



Inclusive Play for Children of All Abilities

A Collaboration Between
Special Olympics and Head Start



Special Olympics
Young Athletes



ABOUT SPECIAL OLYMPICS

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

Special Olympics is the world's largest sports organization for people with intellectual disabilities. Founded by Eunice Kennedy Shriver in 1968. Special Olympics serves more than 5 million athletes in 172 countries.

ABOUT NATIONAL HEAD START ASSOCIATION

The National Head Start Association (NHSA) is a nonprofit organization committed to the belief that every child, regardless of circumstances at birth, has the ability to succeed in life. NHSA is the voice for more than 1 million children, 200,000 staff and 1,600 Head Start grantees in the United States. Since 1974, NHSA has worked diligently for policy changes that ensure all at-risk children have access to the Head Start model of support for the whole child, the family and the community.

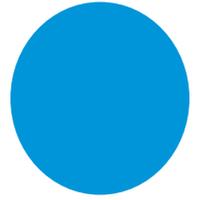
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS



● Special Olympics

- Special Olympics and Head Start: From the Beginning
- Special Olympics Young Athletes
- Results from Young Athletes
- Young Athletes Activities

● Young Athletes Alignment

- Head Start Performance Standards
- Head Start Early Learning Framework

● Additional Young Athletes Resources

- Young Athletes Equipment
- Family Forums
- Healthy Young Athletes
- Getting Started with Young Athletes

SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Special Olympics and Head Start Connected from the Beginning

Eunice Kennedy Shriver's husband was Sargent Shriver a diplomat, activist, and politician. During his time working for the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, he led many lasting initiatives that still impact millions of lives today. He is credited as the driving force behind the creation of the Peace Corps, Job Corps, and Head Start.

In his State of the Union address in 1964, President Johnson declared a "War on Poverty." Soon after, Sargent Shriver, who was the Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity from 1964 to 1968, brought together experts to establish a child development program to help communities meet the needs of disadvantaged preschool children.

"Since its creation in 1965, Head Start has provided comprehensive child development services for 32 million children — services that foster children's growth in social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development, and monitor their progress in these areas to ensure that they are well prepared for kindergarten."

- David Hudson Former Associate Director of Content for the Office of Digital Strategy

In addition to his role in the creation of Head Start, Sargent Shriver was Chairman of the Board Emeritus for Special Olympics and served as President of Special Olympics from 1984-1996, during which he emphasized the expansion of programming to countries outside of the United States. Sargent Shriver believed in the importance of supporting those in need and providing all children with the opportunity to be successful. In this way, he linked together the missions of Special Olympics and Head Start.



Special Olympics Young Athletes

Head Start has led the way as an early education program for low-income children for over 53 years, and in 2017 more than 10% of enrolled children had a disability.

Special Olympics has developed a program to improve early childhood play skills called Young Athletes (YA). This program not only serves children with disabilities. Young Athletes is an inclusive sport and play program for children with and without intellectual disabilities, ages 2 to 7 years old. This makes it a logical fit for any Head Start program looking to expand inclusive physical activities for all the children in the classroom.



Young Athletes introduces basic sport skills, like running, kicking and throwing. Young Athletes offers families, teachers, and people from the community the chance to share the joy of sports with all children. When children of all abilities take part, they all benefit. Children learn how to play with others and develop important skills for learning. Children also learn to share, take turns and follow directions. Young Athletes has simple step-by-step lesson plans that can easily be implemented by Head Start educators in the classroom.

Young Athletes is a fun way for children to get fit. It is important to teach children healthy habits while they are young. This can set the stage for a life of physical activity, friendships and learning. Through Young Athletes, all children, their families, and people in the community can be a part of an inclusive team.

Since its founding, Special Olympics has been built on the premise that lasting change must start with young people. The goal is to inspire a transformation in attitudes of the next generation. In this way, their attitudes and actions toward those with disabilities will be radically different, and more inclusive than ever before. Special Olympics is committed to developing a Unified Generation so that children who “play unified” become better at helping others, standing up for one another and sharing responsibility to make the world more inclusive for everyone.

For children 2 to 7, Young Athletes is the first introduction to the Special Olympics unified movement.



Results From Special Olympics Young Athletes

- **Motor skills.** Children with intellectual disabilities (ID) who took part in an eight-week Young Athletes curriculum saw seven month's development in motor skills. This is compared to a three-month gain in motor skills for children who did not participate.

The proven benefits from Young Athletes continue even after the program ends. At 5 and 10-month follow-ups, children who participated in Young Athletes maintained a 4-month advantage in development.

- **Social, emotional, and learning skills.** Parents and teachers of children who took part in the Young Athletes curriculum said the children learned skills that they will use in elementary school. The children were more enthusiastic and confident. They also played better with other children.

Special Olympics Young Athletes forms a community of support and resources for parents and families

- **Expectations.** Family members say that Young Athletes raised their hopes for their child's future.

"When my baby was born, and I found out that he had an intellectual disability, my world fell apart. At Young Athletes, I see him move about, smiling, mixing freely with others and not holding onto the tail of my skirt. It makes me cry tears of happiness and restores my hope that he can be independent one day. Now I dare to dream and plan to play baseball with my son when he grows up." -Misae

- **Sport readiness.** Young Athletes helps children develop important movement and sport skills. These skills get them ready to take part in sports when they are older.

Children learn how to share, take turns, and follow directions. These skills help children in family, community and school activities.

- **Acceptance.** Inclusive play has a benefit for children without ID as well. It helps them to better understand and accept others.

Young Athletes teaches acceptance at a very young age by creating an inclusive play environment. All children can participate in Young Athletes and all children can experience success!

Favazza, P.C., Siperstein, G.N., Zeisel, S., Odom, S.L., & Moskowitz, A. L. (2011)

Young Athletes intervention: Impact of motor development. Washington, DC: Special Olympics Inc.

Young Athletes Activities

Young Athletes Activities provide skills that can be used in a Head Start program, in the community or at home. There are eight skill activities in the Activity Guide which can be done with one child or a group of children. The skill areas and activities help children learn movements they will use in sports and daily life.

- **Foundational Skills:** Foundational skills help children become aware of themselves and their relationship to their surroundings. They also support basic health and physical fitness. Body awareness, strength, flexibility, coordination and endurance are important for motor and social skills.
- **Walking and Running:** Walking and running are skills that allow children to explore their environment.
- **Balance and Jumping:** Good balance is important for many activities and sports. Balance helps children climb stairs and walk on uneven surfaces, like grass or sand.
- **Trapping and Catching:** Trapping is when children stop a ball with their body and not their hands. Catching is when children use only their hands to stop a ball that is thrown, bounced or rolled. Both skills require children to watch the ball as it moves and hand-eye coordination.
- **Throwing:** Throwing requires strength, flexibility, balance and coordination. Children learn how to grip and let go of an object by tossing something small and light.



- **Striking:** Striking means hitting a ball or object with one's hand or with an object, like a stick, bat, paddle or racket. Striking helps develop the hand-eye coordination skills.
- **Kicking:** Kicking describes when an object is hit with the foot. Kicking requires eye-foot coordination. It also requires the ability to balance, at least for a moment, on one foot.
- **Advanced Sports Skills:** Advanced sports-specific skills require children to use the skills they have developed through YA and put them into a sports context. This requires a high level of connection, strength, power, coordination, teamwork and awareness.

HEAD START PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Young Athletes Alignment

Head Start Performance Standards	Special Olympics Young Athletes Alignment
Subpart A: Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment and Attendance	
1302.11 Determining community strengths, needs, and resources (C) Children with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young Athletes (YA), which serves both children with and without intellectual disabilities, provides relevant training and resources to serve children in the Head Start community.
Subpart B: Program Structure	
1302.20 Determining program structure (b) Comprehensive services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YA programming offers flexibility and fits into a variety of program structures including center-based within Head Start, home-based and in childcare.
Subpart C: Education and Child Development Program Services	
1302.31 Teaching and the learning environment (a) Teaching and the learning environment (b) Effective teaching practices (c) Learning environment (d) Materials and space for learning (e) Promoting learning through approaches to rest, meals, routines, and physical activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young Athletes provides support and materials to teachers through training, continued professional development and equipment. • YA addresses motor skills, social emotional learning skills, expectations of child with intellectual disabilities (ID), sport readiness and acceptance. • YA programming is flexible and can be implemented in a variety of ways. Activities can be adapted depending on the various abilities of the children. • This program can run in a classroom or gym space. Activities can be modified to meet the availability of space. • YA materials are developmentally appropriate for both children with and without disabilities ages 2-7. The equipment is meant to be modified for a variety of skill levels. • YA activities include an assortment of skills that integrate intentional physical movement for a large range of abilities.
1302.32 Curricula (a) Curricula (b) Adaptation (c) Programs are encouraged to partner with outside evaluators in assessing such adaptations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YA is a research-based program that meets the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five • YA is inclusive of children with and without intellectual disabilities. This allows a Head Start program to support children of all needs and ability levels at a location, while also fulfilling requirements to have a minimum 10% of children with disabilities in programming. • Lesson plans, the Young Athletes Activity Guide and in-person trainings are provided to all Head Start locations by local Special Olympics state Programs. • Adaptations for a variety of ability levels are provided in the Young Athletes Activity Guide, including modifications for children with motor challenges and children with autism. • Special Olympics state Programs have staff that can either visit or consult remotely on implementation and assessment questions and strategies.

Head Start Performance Standards	Special Olympics Young Athletes Alignment
Subpart C: Education and Child Development Program Services (continued)	
<p>1302.33 Child screenings and assessments</p> <p>(b) Assessment for individualization (c) Characteristics of screenings and assessments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Olympics provides a Young Athletes Motor Skills Assessment which can be used in addition to current Head Start screenings. • This assessment tracks motor skills development over time. • The Motor Skills Assessment can be done multiple times to see progress in skills. • The Motor Skills Assessment can be easily shared with parents to show the progress of a child’s motor skills.
<p>1302.34 Parent and family engagement in education and child development services</p> <p>(b) Engaging parents and family members</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young Athletes is designed to involve family members. During home visits the YA curriculum and materials can be shared with families to implement programming in the home. • Larger celebration events can be hosted to highlight YA. Families can come observe or volunteer directly with the event. These events include stations highlighting the YA activities, awards, and healthy snacks for all participants.
<p>1302.35 Education in home-based programs</p> <p>(a) Purpose (d) Home-based curriculum (e) Group socialization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young Athletes can be implemented in the home by the families, in addition to the child practicing YA in their classroom. This provides the greatest opportunity for skill development. • The Motor Skills Assessment can be completed by families in the home and shared with Head Start to compare progress of the child. • Families are encouraged to explore Special Olympics beyond YA. There are large state competitions and multiple events hosted in states across the country. Parents and families who attend these events, as either a spectator or volunteer, have the ability to see their child’s potential future. • For a child with a disability, YA provides the opportunity for a child to show what they can do.
Subpart D: Health Program Services	
<p>1302.46 Family support services for health, nutrition, and mental health</p> <p>(a) Parent collaboration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young Athletes provides a guide “Realizing the Bright Future of Your Child with an Intellectual Disability.” • This guide can help in the process of having difficult conversations with parents regarding a child’s disability. • This guide provides families with information on what a diagnosis means, a review of the therapies and support services for children with ID and much more. • YA includes activities that focus on healthy play encouraging children to make healthy eating and social activity choices.
Subpart E: Family and Community Engagement Program Services	
<p>1302.50 Family engagement</p> <p>(a) Purpose (b) Family engagement approach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young Athletes is offered in a multi-layered approach (in the home, at school, at larger events) allowing for a parent to play a key role in their child’s physical development. • YA provides the opportunity for a parent to share their child’s newly gained skills with other family members, increasing positive attitudes toward a child with a disability. • The flexibility of the program allows a family member to insert a game or song from their cultural background into the program.

Head Start Performance Standards	Special Olympics Young Athletes Alignment
Subpart F: Additional Services for Children with Disabilities	
<p>1302.60 Full participation in program services and activities</p> <p><i>A program must ensure enrolled children with disabilities, including but not limited to those who are eligible for services under IDEA19, and their families receive all applicable program services delivered in the least restrictive possible environment and that they fully participate in all program activities.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young Athletes meets the requirements of IDEA that require the least restrictive environment for children with disabilities. • YA is an inclusive program for children with and without intellectual disabilities, therefore children who fall outside of a disability diagnosis but still struggle with gross motor skills can benefit from participation in these skill areas.
<p>1302.61 Additional services for children</p> <p>(a) Additional services for children with disabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young Athletes provides Head Start programs with intentional activities that support the needs of each individual child. Modifications and multiple accommodations for instruction are the cornerstone of Young Athletes.
<p>1302.62 Additional services for parents</p> <p>(a) Parents of all children with disabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Olympics can connect families with local opportunities and programs through its vast network.
Subpart G: Transition Services	
<p>1302.71 Transitions from Head Start to Kindergarten</p> <p>(a) Implementing transition strategies and practices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a Head Start center staff is invited participate in a child’s IEP, YA can be presented as an option to follow a child to Kindergarten. • YA is part of a larger movement in inclusive education called Unified Champion Schools. • Unified Champion Schools provides inclusive sports, leadership and whole school engagement opportunities for students in grades K-12.
Subpart F: Human Resource Management	
<p>1302.92 Training and professional development</p> <p>(a) A program must provide to all new staff, consultants, and volunteers an orientation that focuses on, at a minimum, the goals and underlying philosophy of the program and on the ways they are implemented.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Olympics will train Head Start staff on Young Athletes. Training will include a review of Special Olympics, the Unified Movement, a technical walk through of Young Athletes and the Young Athletes Activity Guide, suggestions on modifications based on child’s need, etc. • Special Olympics will provide training for new Head Start staff annually. • Ongoing professional development will be offered through Special Olympics.
Subpart G: Program Management and Quality Improvement	
<p>1302.102 Achieving program goals</p> <p>(a) Establishing program goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young Athletes will provide goals and strategic plans to assist in development of Head Start program goals.
<p>1303.4 Federal financial assistance, non-federal match, and waiver requirements</p> <p><i>In accordance with section 640(b)32 of the Act, federal financial assistance to a grantee will not exceed 80 percent of the approved total program costs. A grantee must contribute 20 percent as non-federal match each budget period.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Olympics will support Head Start by assisting with the recruitment and placement of volunteers to meet VIK needs. • Special Olympics will provide the equipment kits to run YA.

HEAD START EARLY LEARNING OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK

Young Athletes Alignment

**Young Athletes Alignment Begins at age 24 months*

Young Athletes is proven to positively affect participants' motor and social skills and will be a powerful tool for Head Start centers to use and implement. Young Athletes can support Head Start Centers in fulfilling required standards in five of the central domains from the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework

1. Approaches to Learning
2. Social and Emotional Development
3. Language and Literacy
4. Cognition
5. Perceptual Motor and Physical Development

Approaches to Learning

- Young Athletes provides a space for movement and exploring athletic ability in a welcoming environment.
- Children are encouraged to be curious, learn from others, and explore how movement works for them.
- Young Athletes provides an early opportunity for children to take turns, wait for others, and try again in a different way if an activity is not going well.
- Group play is encouraged each time children participate in Young Athletes.

Social & Emotional Development

- Young Athletes can be a child's first opportunity to participate in structured physical activity.
- Children connect with adults and their peers leading the activities by mimicking their movements .
- Children with and without intellectual disabilities play together to better understand each other.
- Children are valued for their talents and abilities.
- Children are also recognized as leaders.



Young Athletes Alignment to Head Start Early Learning Framework (continued)

**Young Athletes Alignment Begins at age 24 months*

Language and Literacy

- A key component in Young Athletes is the use of descriptive language.
- During the activity an adult leader may ask a child to follow multiple steps, or ask the child to repeat the instructions given.
- An adult leader may ask a child to “go around” a cone or “on” the balance beam to increase understanding.
- An added benefit of Young Athletes is the child learning shapes, numbers and colors through active play.

Cognition

- When a child participates in Young Athletes they are encouraged to experiment and be creative with their movements and equipment.
- Young Athletes is consistent with verbal cues and demonstrations.
- Repetition helps children learn and master new skills.
- In Young Athletes, an adult leader makes note of a child’s ability to remember lyrics, activities, body parts or other important concepts.
- Counting is a key component in Young Athletes. An adult leader may call out scores or ask the children to count during an activity.
- Young Athletes offers activities that help children become aware of themselves and their relationship to their peers and surroundings.

Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development

- Young Athletes supports the development of gross motor skills.
- Games and activities included in Young Athletes help children with movements they will use in sports and daily life.
- Young Athletes promotes inclusive group play.
- Young Athletes assists with body awareness, strength, flexibility, and endurance.
- Young Athletes can be adapted to meet the individual needs of each child.
- Activities are in order of development from basic to more complex skills.



NATIONAL HEAD START ASSOCIATION

ADDITIONAL YOUNG ATHLETES RESOURCES

Young Athletes Equipment

Young Athletes activities use equipment to help children focus on each skill. Special Olympics will make Young Athletes training materials and resources readily available for local Head Start centers to implement.

The following equipment is used to conduct Young Athletes activities.

Balance Beam



Paddle



Small Foam Ball



Floor Markers



Bean Bags



Scarf



Sport Cones



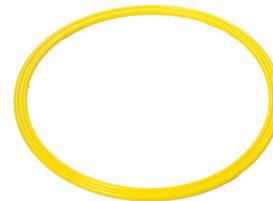
Slow Motion Ball



Large Plastic Blocks



Hoops



Plastic Dowel



Family Forums

Family forums involve bringing together families that participate in Special Olympics activities. They offer a setting for parents and families to gain access to health information, resources and support. Family Forums address questions and concerns of local family members. A Family Forum can be hosted by Head Start with the support of the local Special Olympics state office.

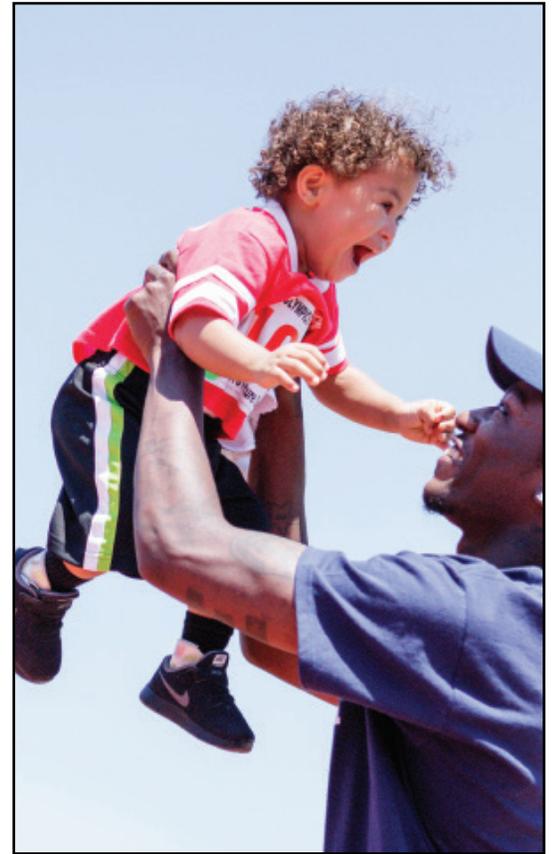
Topics can include:

- Advocating for your child's rights and access to services
- Medical and dental care for children
- Accessing follow-up care
- How to identify the right professional for your child
- Learning through play
- Healthy sibling relationships
- Promoting independence at an early age

Healthy Young Athletes

At more than 1.4 million free health screening clinics in more than 100 countries, the Special Olympics Healthy Athletes program offers health services and information to athletes in dire need. In the process, Special Olympics has become the largest global public health organization dedicated to serving people with intellectual disabilities.

Healthy Athletes has adapted screenings for Young Athletes in the following areas: Health Promotion, fitness, optical, and physicals. Special Olympics can bring these screenings to local Head Start chapters free of cost. The screenings provide families with information on their child's healthcare needs and referrals for follow-up care.



Getting Started with Young Athletes

1. Contact Jennifer Hansen, Special Olympics Young Athletes Manager
JHansen@specialolympics.org, 202-715-1154
2. Jennifer will connect you with a local Special Olympics representative in your state
3. Receive Young Athletes training, materials, and equipment from Special Olympics
4. Begin your new inclusive Young Athletes programming