice Kennedy Shriver is honored each year on July 20. It's a day for people to celebrate the work she did to make a difference for so many people. Remember Mrs. Shriver as you think about ways you can make a difference.

Suggested social media images. Images are available at <https://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/>.



## News to Use

Another way to keep your school community aware of, and involved in, Unified Champion School activities is through brief articles on your school website or in your school newsletter. Use these articles as is or modify them to include specifics from your school; be sure to add important dates about upcoming events as well. Whenever you can, include photos of students participating in activities.





## September: Friendship and Acceptance

As a Special Olympics Unified Champion School, we work to make sure all students have the opportunity to work, play, learn, and grow together. This year during morning announcements, we are sharing weekly messages to reinforce that goal.

This month's theme is friendship. Here are a few ways to start a discussion with your child about what it means to be a friend:

- Share this quote from poet Ralph Waldo Emerson: "The only way to have a friend is to be one." Talk about what that means.
- Share a story with your child about the different ways you've made friends over the years.
- What are the benefits of having friends who have things in common with us? What are the benefits of having friends who are different from us?

**Did you know?** September 18 is National Respect Day.

## October: Say "No" to Bullying

October is National Bullying Prevention Month. As a Special Olympics Unified Champion School, we'll be sharing messages during morning announcements to talk about how bullying hurts us all.

Here are some questions you can ask your child to start a conversation about how we should treat others:

- What act of kindness have you done today? (Share your own examples too!)
- Can you think of someone you know who needs a friend? What could you do to help?
- What do you think this quote means? "Wrong is wrong even if everyone else is doing it. Right is right even if no one is doing it." (St. Augustine)

And finally, remind your child that if he or she witnesses bullying, it's important to tell an adult right away.





## November: Perseverance

This month we're focusing on perseverance. The ability to keep going when things get difficult is a life skill that will serve your child well.

As a Special Olympics Unified Champion School, we want each student to understand that something that is easy for him or her might be difficult for someone else, and visa versa. Through perseverance members of our school community can support one another as we all learn and grow.

Here are a few conversation starters you can use when talking about perseverance with your child:

- Share with your child a story about a time you worked extra hard to reach a goal.
- Ask your child what's easy for him or her. What's more difficult?
- Who helps your child when things are difficult? In turn, who does your child help?
- Does your child have a goal that he or she wants to meet? How could perseverance help?

## December: Leadership

Being a leader doesn't mean your child has to go on to be class president or valedictorian (though he or she might!). As we work to build a socially inclusive school climate, we want students to realize that being a leader means setting a good example, helping others, and doing the right thing. That's what being a Special Olympics Unified Champion School is all about.

Try these thought starters to talk about leadership with your child:

- Sometimes leaders help people by doing small things that make a big difference. Watch for examples of this and point out to your child what you noticed.
- Who is someone you admire? Tell your child about him or her.
- Talk with your child about this quote: "Be somebody who makes everybody feel like a somebody."





## January: Individuality

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools celebrate each child's individuality and strive for a socially inclusive school climate. We want all children to know they are valued.

To support this goal at home, here are some conversation starters you can use to talk about individuality:

- What makes you unique? What makes me unique? What about other members of our family? Is being unique a good thing? What would our family be like if we were all the same?
- Share these wise words: "The things that make me different are the things that make me ME." That's a quote from Piglet in *Winnie the Pooh* by A.A. Milne. What does this mean?
- What activities do you enjoy? In what are you interested? That's part of what makes you who you are.
- Demonstrate for your child how to say something positive to someone about a trait that makes them unique. For example, what might your child say to someone who is full of smiles? Good at making foul shots in basketball? Good at playing the piano?

## February: The Power of Teamwork

Are you planning to watch the Super Bowl? No doubt we'll see lots of examples of excited fans and stories about how the players must work together to win the game.

As a Special Olympics Unified Champion School, we work together and cheer for one another. Take a few minutes this month to talk with your child about teamwork:

- Talk with your child about a time you were a member of a team. How did teamwork make the group stronger? Has your child been on a team? What was the experience like?
- The letters in "team" just happen to stand for "Together everyone achieves more." Talk with your child about how that saying applies to school.
- Have you heard about Fans in the Stands? This program encourages students and families to attend a local Special Olympics event. Does this sound like something our family could do together to have fun and make a difference?





## March: The Power of Words

Sometimes a single phrase can make all the difference in whether someone feels like they're part of the group or an outsider. As a Special Olympics Unified Champion School, we work to use the power of words to create a positive, socially inclusive school climate.

Talk about the power of words with your child. Here are some ways to get started:

- Ask your child about a time when someone's words made him or her smile.
- Share these wise words: "It's nice to be important, but it's more important to be nice." Challenge your child to point out examples he or she sees and hears.
- Challenge your child to use only positive words today. Take the challenge yourself, too.

## April: Encouragement

We all benefit from encouragement. Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools teach students to appreciate and support one another from an early age.

Let your child know that our school is focusing on encouragement this month. Launch a discussion with questions like these:

- Who encourages you?
- How do you encourage others?
- Can you think of five more ways to encourage others?
- Have you ever cheered up someone who seemed discouraged?
- How do small gestures of encouragement add up?





## May: Taking Action

As a Special Olympics Unified Champion School, we're making a difference every day. Let's wrap up the year on a positive note and take a few minutes to think about just how powerful that mission is.

Talk about the power of words with your child. Here are some ways to get started:

- Share these words from President John F. Kennedy, whose sister, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, founded Special Olympics: "One person can make a difference, and everyone should try."
- Eunice Kennedy Shriver held a summer day camp in her backyard for people with special needs, and that led to the start of Special Olympics. Why was this a good idea?
- Before athletes participate in Special Olympics, they say this oath: "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me brave in the attempt." What does that mean? Why might athletes and others need to be brave?

**Did you know?** Eunice Kennedy Shriver is honored each year on July 20.





## Looking for Leaders

An elementary school play  
inspired by “It’s Our School, Too!” by Suzy Messerole and Aamera Siddiqui

### About this play

“Looking for Leaders” is a play designed to promote respect and empathy among all students. It works well as a kickoff event for a Respect Campaign (see pages 71–72). It can also be presented on its own any time of year.

Here are a few things to know:

- The play has six short scenes. The parts are brief, making it ideal for elementary students with and without disabilities to perform.
- Students may perform all parts, or adults may take the narrator and teacher roles.
- The play includes 30 parts, allowing for all students in a class or another large group to participate. As an alternative, a smaller group may present the play, with students performing in more than one scene.
- Consider having older students present the play to younger students or to parents as part of a school meeting or at an assembly.
- The only props that are needed are chairs and a table, but students may create additional props.



## Scene 1: OPENING

*All performers enter the stage one by one. Each performer will say,*

**When you see me, I want you to see...** *and then complete the sentence to describe one of their talents, hobbies, or attributes.*

Examples:

When you see me, I want you to see a friend.

When you see me, I want you to see a nice person.

When you see me, I want you to see that we are alike.

When you see me, I want you to see a soccer player.

When you see me, I want you to see that I'm friendly.

When you see me, I want you to see an artist.

When you see me, I want you to see a happy person.

When you see me, I want you to see a person who shows respect.







## Scene 3: PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASS

### Roles:

PE teacher                      Narrator 1  
Students 1–3                    Narrator 2

*The PE teacher and students enter the stage.*

**PE teacher:** Okay, class. Today we're going to practice kicking. I want you to kick the soccer ball into the goal. Line up behind one another.

**Student 3:** This is going to be fun!

*Students 1–3 line up behind one another in numerical order and face the PE teacher, leaving several feet between them and the teacher. The teacher pantomimes rolling a ball to Student 1. Student 1 runs up and kicks the imaginary ball.*

**Student 2:** Wow! That went right in.

**PE teacher:** Good job.

Student 1 happily gets the imaginary ball and tosses it to the teacher.

**Student 1:** *(Cheering on Student 2)* Come on! Smash it!

**Student 3:** Yeah, smash it!

*The teacher rolls the ball and Student 2 runs up and kicks it.*

**Student 2:** *(Does a fist pump.)* Score!

*Student 2 gets the ball and tosses it to the teacher. The teacher rolls the ball to Student 3. Student 3 walks up and kicks.*

**Student 1:** You missed it!

**Student 2:** It wasn't even close!

*Students 1 and 2 laugh.*

**PE teacher:** Okay, okay. Settle down.

*Narrators 1 and 2 enter the stage.*

**Narrator 1:** Kicking the ball is only one part of being a great soccer player.

**Narrator 2:** Another part is being a good teammate. A good teammate doesn't tease other players.

**Narrator 1:** A good teammate encourages all players even if they don't score.







## Scene 5: THE SCHOOL CAFETERIA

### Roles:

Students 1–3 (Student 1 is male.)

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

*Students 1–3 enter the stage. They walk behind one another to an imaginary cafeteria window. Student 1 takes an imaginary tray, walks over to a table with three chairs, and sits down. Students 2 and 3 stand at the window.*

**Student 1:** Yum! Meatloaf and green beans!

*Student 1 pantomimes eating his food. Students 2 and 3 start walking toward the table with their lunch trays. They stop when they notice Student 1 sitting there.*

**Student 2:** I don't want to sit by that dummy.

**Student 3:** He's not a dummy. You shouldn't call people names.

**Student 2:** I didn't mean it.

**Student 3:** Well, it still wasn't nice. Did you know that he likes to play basketball?

**Student 2:** I like basketball too!

**Student 3:** You might be more alike than you think. There's an easy way to find out.

**Student 2:** Let's sit down with him.

**Student 3:** Maybe we can all be friends.

*Students 2 and 3 sit at the table as Narrators 1 and 2 enter the stage.*

**Narrator 1:** Mean words hurt people.

**Narrator 2:** It's never okay to call people mean names.

**Narrators 1 and 2:** Treat people as you would like to be treated by them.





## Scene 6: CLOSING

*All performers enter the stage.*

**Student 1:** We will encourage others. We won't put them down.

**All:** We will encourage others. We won't put them down.

**Student 2:** We will make sure that no one is left out.

**All:** We will make sure that no one is left out.

**Student 3:** We will use kind words.

**All:** We will use kind words.

**Student 4:** We will treat people as we would like to be treated.

**All:** We will treat people as we would like to be treated.

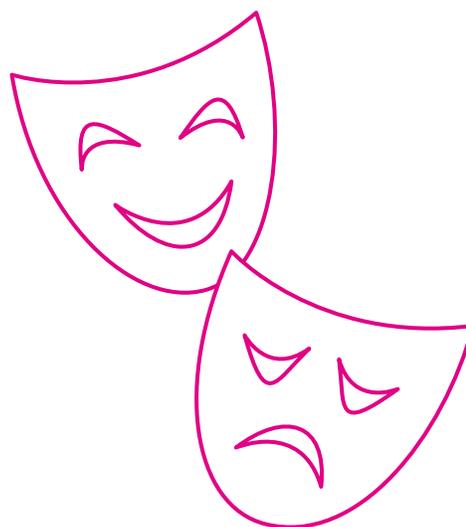




## Checklist for “Looking for Leaders” School Play

The play presents several short vignettes that are designed to increase students’ awareness of respectful behavior and encourage them to be leaders by setting positive examples. You’ll find background information and the script on pages 92–98. Use the checklist below to guide your planning.

- 1. Meet with the Unified Champion School Leadership Team to discuss putting on the play at your school. Develop a timeline for planning and rehearsing the performance.
- 2. Meet with the principal to discuss plans for the play and ensure the administration’s support and approval.
- 3. Communicate with the school staff about the purpose of the play. Decide who will present the performance. For example, fifth graders could present the play to younger classes, or interested students from various grades might perform the play for students and parents.
- 4. Develop a plan.
  - Set the date, time, and location for the performance. Make sure these details are cleared with the necessary school personnel before releasing the information to others.
  - Assign roles and schedule rehearsals.
  - Create a plan for each task that needs to be completed, including deadlines, and a list of who is responsible for carrying out each step.
- 5. Ask the school staff members to assist with communication through announcements, the school website, letters sent home, the school newsletter, and local news media.
- 6. Encourage teachers to talk with their classes after the performance to discuss the play’s message of respect and social inclusion. See the discussion questions on page 100.
- 7. After the performance, be sure to thank everyone involved with the event.





## Discussion Questions for “Looking for Leaders” School Play

The play provides a natural opportunity to promote class discussions that support social and emotional learning. Use questions such as the ones below to guide students’ reflections.

### Grades K–2

- *Social awareness, relationship skills:* What can we learn from the play?
- *Self-awareness, social awareness:* What does it mean to be left out? How does it feel?
- *Social awareness:* What are some things a good teammate might say to a soccer player who scores a goal?
- *Social awareness:* What are some things a good teammate might say to a basketball player who misses a shot?
- *Social awareness:* How can words hurt people?
- *Responsible decision-making:* What can you do if you see a student who has no one to play with during recess?

### Grades 3–5

- *Social awareness, relationship skills:* What do you think the play’s main message is?
- *Self-awareness:* Have you ever been left out of an activity? How did it feel?
- *Self-awareness:* Has anyone ever invited you to join them in a game or an activity during recess? How did it feel?
- *Social awareness:* Can you tell everything about a person by looking at him or her? Explain.
- *Social awareness:* How can students be different but alike?
- *Social awareness, relationship skills:* What does it mean to encourage someone?
- *Self-management, responsible decision-making:* A good leader sets a positive example. What does that statement mean to you?
- *Self-management, responsible decision-making:* How can students be leaders?



Unified Champion Schools provide students with experiences that **develop prosocial** skills.

To learn more about social and emotional learning, visit [casel.org](https://casel.org).



## Whole School Engagement: Tips for Success

- **Start small!** Make sure your first activity is manageable and then build on that success.
- **Don't reinvent the wheel:** Build on activities that your school already does with a focus on making them more socially inclusive.
- **Include school administration:** Get the support of administrators early in the process. Invite them to participate in visible ways.
- **Incorporate social inclusion into schoolwide plans:** Be intentional about including social inclusion in curriculum development and school climate improvement activities. The unified strategy complements social emotional learning and can support schoolwide SEL goals already in place.
- **Take advantage of available resources:** Connect with your state Special Olympics program for support. Let them know about your successes, too!
- **Work together:** Share the goals of whole school engagement with staff, parents, and students.
- **Reach out:** Provide opportunities for stakeholders throughout the school and community to be involved.
- **Help students connect:** Encourage inclusive relationships in both structured and unstructured settings.
- **Connect with families:** Organize inclusive family events, such as a family skate night, a family bowling night, or a family movie night. While the school might have offered similar events in the past, you might need to make a deliberate effort to ensure that families of students with intellectual disabilities feel welcome.
- **Share accomplishments:** Use the school's website or social media to post photos, videos, and stories of social inclusion activities.
- **Encourage reflection:** Provide opportunities for students to reflect on whole school engagement activities through discussion or journal writing by asking questions such as, "What did you learn from the experience?" or "How did you feel before the activity, during the activity, and after the activity?"



For additional resources, see **Get Into It**, a web-based, interactive curriculum for students that promotes respect and acceptance for people with intellectual disabilities. This unique program delivers free lessons, activities, videos, athlete stories, and supplemental materials at <https://getintoit.specialolympics.org/>

**Unified Champion  
Schools**

**Whole School Engagement  
Action Plan Form**

Strategy/Activity	Tasks	Date of Completion	People Responsible
Connects with: <input type="checkbox"/> Unified Sports <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Youth Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Other			
Connects with: <input type="checkbox"/> Unified Sports <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Youth Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Other			



# Glad to Be Me

## **Social and Emotional Learning Competency (SEL):** Self-awareness

### **Lesson overview:**

During this lesson, students learn the following:

- Interests and strengths contribute to uniqueness.
- Strengths include skills, talents, and character traits.
- How to identify one's own characteristics.

To wrap up the lesson, students will create a class display that showcases interests and strengths.

### **Academic skills:**

- Participating in a group discussion
- Expressing thoughts clearly
- Writing in response to a prompt
- Developing vocabulary

### **Social-emotional learning skill:**

- Identifying one's own interests and strengths

### **Estimated lesson time:** 40–45 minutes

As an alternative, the lesson can be divided into two sessions, approximately 20 minutes each.



“By being yourself, you put something wonderful in the world that was not there before.”—Edwin Elliott



Through Special Olympics Unified Sports, 93% of young people with intellectual disabilities reported significant **change in self-esteem/self-confidence.**



## Glad to Be Me

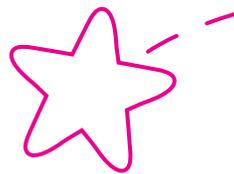
**Social and Emotional Learning Competency (SEL):** Self-awareness

### Materials needed:

- “Roll a Question!” mini poster
- copy of “Meet Me!” reproducible for each student
- colorful copy of a smiley face pattern for each student
- class supply of 9" x 12" construction paper
- die
- crayons
- scissors
- stapler

### Vocabulary:

- strength, talent, character traits



### Activity:

1. Ask students, “What can you tell about someone just by looking at him or her?” Invite students to share their thoughts. Comment that it’s difficult to identify a person’s interests and strengths without interacting with them.
2. Ask students to define *strength* in their own words. Guide them to realize that the word not only means the quality of being physically strong but also means something at which a person is good. Point out that everyone has strengths. Explain that a strength might be a trait, such as being kind, patient, or creative; or it might be a skill or talent, such as playing soccer or the piano very well. Point out that having a strength in a particular area doesn’t necessarily mean that you are the best at it.
3. Tell students that they will complete an activity that involves identifying some of their own strengths and interests. Display the “Roll a Question!” mini poster. Roll a die and identify the number rolled. Read the corresponding question aloud and then answer it. Have each student take at least one turn. (Read the questions for students, if desired.)
4. Give each student a copy of the “Meet Me!” reproducible. Instruct each student to draw a self-portrait in the first box and then write and illustrate a sentence ending in each remaining box. Encourage more advanced students to list self-describing character traits in the last box.
5. Have each student cut out a colorful smiley face pattern. Back each student’s paper with construction paper and then display it with the smiley face cutout on a bulletin board titled “Glad to Be Me!”



## Glad to Be Me

**Social and Emotional Learning Competency (SEL):** Self-awareness

### Adaptations:

- **Time modification:** Complete the question activity one day and the reproducible activity on another day.
- **Easier version:** Complete the “Roll a Question!” activity early in the week. Throughout the rest of the week, meet with students in small groups to guide them in completing the reproducible. Invite them to draw or write a response to each sentence starter.
- **More advanced version:** Instead of using the “Meet Me!” reproducible, have each student design a poster that shows his or her name, interests, and strengths. Encourage students to include words that describe their character traits.



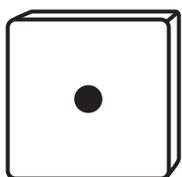
### Extensions:

- **Grs. K–2:** Read a selection about self-awareness such as *You’re All Kinds of Wonderful* by Nancy Tillman or *I Like Myself!* by Karen Beaumont. Ask each student to write the following sentence starter and complete the sentence: “I like me because...” Then, have the student illustrate his or her work. **Writing**
- **Grs. K–5:** Invite each student to write in a journal about an achievement that makes him or her proud. **Writing**
- **Grs. 3–5:** Tell students that an acrostic is a poem that uses the letters of a topic-related word to begin each line of the poem, with every line describing the topic. Have each student write an acrostic using his or her name. **Writing**
- **Grs. K–5:** Guide students to name different physical strengths, such as being a fast runner or being able to jump high. Discuss how different strengths often lead to different interests. Also, point out that diverse physical strengths benefit sports teams.

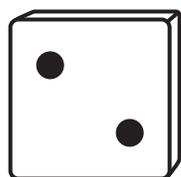
To learn more about social and emotional learning, visit [casel.org](https://casel.org).



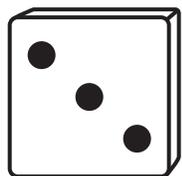
## Roll a Question!



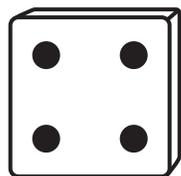
What  
is your  
favorite game or  
sport to play?



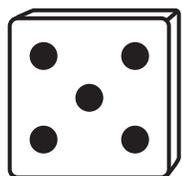
What do  
you like to  
do after school?



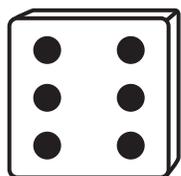
What is  
one word  
that describes  
you?



What  
makes you  
really happy?



What do  
you like  
to do with your  
family?



What is  
one thing  
you do well?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Self-awareness: personal interests and strengths

# Meet Me!

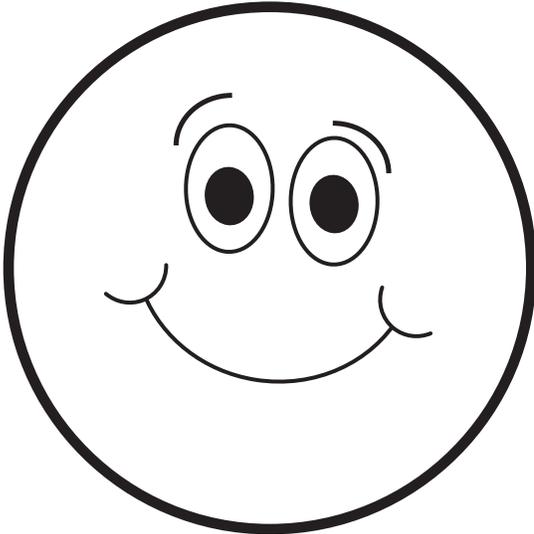
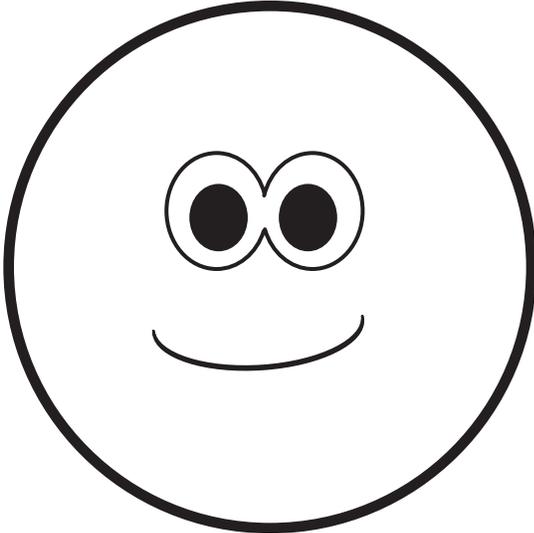
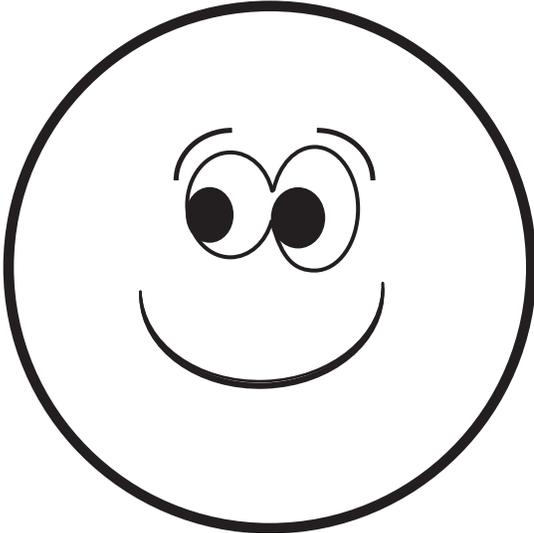
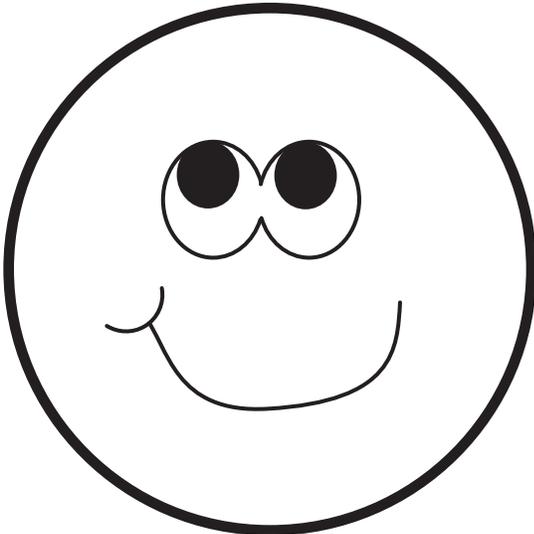
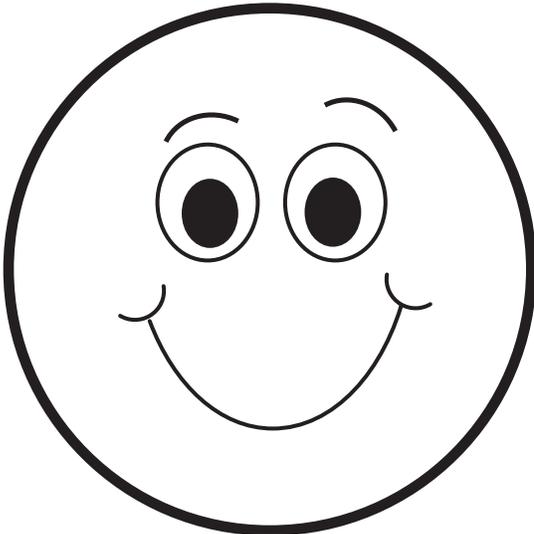
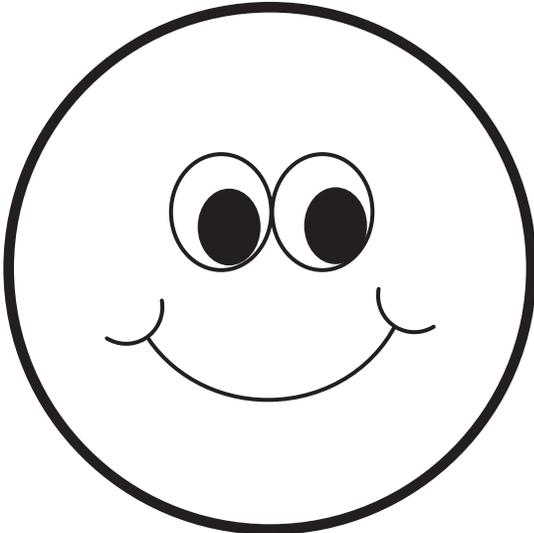
My Self-Portrait

I like to...

I am good at...

I am...

Smiley Face Patterns





## Keep Trying!

### Social and Emotional Learning Competencies (SEL):

Self-management, relationship skills

#### Lesson overview:

During this lesson, students do the following:

- Explore the theme of perseverance through a popular fable.
- Practice perseverance and providing encouragement.

To wrap up the lesson, students will write about the message conveyed in *The Tortoise and the Hare*: Hard work and perseverance bring reward.

#### Academic skills:

- Identifying the theme of a reading selection
- Making connections between literature and real-life experiences
- Participating in a group discussion
- Comparing characters

#### Social-emotional learning skills:

- Setting goals
- Motivating oneself
- Displaying perseverance
- Offering support to others when needed

#### Estimated lesson time: 45–50 minutes

As an alternative, the lesson can be divided into two sessions, approximately 25 minutes each.

Data shows that middle school students who participated in the Unified Champion Schools program reported they learned about **working with others** (64%), **helping others** (68%), becoming more **patient** (64%), **standing up** for something (66%), and that they have **things in common** with students of different abilities (59%).



“Little by little, one walks far.”—Peruvian Proverb



## Keep Trying!

### Social and Emotional Learning Competencies (SEL):

Self-management, relationship skills

#### Materials needed:

- *The Tortoise and the Hare* by Janet Stevens
- copy of the reproducible “A Lesson from Tortoise” or “The Power of Perseverance” for each student

#### Vocabulary:

fable, perseverance, determination, encourage

#### Activity:

1. Tell students that you’re going to read a certain kind of fiction book called a fable. Explain that many fables feature animals as the main characters and teach a lesson. Read the book aloud, pausing partway through the story. Ask each student to turn and tell his neighbor what he thinks the fable’s lesson might be. Then, finish reading the story.
2. Write the word *perseverance* on the board. Encourage students to define it in their own words. Then use the questions below to guide a class discussion.
  - How are Tortoise and Hare alike? Different?
  - What are some ways Tortoise shows perseverance and hard work?
  - What is determination? Where do you think it comes from?
  - How do Tortoise’s friends encourage him?
3. Tell students that everyone can learn new things. Sometimes, people need a lot of practice or time to learn a new task; that means they need perseverance. Explain that each student will have a chance to practice perseverance.



Students can see perseverance in action in the video about Special Olympics snowboarder Daina Shilts at [http://bit.ly/daina\\_shilts](http://bit.ly/daina_shilts).



4. Pair students and tell them that they will try to do a 180-degree jump turn. Demonstrate how students should stand with feet shoulder-width apart and then jump while turning their bodies 180 degrees, landing with their feet facing the opposite direction. If students can do this easily, ask them to try a full turn, landing with their feet facing the same direction that they started. Suggest that partners encourage each other. Give the first student in each twosome a few minutes to try this task (gauge the time according to students' enthusiasm and success) and then signal partners to switch roles.

Note: If students in the group have gross motor difficulties that hinder jumping, provide a different task, such as throwing a beanbag at a small target from a long distance.



5. Guide a discussion about the experience by asking students to respond to questions such as these:
  - When you first tried the task, how did you feel? Why?
  - If something is difficult the first time you try to do it, does it always mean that you won't ever be able to do it?
  - Think about another time when you tried something new, such as playing a musical instrument, learning the rules to a new game at recess, or drawing a self-portrait. How were these experiences similar? How were they different?
  - How can a friend motivate you to keep trying to do something that is difficult?
6. Tell students that Special Olympics is a sports program that includes athletes who might need a longer time to learn a particular skill. That means they need to persevere and try harder and work longer to learn a new skill. Explain that Special Olympics athletes say an oath before competing: "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt." Discuss the oath's meaning and what it means to be a winner.
7. Give each student a copy of the grade-appropriate version of the reproducible to complete.
  - Grs. K–1: "A Lesson from Tortoise"
  - Grs. 2–5: "The Power of Perseverance"



## Keep Trying!

### Social and Emotional Learning Competencies (SEL):

Self-management, relationship skills

#### Adaptations:

- **Time modification:** Complete the lesson over two days, reading and discussing *The Tortoise and the Hare* on the first day and completing the partner activity and written follow-up on another day.
- **Easier version:** For students who have difficulty expressing themselves in writing, have a classmate or an adult write their responses for them.
- **More advanced version:** After reading the story, create a class Venn diagram to compare and contrast Tortoise and Hare.



Sometimes making new friends takes perseverance, too. It might take longer to make friends with someone who is shy or someone who is still learning English. But with a little perseverance, those friendships flourish.

#### Extensions:

- **Grs. K-3:** Read aloud *The Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires. Ask students to describe the factors in the main character's success, such as the faithful support that the dog provides. Discuss the different ways friends can demonstrate support for one another. **Comprehension**
- **Grs. K-5:** Read aloud a real-life story of perseverance, *Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the World's Fastest Woman* by Kathleen Krull. As a class, create a web of words that describe Wilma Rudolph or have each student create a web individually. **Character analysis**
- **Grs. 3-5:** Pair students and have each pair write and illustrate their own fable that teaches the lesson that perseverance brings reward. Arrange for students to share their fables with the rest of the class and students in lower grades. **Writing**

To learn more about social and emotional learning, visit [casel.org](https://casel.org).

# A Lesson from Tortoise

What did you learn from the story about Tortoise and Hare?  
Draw and write.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# The Power of Perseverance



Explain what *perseverance* means in your own words.



Describe a time when you used perseverance to accomplish something. What helped you stick with the task?



Why is perseverance important?



# We Are All Unique

## **Social and Emotional Learning Competency (SEL):** Social awareness

### **Lesson overview:**

During this lesson, students do the following:

- Explore the concepts of uniqueness and diversity.

During this lesson, students learn the following:

- All groups represent overlapping areas of similarities and differences.

To wrap up the lesson, students reflect on characteristics that make them unique and compare and contrast their interests and preferences with those of a classmate.

### **Academic skills:**

- Demonstrating listening comprehension
- Participating in a group discussion
- Developing vocabulary
- Comparing and contrasting

### **Social-emotional learning skill:**

- Appreciating diversity (recognizing individual similarities and differences)

### **Estimated lesson time:** 35–40 minutes

As an alternative, the lesson can be divided into two sessions approximately 15 or 20 minutes each.



Program research shows staff and students alike believed the Unified Champion Schools strategy **empowers all students to become leaders**. They also felt that these leadership experiences help students learn valuable social-emotional skills like mentoring, interacting with new people, accepting others, learning from mistakes, and, most importantly, how to take on responsibility.

“Diversity is the one true thing we all have in common. Celebrate it every day.”—Author Unknown



## We Are All Unique

**Social and Emotional Learning Competency (SEL):** Social awareness

### Materials needed:

- copy of Activity Commands for teacher reference
- one 8½" x 11" sheet of white paper for every two students
- one 9" x 12" sheet of construction paper for every two students
- bulletin board backed with light-color paper
- class supply of colorful markers
- stapler



### Vocabulary:

external, internal, alike, unique, diversity

### Activity:

1. Comment that even though students see each other often, you wonder how well they really know each other. Explain that every person has characteristics that are external, or can be seen, as well as characteristics that are internal and cannot be seen. Tell students that they will complete an activity that will help them learn ways in which they are alike and ways in which they are different.
2. Have students stand side by side or in a large circle. Explain that they will need to listen carefully and step forward if a sentence describes them.
3. Read aloud a command from the top box of the teacher reference page. Allow time for students to respond; instruct students to look at the two groups that result. Then, ask students to return to their original places.



4. Continue with several other commands, reading some from the top box (external characteristics) and some from the bottom box (internal characteristics such as preferences and abilities). Modify the commands as needed to ensure that they are appropriate for your group and that all students are represented in a number of statements. Then, give a command that applies to all students, such as “Step right up if you are in my wonderful class.”
5. Have students return to their seats and then invite them to share their observations by asking them questions such as:
  - Did you learn anything new about your classmates?
  - How much can you tell about people just by looking at them?
  - Were you always grouped with the same people?
  - Some groups were small and some groups were large. Which did you prefer? Why?
6. Tell students that even though they are alike in some ways, no one is exactly the same as anyone else. We are all unique. Point out that students don't need to be alike in every way to be friends. Explain that diversity makes a community more interesting.
7. Pair students with and without intellectual disabilities as possible. Give each twosome a sheet of white paper and markers. Have the partners title their paper with their names. Ask them to write one way in which they are alike. Then, instruct each student to write a sentence identifying a personal interest or preference that his or her partner does not share. Have each student pair staple its paper to a sheet of construction paper.
8. Display students' work around the edges of a prepared bulletin board to create a border. In the center of the display, write a message celebrating diversity, such as “We are each unique. We're all awesome!”





## We Are All Unique

**Social and Emotional Learning Competency (SEL):** Social awareness

### Adaptations:

- **Time modification:** Complete the lesson over two days, doing the “Step Right Up” activity the first day, and the display activity on another day.
- **Easier version:** Instead of writing sentences with a partner, have each student draw an individual self-portrait.
- **More advanced version:** Rather than reading the provided commands, ask students to move around and team up with students who share designated traits or preferences. For one round, you might have students team up with students who have the same eye color or students who like the same flavor of ice cream. Point out that students will need to communicate with each other because some traits are not visible. After each round, ask each group to tell the class what preference or characteristic they share.

### Extensions:

- **Grs. K–2:** Read aloud *You Be You* by Linda Kranz or *Spaghetti in a Hot Dog Bun* by Maria Dismondy. Have each student write what he or she learned from the selection in a journal or on a sheet of paper. **Demonstrating understanding of a story’s central message**
- **Grs. 2–5:** Display a quote about respect or diversity. (See the suggestions below.) Divide students into small groups. Have the group members write a sentence or two that explains what it means to them. Then, ask each group to share their work with the class. **Interpreting a text**
  - Treat people the same way you would like them to treat you.
  - “Never judge someone by the way he looks or a book by the way it’s covered; for inside those tattered pages, there’s a lot to be discovered.”—Stephen Cosgrove
  - “When I see you through my eyes, I think that we are different. When I see you through my heart, I know we are the same.”—Doe Zantamata
- **Grs. 3–5:** Read *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio with students. After each chapter, ask each student to write a reaction to the story events in a journal. **Writing an opinion about a text**

To learn more about social and emotional learning, visit [casel.org](https://casel.org).

# Activity Commands

Step right up if you...

- are wearing sneakers.
- have brown eyes.
- are wearing jeans.
- have a blue backpack.
- have brown hair.
- have freckles.
- have pockets on your outfit.
- are wearing earrings.

Step right up if you...

- like to watch movies.
- like country music.
- play piano or another musical instrument.
- like to sleep late on the weekends.
- like to watch sports games.
- like hip-hop music.
- like to tell jokes.
- have a pet.
- like pepperoni pizza.
- like to play a sport.



# Together We Are Stronger

## Social and Emotional Learning Competency (SEL):

Relationship skills

### Lesson overview:

During this lesson, students do the following:

- Play a game that demonstrates the value of working together.
- Reflect on the experience during a group discussion.
- Identify other situations and ways in which teamwork can be demonstrated.

### Academic skills:

- Participating in a collaborative discussion
- Identifying real-life connections between words and their use

### Social-emotional learning skills:

- Using teamwork to achieve a goal
- Cooperating with others
- Communicating effectively

### Estimated lesson time: 35–40 minutes

As an alternative, the lesson can be divided into two sessions, approximately 15 or 20 minutes each.

Middle school and high school liaisons felt strongly that the Unified Champion Schools strategy increased opportunities for students with and without intellectual disabilities to **work together** (95%), **raised awareness** about students with intellectual disabilities (94%), increased the **participation** of students with intellectual disabilities in school activities (92%), and **reduced bullying, teasing, and offensive language** (88%).



“The nice thing about teamwork is that you always have others on your side.”—Margaret Carty



## Together We Are Stronger

### Social and Emotional Learning Competency (SEL):

Relationship skills

#### Materials needed:

- class supply of beanbags
- source of music
- chart paper
- markers (one colorful, one black)

#### Vocabulary:

teamwork, cooperative

#### Activity:

1. Tell students that they will play a game that involves everyone working together toward the same goal. Explain that each student will balance a beanbag on his or her head. If the beanbag falls, the student is frozen. To be freed, another student needs to replace the beanbag on the frozen student's head without dropping his or her own beanbag. If the helper's beanbag falls, the helper also becomes frozen until someone rescues both players. Tell students that the goal of the game is for no more than two students to be frozen at any one time. (Adjust the number as appropriate for your group.)
2. Hand each student a beanbag. Start the activity by having each student balance the beanbag on his or her head. Then play music and have students try not to let the beanbags fall as they walk or dance around a designated area.
3. Continue for a desired amount of time or until a chosen number of songs play.





4. Gather students for a group discussion. Ask students questions such as:
  - How did you feel when you were frozen and needed someone to free you?
  - What helped the group be successful?
  - How does the word *teamwork* relate to this game?
5. Point out how students benefited when everyone worked together, rather than just certain friends helping each other. Remind students that if they didn't include everyone in the game, they might not have gotten help from someone when they most needed it. Working cooperatively with many different people is more effective than working with just a few.
6. Use a colorful marker to write "TEAM" vertically on a sheet of chart paper. Use a black marker to write each of the following words beside the corresponding beginning letter: *Together, Everyone, Achieves, More*. Read the words with students.
7. Have students name various situations in which they can demonstrate teamwork by helping or supporting another person. Possibilities include cheering for a classmate's soccer team, practicing with a bocce ball team, working on a class project, or doing a group service project. Guide students to brainstorm specific ways they can use words and actions to encourage, support, or help others in these and similar situations; then write their thoughts on chart paper.



To learn more about social and emotional learning, visit [casel.org](https://casel.org).



# Together We Are Stronger

## Social and Emotional Learning Competency (SEL):

Relationship skills

### Adaptations:

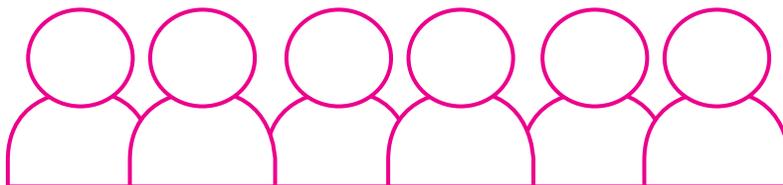
- **Time modification:** Complete the lesson over two days, playing and discussing the game on the first day and brainstorming ways teamwork can be demonstrated on another day.
- **Easier version:** Provide more structure by dividing students into groups and having each group walk with their beanbags on their heads on a different designated path.
- **More advanced version:** After introducing the saying “Together Everyone Achieves More” to students, have them work in small groups to create posters promoting teamwork.

### Extensions:

- **Grs. K–1:** Read aloud *Strictly No Elephants* by Lisa Mantchev. Have each student draw a picture that shows one thing that friends do and then write about it. **Writing**
- **Grs. 2–5:** Read aloud “The Sneetches” from *The Sneetches and Other Stories* by Dr. Seuss. Write the words *include* and *exclude* on the board. Explain that the prefix *in-* means *in, toward, or into* and the prefix *ex-* means *out, outside, or away from*. Guide students to discuss how these words relate to the story.

#### **Vocabulary**

- **Grs. K–5:** Tell students that treating others the same way they would like to be treated is a great way to show respect. Ask students to describe what respect looks like and how it sounds. **Vocabulary**





Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools**

# Inclusive Youth Leadership



Getting Ready



Establishing a Leadership Team



Whole School Engagement



Inclusive Youth Leadership



Unified Sports and Fitness



Special Olympics Resources



## Inclusive Youth Leadership: Leadership for All

Inclusive youth leadership provides students with and without intellectual disabilities leading roles as they work with adults in the school to create a socially inclusive environment.

What does inclusive youth leadership look like?

- students leading warm-up drills for Unified PE classes
- older students acting as mentors for younger students
- students planning and completing a community service project with adult assistance
- students brainstorming socially inclusive activities and getting feedback from their peers

### Why is it important?

Inclusive youth leadership

- enhances the school's efforts to improve school climate.
- increases student independence.
- develops students' sense of responsibility for contributing to a positive school climate.
- promotes key social and emotional skills.
- encourages choice and decision-making skills.
- heightens awareness of the strengths and talents all students possess.



### Start with students.

Unified Champion Schools are based on the premise that in order to have the most significant impact, change must start with youth. When students have active leading roles in creating a socially inclusive school, the effects are stronger and more likely to last.

### Unified Champion Schools make a difference.

Data from older students shows the impact that Unified Champion Schools have:

- 87% of students have learned how their emotions and **attitudes can affect others**.
- 84% of students have become better at **sharing responsibility**.
- 81% of students have learned about the challenges of **being a leader**.
- 63% of involved school staff feel that students are open to and accepting of differences, and that the program increased the **sense of community** in the school.



## What Are the Goals of Inclusive Youth Leadership?

- **Everyone leads:** Students representing the diversity of the student body will be engaged in leadership roles.
- **Everyone contributes:** All students will have equitable opportunities to contribute to the school community in meaningful ways.
- **Everyone has a voice:** Administrators and teachers will value the insight of all students as they develop a socially inclusive school environment.
- **Everyone is a champion for themselves and others:** Students with and without disabilities will gain the skills, knowledge, and disposition to become advocates for themselves and their peers.

### Principle of meaningful involvement

A socially inclusive school ensures that students with and without intellectual disabilities are active and valued participants in the school community.

### Indicators of meaningful involvement

- **Opportunities:** All students have opportunities to use their unique skills and qualities to contribute to the success of the school.
- **Intentional involvement:** Students with and without intellectual disabilities are purposefully engaged in leadership roles in formal and informal settings.
- **Intergenerational collaboration:** Students and adults work together to enhance the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of each individual.

### What school staff is saying

“...it gives some of the kids who have the quieter voice, or maybe don’t want to do the big leadership opportunities, [it] gives them more **opportunity** to do this in smaller settings where they’re more comfortable, too.”

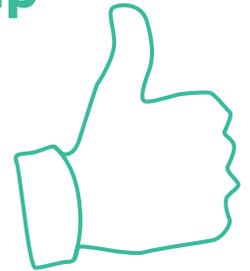
“Because to be a leader in [UCS], you don’t have to be the smartest person. It’s not a competition. It just takes being a **good person.**”



## Get Started With Inclusive Youth Leadership

Inclusive youth leadership in an elementary school may begin as guided leadership with adult support. The skills and knowledge students develop in elementary school lay the foundation for more independent youth leadership in middle and high school.

The leadership opportunities in elementary schools vary, but a common first step is to have a planning meeting with your school's Unified Leadership Team. Start by discussing topics such as the ones below. Once you agree on one or more ideas for promoting inclusive youth leadership, use the action plan form on page 132 to organize the details.



### Topics to discuss

- What types of inclusive youth leadership opportunities does our school have, need, or want to incorporate?
- What leadership opportunities would be a good starting point?
- Where do we already have formal and informal leadership opportunities for students? Are these inclusive opportunities, involving typical as well as atypical leaders?
- What inclusive youth leadership opportunities are valued by students with and without intellectual disabilities?
- How do we nurture leadership partnerships of students with and without intellectual disabilities?
- Who will be the adult coordinator for inclusive youth leadership?

### Need ideas? Check out these suggestions.

- Incorporate leadership skills into the curriculum. (page 128)
- Promote student leadership during Unified Sports experiences. (page 129)
- Have leadership lunches. (page 129)
- Start a Unified Club. (page 130)





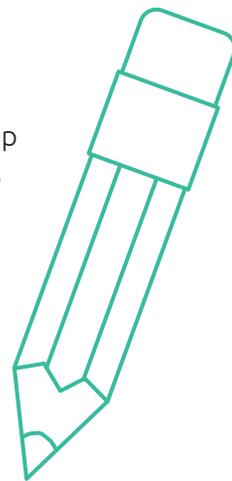
## Activities to Promote Inclusive Youth Leadership

Inclusive youth leadership opportunities are times when adults step back and let students with and without intellectual disabilities take leadership roles in their schools. Check out the ideas below and on pages 129–130 for encouraging students to actively promote acceptance, respect, and social inclusion. Don't be limited to these suggestions, though. Engage students as leaders in as many ways as you can.

### Incorporate leadership skills into the curriculum.

—**Literature:** Read books that promote leadership qualities. (See the suggestions below.) Follow up by asking students questions such as “Whom do you admire in this book and why?” and “What does this book teach us about being a leader?”

- *One* by Kathryn Otoshi (standing up for oneself and others)
- *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson (creativity, problem solving, establishing a vision)
- *Horton Hatches the Egg* by Dr. Seuss (commitment, trustworthiness)
- *The Little Engine That Could* by Watty Piper (perseverance)
- *The Hundred Dresses* by Eleanor Estes (standing up for others)
- *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein (putting the interests of others first)



—**Writing:** Have students write invitations to Unified Champion Schools events, such as Unified Sports Day, or design flyers to send home. After an inclusive event, have each student write about it in a journal. Encourage students to include how they felt during the event, how they grew as a result of the experience, and how the event contributed to a positive school environment.

—**Math:** Have students keep track of scores during a Unified Sports event. Another option is to have students use their math skills to help plan the event. For example, they might determine how many cases of bottled water are needed for the athletes.

—**Language:** Have groups of students research quotes that promote leadership, respect, and acceptance. Invite students to discuss what the quotes mean to them. Then, have students create banners to showcase the quotes throughout the school. These are great choices:

“Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible.” (Dalai Lama)

“Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.” (William James)

—**Research and technology:** Divide students into small groups and have each group research a different aspect of Special Olympics, such as how it started, how it has changed over the years, and what countries participate. Have students use a presentation program such as PowerPoint, Google Slides, or Prezi to share what they learned during a Unified Champion Schools event.





## More Ways to Promote Inclusive Youth Leadership

- **Ensure that existing leadership opportunities are inclusive.**

Does your school have classroom representatives for student government? How about a school news club or safety patrol? While clubs such as these may be open to all students, it might take deliberate efforts to ensure that students with and without disabilities feel welcome. Have current club members invite friends with intellectual disabilities to join. Having co-leaders—one with and one without an intellectual disability—is an effective approach.

- **Involve students in planning Unified Champion School activities.** As events are planned, invite students with and without intellectual disabilities to share their opinions and preferences. It will lead to the growth of their leadership skills and help ensure that the activities will be embraced by all students. For example, students can take the lead on planning the Respect Campaign.

- **Promote student leadership during Unified Sports experiences.**

Have students

- weigh in on which sports they want to do each semester.
- set up skill stations for sports practices.
- lead warm-up drills.
- serve as peer coaches.
- decide how to promote an upcoming event, such as Unified Sports Day.
- take leadership in running various activities for younger students in the Young Athletes program.

- **Have leadership lunches.** Establish a regular meeting time such as every Friday during lunch. Over several lunches, show an interested group of students with and without intellectual disabilities a movie with a leadership theme, such as *The Lorax* or *Dolphin Tale*. (Since every group of students is different, preview your movie selection to ensure that it is a good fit for your group.) After each viewing, follow up with a group discussion. Ask students questions such as the ones below.

- What did you learn about leadership?
- How does the plot relate to real life?
- Would you have acted differently than the main character? Why or why not?

- **Start a peer mentoring program.** Pair older students with younger students who have intellectual disabilities. Have the mentors help the younger students complete whole school activities or train for Special Olympics competitions.





## Start a Unified Club

Create a nonacademic school-based club that brings students with and without intellectual disabilities together. Whether you call it a Unified Club, a Respect Club, a Friend Club, or something else, set the goals of promoting acceptance, socially inclusive friendships, and student leadership. The club will become an influential core group of students who promote social inclusion. Since district policies on school clubs vary, be sure to share your plans with your school principal.

- **Schedule:** Establish a schedule that works with the school’s structure and schedule. Consider scheduling meetings before school, after school, or during lunch.
- **Management:** As the club gets up and running, gradually hand over more responsibilities to students to help plan meetings or lead parts of them. You might designate a student to be a timekeeper, for example. As students develop leadership abilities, you’ll be giving them the tools they need to advocate for unity and respect.
- **Activities:** What kinds of activities would the club do? The possibilities are limitless, but the goal is for students to help plan and participate in social and community activities that increase understanding, acceptance, and respect of individual differences. For example, club members might help adults plan parts of various whole school engagement activities. (See ideas starting on page 60.)
- **Social connections:** While students will get to know each other as they plan activities, it’s important to ensure that there are other opportunities to develop friendships, too. Consider these options:
  - **Icebreakers:** Start each meeting with a brief activity that helps students get acquainted.
  - **Lunch mates:** On a designated day each month, arrange for club members to sit together at lunchtime.
  - **Family fun:** Periodically arrange a get-together—such as a picnic or hike—outside of school for club members and their families.

### School Schedule

M T W T F

#### Student applications or not?

Some Unified Champion Schools have experienced success with an application process for **general education students** who are interested in joining a **Unified Club**. It helps ensure that students take the responsibility seriously and want to join the club for the right reasons. However, an application process might deter students who aren’t popular or “star students” from applying which is counter to the unified strategy. Each school should consider its school community and decide what will work best. Ideally, a school would reach out to all students in some way.



## Inclusive Youth Leadership: Tips for Success

**Reach out to atypical leaders:** Intentionally involve students who might not immediately come to mind as leaders, including students with disabilities or disengaged learners. This is a critical step in understanding the school experience from multiple perspectives. It also builds students' self-esteem and increases their sense of belonging. When students feel connected to school, they're more likely to attend regularly and become more invested in academic achievement.

- **Involve diverse students:** Spread leadership opportunities to a wide range of students. Be intentional about developing the leadership skills of all students.
- **Establish equal partnerships:** Avoid consistently assigning students without intellectual disabilities the role of “helper” and students with intellectual disabilities the role of “helpee.”
- **Support staff members:** Periodically provide opportunities for teachers to share ways they foster inclusive youth leadership in their classrooms. Encourage them to share their challenges, too. Their colleagues are bound to have helpful suggestions.
- **Step back:** Always look for times adults can step back and let students lead. Guard against taking control of all decisions simply because it's faster and easier. Try to give only the help that is needed to allow each student to be as independent as possible.
- **Make social inclusion a lifestyle:** Help students learn to model social inclusion throughout their daily interactions at school, not just during a special event or activity. Having co-leaders with and without intellectual disabilities works well to provide leadership opportunities.
- **Encourage reflection:** Provide ongoing opportunities for students to reflect on their leadership skills.
- **Share accomplishments:** Use the school's website or social media to share photos, videos, and stories of social inclusion activities.



## Unified Champion Schools

# Inclusive Youth Leadership Action Plan Form

Strategy/Activity	Tasks	Date of Completion	People Responsible
Connects with: <input type="checkbox"/> Unified Sports <input type="checkbox"/> Whole School Engagement <input type="checkbox"/> Other			
Connects with: <input type="checkbox"/> Unified Sports <input type="checkbox"/> Whole School Engagement <input type="checkbox"/> Other			



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
Schools

# Special Olympics Unified Sports® and Fitness



Getting Ready



Establishing a Leadership Team



Whole School Engagement



Inclusive Youth Leadership



Unified Sports and Fitness



Special Olympics Resources



# Unified Sports and Fitness: Activities for All

Unified gross motor education and sports provide students with and without intellectual disabilities opportunities to meaningfully participate in fitness activities alongside one another in a variety of settings. Special Olympics Unified Sports® are one specific type of inclusive sport. Other activities such as walking or fitness clubs, are inclusive and lots of fun, though they don't fall under the official category of Unified Sports.

## What do Unified gross motor education and sports look like?

Unified sports opportunities vary by students' ages and from school to school. While some students work on developing basic gross motor skills, others compete on sports teams. Schools may provide a variety of opportunities, ranging from a weekly fitness club to an ongoing Unified PE class to a seasonal intramural basketball team. All Unified Sports opportunities have one thing in common—they provide opportunities for all students to achieve their personal best and experience the joy that comes from physical activity.



## From Learning to Competing

### Special Olympics Young Athletes

Children ages 2 to 7 develop fundamental gross motor skills as well as social and cognitive skills in an inclusive sports play program.

### Developmental Sports Activities

Children ages 6 to 12 learn more sport-specific skills in inclusive settings, such as Unified Physical Education classes.

### Special Olympics Unified Sports®

Students with and without disabilities train and compete together on the same teams.



## Why are Unified Sports opportunities important?

Unified Sports

- improve students' physical fitness.
- enhance social and emotional skills.
- provide opportunities for students to build friendships on and off the playing field.
- teach acceptance, inclusion, and camaraderie—lessons that translate to all aspects of life.
- are a catalyst for social inclusion.

### Powerful impact

- Unified Sports lead to **new friendships**, improved self-esteem, positive changes in attitudes and behaviors, increased sports skills, and a deeper connection to the school.
- Children who participate in Young Athletes show **motor skill gains** at twice the rate of children who do not participate.
- 82% of family members in the United States report that athletes **improve** their self-esteem and confidence after participating in Unified Sports.



## What Are the Main Models of Unified Sports?



There are three basic models of Unified Sports. It is up to each school to choose which model or combination of models will be most beneficial for its students. Many elementary schools do not have an existing structure for competitive team sports. There are many other options, though, including the ideas starting on page 138. Since sports are the foundation for Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools, it is essential that each school provide one or more Unified Sports opportunities. Ideally, each school would provide a variety of Unified Sports or fitness opportunities for students.

### Player development and mentoring

- Students with higher skill levels might serve as mentors, assisting teammates of lower skill levels in developing sport-specific skills.
- All teammates are of similar age.
- There is a noncompetitive, cooperative team environment.
- The Young Athletes program may be implemented as a player development opportunity.

### Competitive

- Students with and without intellectual disabilities train and compete on the same team.
- All teammates are of similar age and ability levels.
- Teams adhere to training, competition, and team composition requirements.
- Teams compete within an intramural setting, an interscholastic athletic league, or through Special Olympics tournaments.
- A Unified intramural flag football team is one example.



### Recreation

- This is the most flexible model because it requires fewer training and team composition criteria.
- Recreational sports take place solely on school property and do not advance into competitions.
- There is a noncompetitive, cooperative team environment.
- Examples include a Unified Sports Day and a Unified Fitness Club.

See the **checklists** on pages 141–143 for steps in getting started with these models.



## What Are the Goals of Unified Sports?



- **Friendship and socialization:** Students with and without intellectual disabilities will have opportunities for positive social interactions and the development of long-lasting friendships.
- **Meaningful inclusion:** Each student will be an active participant and have a valued role on a team or in a sport or fitness activity.
- **Skill development:** Students will enhance their overall physical fitness and develop specific sports skills that enable them to participate in the sport with greater proficiency.
- **Personal growth:** Students with and without intellectual disabilities will benefit from physical and mental challenges by participating in a variety of sports activities.



## Principle of meaningful involvement

A socially inclusive school ensures that students with and without intellectual disabilities have multiple opportunities throughout the school year to participate in sports.

## Indicators of meaningful involvement

- **Equal participation:** All students have the ability and opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the sports activity or performance of the team.
- **Sports rules:** Students participate according to the rules of the sport or competition.
- **Safety:** Students participate without causing undue risk of injury to themselves or others.
- **Commitment:** Students are committed to doing their best, including regularly attending any scheduled practices.

## Lasting impact

- The benefits of the Young Athletes (YA) program continue even after the program ends. At five- and ten-month follow-ups, children who participated in YA maintained a **four-month advantage** in development on two of three areas where they improved.
- The program raises parents' expectations of their child with intellectual disabilities. In the United States, 21% of teachers report that YA benefited families by **raising parental expectations** of their child's capabilities.

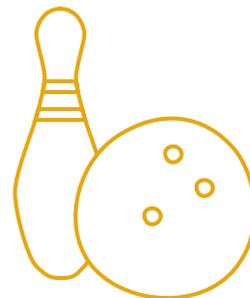


## Get Started with Unified Sports

There are various ways to implement Unified Sports, but a typical first step is to have a planning meeting with your school's Unified Leadership Team. Consider discussing topics such as the ones below. Once you agree on one or more Unified Sports activities, use the action plan form on page 145 to organize the details.

### Topics to discuss

- Which Unified Sports model (competitive, player development, or recreation) or combination of models is the most appropriate for the students in our school? For example, a school may have a Young Athletes program for kindergartners and a competitive Unified bocce team for older students. A school is not restricted to using one model.
- Are there existing opportunities, such as PE classes, that can be made socially inclusive?
- Which sports are of greatest interest to students with and without intellectual disabilities?
- Who will be the adult leaders for the activities we choose?
- Is any training needed for the adults leading the activities?
- Is any paperwork required for participants?
- How will general education students be selected to participate? Will the selection be based on grade level, or is an application process a better fit?
- When will the activities be held? Before, during, or after school?



### Need ideas? Check out these suggestions.

See pages 138–140 for details and other creative options.

- Special Olympics Young Athletes
- Unified Sports Day
- Unified PE
- Fitness Friends
- Basketball Buddies

If the leadership team is interested in **interscholastic competition**, contact your state Special Olympics Program to find out about local Unified Sports opportunities. Be sure to check into your school and district athletic policies, too.

Get illustrated, leveled **exercise cards** for endurance, strength, and flexibility here: <https://media.specialolympics.org/resources/sports-essentials/fit-5/Fitness-Cards-Level-All-Levels.pdf>



## Unified Sports Opportunities

Every student should have a chance to share in the joy of sports, interact with other students, and be part of their school through sports. As students participate in Unified Sports, they establish environments of acceptance and respect. In addition to Unified Sports teams, there is a wide variety of additional Unified Sports options. See the ideas below and on pages 139–140 for several ways to make Unified Sports part of your school.



- **Special Olympics Young Athletes:** This is the first stage of Unified Sports. It is an inclusive sport and play program for students with and without intellectual disabilities, 2 to 7 years. Students develop fundamental gross motor skills, improve their social and emotional skills, and learn healthy habits. To celebrate students' achievements, conclude the program with a Young Athletes Demonstration Day and invite families and community members to attend. Begin the event with a parade of athletes. Have students rotate through skill stations to demonstrate what they have learned. Conclude the event by presenting award ribbons to athletes for their participation. Special Olympics resources, including posters, activity guides, a curriculum, and videos are available here: [https://resources.specialolympics.org/Topics/Young\\_Athletes/Young\\_Athletes\\_Toolkit.aspx](https://resources.specialolympics.org/Topics/Young_Athletes/Young_Athletes_Toolkit.aspx)
- **Developmental Sports Activities:** After students ages 6 to 12 years have learned the fundamentals, they're ready to learn more sport-specific coaching and instruction. They learn individual skills as well as the basic rules of a chosen sport. The instruction format might include a warm-up activity, skill stations, a team-building activity, and time for students to reflect on what they learned that day. For resources, visit <https://media.specialolympics.org/resources/community-building/young-athletes/DevelopmentalSportsOverview.pdf>
- **Unified Sports:** Students with and without intellectual disabilities train and compete together on sports teams. Students increase their sports skills, have fun together, and bond as a team. For students who have never been on a competitive team, a sport such as bocce or bowling might be a great first experience. Find out more at [https://resources.specialolympics.org/Topics/Sports/Unified\\_Sports.aspx](https://resources.specialolympics.org/Topics/Sports/Unified_Sports.aspx)





- **Unified Physical Education:** This class is a unique opportunity for students of various ability levels to come together on equal terms through ongoing fitness, sports, leadership, and wellness activities. The Unified PE course is based on the national PE standards and empowers students to create an inclusive school environment. For Special Olympics resources, including tips for inclusion, sample units, and resources for student self-reflection visit <http://www.specialolympics.org/SimpleStories/SimpleStory.aspx?id=42662>.

- **Unified Sports Day:** Invite students to demonstrate and celebrate sports skills they have learned and practiced during a special day of Unified Sports activities for the entire student body. Encourage families to attend and celebrate what students can do. Use the planning checklist on page 143 to organize the event.

- **Fitness Models:**

- **Unified Sports Fitness Club:** For example, a year-round walking club
- **Fit Families:** A six-week fitness challenge for families or teams
- **SOfit:** An eight-week program that explores the four pillars of wellness: physical, nutritional, emotional, and social

Find resources for these wellness programs here: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/Fitness-Model-Resources>.



For additional **information and resources** on inclusive sports, visit the Special Olympics Resource webpage: [https://resources.specialolympics.org/Topics/Sports/Unified\\_Sports.aspx](https://resources.specialolympics.org/Topics/Sports/Unified_Sports.aspx)



## More Unified Opportunities

- **Fitness Fridays or Super Sports Days:** Each week or month, organize a special Unified PE class. You might focus on a different sport each time to expose students to a wide variety of sports. Another option is to set up a different obstacle course for each class. Promote leadership skills by having students design the course.
- **Unified Walking Club:** Invite school staff members and students with and without intellectual disabilities to walk regularly as a group. Schedule club meeting times that work well for your school, such as before school, during lunch, or right after school. It's a wonderful way to promote fitness, and it is a great opportunity for students to strike up conversations with peers with whom they might not otherwise have the opportunity to socialize.
- **Fitness Friends:** Gather students with and without intellectual disabilities weekly to enjoy physical activities together, such as yoga, walking, and jumping rope. Vary the activities from week to week to keep interest high.
- **Unified Intramural Teams:** If your school already has an intramural team for one or more sports, explore ways to make it socially inclusive. Consider having current team members extend personal invitations to friends who have intellectual disabilities, or ask the special education staff to encourage their students to give playing a try.
- **Basketball Buddies:** Host an informal afterschool Unified basketball program that focuses on basic skills and teamwork. Check with your local high school athletics department for students who might be interested in assisting.
- **Unified Recess Opportunities:** What better time to promote social inclusion than recess? Schedule a variety of Unified opportunities, such as kickball games or yoga instruction. Another option is to establish a group that focuses on one sport for several weeks, such as an Unified bocce group. The more frequent the opportunities, the easier it will be to promote friendships!
- **Training Mentors:** If you have the Young Athletes program or Special Olympics athletes in your school, pair students without intellectual disabilities with younger athletes to help them train. It's a wonderful opportunity for students to develop friendships with students with whom they might not otherwise interact.



The **Young Athletes** program is for children ages 2 to 7. Once a child turns 8 years old, he or she may enter general Special Olympics programming. Special Olympics trains people with intellectual disabilities to compete in Olympic-style sports events. 4.9 million athletes from more than 172 countries participate in Special Olympics!





## Checklist for Unified Sports Player Development and Competitive Models

- 1. Meet with the Unified Champion School Leadership Team to discuss providing a Unified Sports opportunity in your school. Develop a timeline for recruiting athletes and adult volunteers and to prepare for the season or program.
- 2. Contact your state Special Olympics office to begin the process of forming a Unified Sports program or team at your school.
- 3. Choose the sport that the school will implement and when/where it will take place.
- 4. Recruit an adult head coach and identify other adults who can support the athletes in different ways.
- 5. Have the coaches complete training requirements. A free online course is available here: <https://nfhslearn.com/courses/36000/coaching-unified-sports>
- 6. Recruit students with and without intellectual disabilities. Ensure that there will be a meaningful role for each student who is interested in participating.  
**Player Development:** Focus recruitment on students without disabilities who will be of similar age as students with disabilities and be committed to the program or team.  
**Competitive:** Use a targeted approach to focus recruitment on students without disabilities who will be of similar ability as students with disabilities and will be committed to the team.
- 7. Ask interested students/parents to complete and submit required participation forms in a timely manner.
- 8. Establish a practice or training schedule. Establish a competition schedule for intramural or interscholastic teams.
- 9. Address transportation needs, if necessary.
- 10. Conduct an orientation meeting with students and families.
- 11. Encourage whole school engagement through pep rallies and other shows of fan support.
- 12. Use the school's website or social media to post photos, videos, and stories about the team.

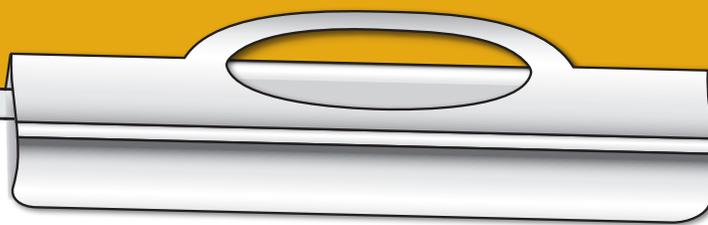




## Checklist for Unified Sports Recreation Models

- 1. Meet with the Unified Champion School Leadership Team to discuss starting Unified Sports in your school. Develop a timeline for recruiting participants and volunteers and preparing for the sport or activity.
- 2. Choose the sport or activity you will implement and when/where it will take place.
- 3. Contact your state Special Olympics office to begin the process of initiating a Unified Sports program at your school.
- 4. Recruit an adult to help and identify others who can support the program in different ways.
- 5. Have coaches complete training requirements. A free online course is available at <https://nfhslearn.com/courses/36000/coaching-unified-sports>
- 6. Recruit participants with and without intellectual disabilities. Ensure there will be a meaningful role for each student who is interested in participating.
- 7. Ask interested students/parents to complete and submit required participation forms in a timely manner.
- 8. Set a schedule and work out any other logistics such as transportation needs.
- 9. Conduct an orientation meeting with all students and adults involved. (This meeting could include parents.)
- 10. Use the school's website or social media to post photos, videos, and stories about activities or team events.

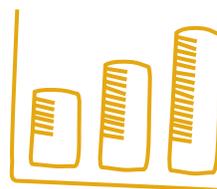




## Checklist for a Unified Sports Day

A Unified Sports Day is a festive and fun way to involve all students and families in a day of Unified Sports activities. Use the checklist below to make the event a success.

- 1. Meet with the Unified Champion School Leadership Team to discuss hosting a Unified Sports Day at your school. Develop a timeline for recruiting volunteers and planning the event. Consider whether to seek any sponsors or donors.
- 2. Meet with the principal to discuss plans for the event and ensure the administration's support and approval.
- 3. Communicate with school staff about the event. Seek their input on possible activities to include. Invite student input, as appropriate. Solicit volunteers.
- 4. Reach out to the physical education teacher(s) and encourage collaboration for organizing activities and making accommodations to ensure all activities are accessible to all students.
- 5. Develop a plan.
  - Set the date for the event and a schedule for the day.
  - Invite members of the parent-teacher organization to help plan or carry out activities.
  - Decide whether the day will have a theme or focus on a specific sport.
- Finalize the activities and clear them with the necessary school personnel before releasing the information to others.
- Determine how to ensure that all students will have equitable opportunities to participate.
- Create a plan for each task that needs to be completed, including deadlines and a list of who is responsible for carrying out each step.
- 6. Publicize the Unified Sports Day within the school. Invite students' families. Reach out to the local newspaper and radio station. Include information about the event on the local access television station.
- 7. After the event, thank everyone involved with making the event a success. Send a special thank-you note to any sponsors or donors.
- 8. Use the school's website or social media to post photos, videos, and stories about the event.





## Unified Sports: Tips for Success

- **Use people-first language.** Always put the athlete first and the disability behind. For example, say “My student with special needs,” not “She’s a special needs student.”
- **Ensure opportunities for socialization:** Regularly incorporate a get-acquainted activity at the beginning of Unified Sports activities or practices. Keep in mind that individual sports provide fewer natural opportunities to build social relationships than team sports.
- **Tailor the models to students:** It’s valuable to offer all three sports models, but it might not be practical. Consider the skill level of students. For example, if it’s the first year the school has a bocce club, the player development model is the best fit. If students have had more exposure to basketball, the recreation or competitive model might be a good choice.
- **Promote leadership:** Involve students in leadership roles such as setting up skill stations, designing an obstacle course, or leading warm-up drills.
- **Practice!** The more students practice basic gross motor skills, the greater their progress. Encourage families to help their children practice at home.
- **Keep it positive:** Avoid elimination activities and having students pick teams. No one wants to be “out” or the last player chosen.
- **Strike a balance:** Make it easy for students to join a sports team or club, but stress the importance of being committed to attending practices and being an active member. It’s a real-life opportunity for students to learn about responsibility and dependability.
- **Generate enthusiasm:** If your school has a Unified intramural team or interscholastic sports team, include the game dates and team achievements on the school’s morning announcements. Invite students and the school staff to show their support with pep rallies.
- **Periodically encourage reflection:** Ask students questions such as “What are the qualities of a good teammate?” and “What is your favorite sports activity and why?” Invite students to respond verbally or have each student write his or her response in a journal.
- **Share events and accomplishments:** Use the school’s website or social media to post photos, videos, and stories of socially inclusive sports clubs, events, and activities.



## Unified Champion Schools

# Unified Sports and Fitness Action Plan Form

Strategy/Activity	Tasks	Date of Completion	People Responsible
Connects with: <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Youth Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Whole School Engagement <input type="checkbox"/> Other			
Connects with: <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Youth Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Whole School Engagement <input type="checkbox"/> Other			



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools**

# Special Olympics Resources



Getting  
Ready



Establishing a  
Leadership Team



Whole School  
Engagement



Inclusive Youth  
Leadership



Unified Sports  
and Fitness



Special Olympics  
Resources



## Resources: Tested and Ready

Special Olympics offers a wide variety of Unified Sport, fitness, and learning opportunities that promote physical health as well as respect and acceptance for people with intellectual disabilities. Take a look at these free resources.

### Young Athletes

Special Olympics Young Athletes is a sport and play program for children with and without intellectual disabilities, ages 2 to 7. The program focuses on developing fundamental motor, social, and cognitive skills through inclusive play. Get an activity guide, videos, and a curriculum here:  
<https://resources.specialolympics.org/YoungAthletes>



Special Olympics  
**Young Athletes**

### Transitioning from Young Athletes to Sports

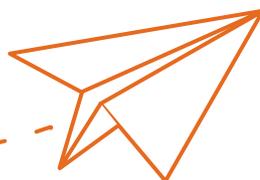
These resources provide sport-specific skill development activities for children with and without intellectual disabilities, ages 6–12 years old. Find information here:  
<https://media.specialolympics.org/resources/community-building/young-athletes/DevelopmentalSportsOverview.pdf>

### Unified Sports

Special Olympics Unified Sports brings people with and without intellectual disabilities together on the same team to compete. Check out the training tools and other valuable resources at  
[https://resources.specialolympics.org/Topics/Sports/Unified\\_Sports.aspx](https://resources.specialolympics.org/Topics/Sports/Unified_Sports.aspx)

### Coaching Unified Sports

This course is designed to help adults implement Special Olympics Unified Sports in their schools. Find the online course here:  
<https://nfhslearn.com/courses/36000/coaching-unified-sports>





## Fitness Model Resources

Physical fitness is a key part of the Special Olympics mission. Additional fitness activities beyond sports improve athletes' sport performance, health, and lives.

- **Unified Sports Fitness Club** is a year-round program that offers Unified physical activity opportunities through weekly or bi-weekly walking sessions.
- **Fit Families** is a six-week fitness challenge for athletes and their supporters (family members or others) to get active and healthy together.
- **Sofit** is an eight-week Unified program that gets participants active while teaching them about holistic wellness.

Find resources for all three programs here: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/Fitness-Model-Resources/>



## Fitness Cards and Videos

These cards and videos provide endurance, strength, and flexibility exercises with simple instructions. They follow a leveled approach to make exercise possible for all abilities.

See the cards and videos here: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/Fitness-Cards/>

## Get Into It

Special Olympics Get Into It consists of online resources that include lessons, activities, videos, athlete stories, and supplemental materials. For all materials, go to <https://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources>

## Unified Champion Schools

# Action Plan Form

Strategy/Activity	Tasks	Date of Completion	People Responsible
Connects with: <input type="checkbox"/> Unified Sports <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Youth Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Whole School Engagement <input type="checkbox"/> Other			
Connects with: <input type="checkbox"/> Unified Sports <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Youth Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Whole School Engagement <input type="checkbox"/> Other			



## Citations

1. U.S. Department of Education. An NEA policy brief: Parent, Family, Community Involvement in Education. Washington, D.C.: NEA Education Policy and Practice Department, 2008.
2. U.S. Department of Education. Resources for Involving Families in Education. Family Involvement in Children's Education, 1997. Retrieved from <https://www.ed.gov>
3. Center for Social Development and Education: University of Massachusetts Boston, The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Program: 2016–2017; Year 9 Evaluation Report (Boston, MA: 2017).

## Additional Reading

Bradshaw, C.P., Sawyer, A.L., & O'Brennan, L.M. (2007). Bullying and peer victimization at school: Perceptual differences between students and school staff. *School Psychology Review*, 36(3), 361-382.

Center for Social Development and Education: University of Massachusetts Boston, Project UNIFY 2011-2012: Final Evaluation Report (Boston, MA: 2012). Retrieved from <http://www.umb.edu/csde>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2009.

Nanavati, J. & Haas, K. (2015). *Unified Sports Evaluation*. Washington, DC: Special Olympics International.

National School Climate Center, *School Climate Pilot Research Project: Preliminary Report* (New York, NY: 2014).

Özer, D., Baran, F., Aktop, A., Nalbant, S., Ađlamış, E., & Hutzler, Y. (2012). Effects of a Special Olympics Unified Sports soccer program on psycho-social attributes of youth with and without intellectual disability. *Research in developmental disabilities*, 33(1), 229-239.

Rose, C.A., Espelage, D. A. & Monda-Amaya, L. E. (2009). Bullying and victimization rates among students in general and special education: A comparative analysis. *Educational Psychology*, 29, 761–776.

Siperstein, G., Hardman, M., Wappett, M., & Clary, L. (2001). *National evaluation of the Special Olympics Unified Sports program. A special report*. Washington, DC: University of Massachusetts Boston, University of Utah, & Special Olympics, Inc.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008.