



## Getting Started Checklist

# Elementary School Unified Clubs

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, or something else, it should have goals of promoting acceptance, socially inclusive friendships, and student leadership. The club will become an influential core group of students who promote social inclusion and provide input to the Unified Champion Schools leadership team. Be sure the club includes students with and without intellectual disabilities and that all students have meaningful roles within the club.

- 1. Schedule:** Establish a schedule that works with your school’s structure and schedule. Consider scheduling meetings before school, after school, or during lunch based on student availability to participate.
- 2. 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. The club should give students leadership skills they need to model unity and respect and the opportunities to practice them.
- 3. Activities:** All activities of the unified club should give students leadership skills that increase empathy, acceptance, and respect, as well as opportunities to practice those skills by having meaningful roles within the club. The activities that can reach this goal are limitless. One example is club members helping adults plan parts of a whole school engagement activity. Another example is training students how to deliver morning announcements, lead new student tours, or mentor new students, then giving them opportunities to practice their new skills. Just remember that students with and without intellectual disabilities are capable of learning and practicing these skills. Be sure to seek the club’s input as student representatives on the leadership team.
- 4. 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.
  - **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.



### 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.