



The Special Olympics
Unified Champion Schools® Program
**Elementary School
Playbook**



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**

Acknowledgments

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

AUTHORS

Ashley Leidholt, Special Olympics North America, Education Consultant

Molly McCloskey, Special Olympics North America, Education Consultant

EDITORS

Kat Butler, Special Olympics North America

Kendra Cummings, Special Olympics North America

Leigha Bannon, Special Olympics North America

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Abe Cruz, Design Consultant

CONTRIBUTORS

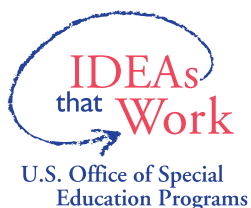
Brian Quinn, Special Olympics North America

Natalie Newell, Special Olympics North America

Stephanie McKeon, Special Olympics North America

All resources within this playbook can be found at:

resources.specialolympics.org/community-building/youth-and-school/ucs-playbook-resources



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Overview



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
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What is the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Program?

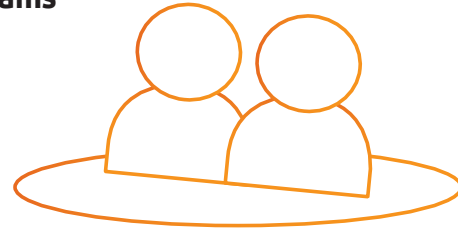
The Unified Champion Schools program promotes social inclusion by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities through sports and other activities. Students who “Play Unified” become better at helping others, standing up for each other, and sharing responsibility.

The Unified Champion Schools activities are based on the idea that lasting change must start with youth. In elementary schools, adults foster student development through unifying programming experiences which build sports, leadership, and social skills. For example, students might be co-leaders of Unified Sports activities for their peers or younger students, lead book discussions that promote leadership qualities, or help plan a school wide inclusion awareness event. 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 Programs

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



Bunker Hill Elementary
Washington, DC



Mary A. Otando Elementary
Yuma, Arizona

“It’s more important to be kind, than it is to be beautiful, than it is to be intelligent, than it is to be rich.”

– Lisa, teacher at Bunker Hill Elementary, DC

Socially Inclusive Schools – Setting the Vision

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 entrance, 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 peers who recently represented the school on a Unified team at the 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, cheer, and give encouragement alongside each other. 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.



Check out this video to learn more!



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.**

1. Provide a positive school climate free of bullying.

Context matters. A school’s overall 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 fosters **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.

2. 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 model 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.

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

The positive, socially inclusive environment evident in Unified Champion Schools programming 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 learning and development, such as **communication and problem solving skills, critical thinking, and teamwork**. As diverse students interact in socially inclusive learning activities, they develop the foundation for effective leadership skills.



4. 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. The Unified Champion Schools model promotes physical health and fitness by providing a variety of **Unified Sports and fitness** activities.

5. 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.**

6. Cultivate partnerships with parents and the community.

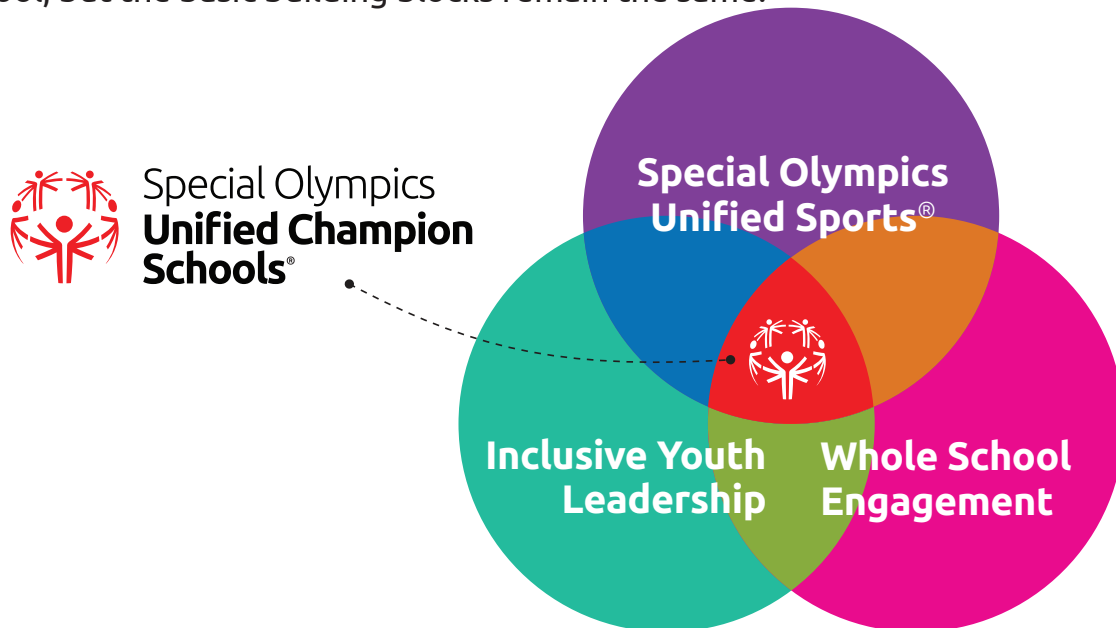
Without a doubt, the role that families play in a child's education is critical. When families partner with schools, students attend school more regularly, perform better academically, and demonstrate more positive attitudes and behaviors. When other community members lend their support as well, the 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.



↓ You can find the most recent research on Unified Champion Schools® programming [here](#).

How Does the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Model Work?

Becoming a Unified Champion School is designed to be woven into the fabric of the school, enhancing current efforts, providing rich opportunities that lead to meaningful change, and 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.



A Unified Champion School implements 3 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 3 components of Unified Champion Schools:

- 1 Special Olympics Unified Sports®:** Opportunities for students with and without intellectual disabilities to participate in a variety of fitness, play, and sports activities alongside one another.
- 2 Inclusive Youth Leadership:** Students with and without intellectual disabilities working with adult support to learn about inclusion and lead advocacy, awareness, inclusion and other Unified Champion Schools activities.
- 3 Whole School Engagement:** Awareness and education activities that promote respect and social inclusion and reach the majority of students and school staff members.



Tips for Starting 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 schools with quality Unified Champion Schools programming, the climate is 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 leadership team helps ensure the Unified Champion Schools program is 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 3 components

Creating a socially inclusive school makes social inclusion a way of life. Inclusive opportunities should incorporate a combination of the 3 components and multiple opportunities for all students to be engaged in a variety of ways.



Learn More About the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Program



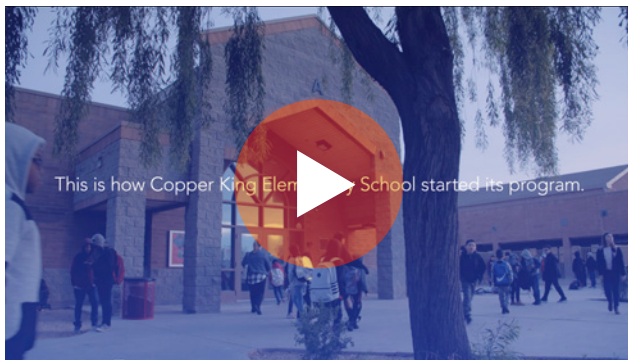
Click on the videos below
to learn more!



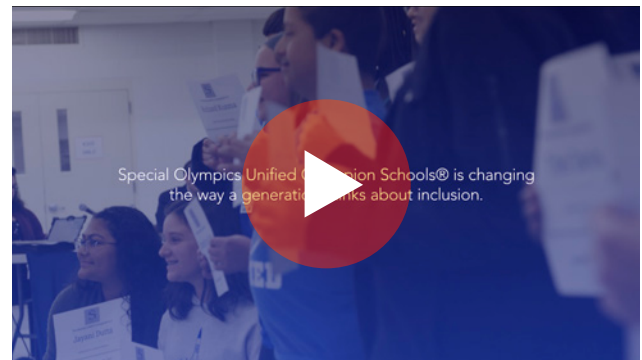
Bullying Prevention by the Numbers



Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®



Unified Beginnings: Copper King Elementary School, AZ



Unified Beginnings: Sayreville School District, NJ

“ You can see the change in the students... they’re having fun because of what we are doing here.”

– Marcus, Teacher at Sayerville School District, NJ



Getting Started with a Leadership Team

Why is a Leadership Team Important?

One of the 1st steps to implementing the Unified Champion Schools program is to bring together a team to lead the work. This may be a new team or an existing team that takes on this role. The team will be responsible for establishing the vision and overarching goals for the school. It will coordinate early stages of implementation and work with the leaders of specific activities. The team will also monitor the success of the strategy with an eye toward continuous improvement.

When a leadership team guides implementation of the Unified Champion Schools strategy

- Schools have **more robust programming** than those without a leadership team.
- Schools report **more involvement of community members**.
- General and special education teachers **work together** more often.
- The strategy is **more likely to be sustained** from year to year because more people are engaged.
- The strategy is **integrated** with other school priorities.



Words of wisdom often shared by older youth leaders involved in Special Olympics:

“Nothing about us without us.”



Establishing a Leadership Team

1. Recruit team members

Strive to include diverse members including students with and without intellectual disabilities. Students may not be able to attend meetings, but can provide input through lunch bunches or meeting with an adult member of the team. Remember to include general and special education teachers along with an administrator and other staff members like the school counselor. The team will also benefit by including parents and community members even virtually.

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.

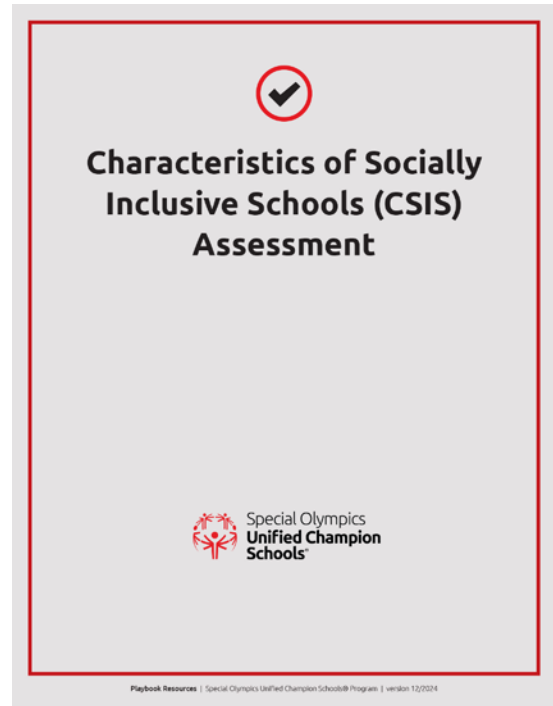
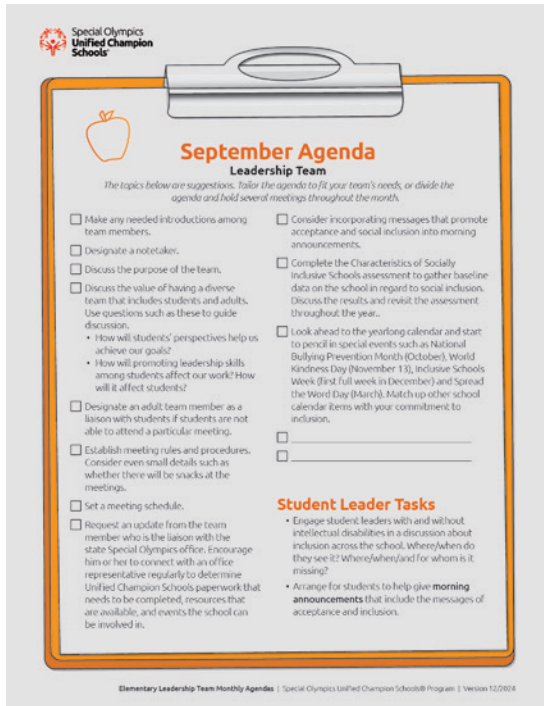
Before the team can plan how to implement the Unified Champion Schools model, it is important to consider how socially inclusive the school is currently. This will not only help the team prioritize goals and first steps, but will also serve as a baseline for measuring progress. Use the Characteristics of Socially Inclusive Schools (CSIS) Assessment to gather relevant data.

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

Consider how the 3 components of the Unified Champion Schools program (Unified Sports, inclusive youth leadership, and whole school engagement) will help your school work toward your 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. Be sure to monitor your progress and return to your assessment to check progress.



Resources to Get You Started



↓ [Playbook Resources:](#)
Use the monthly agenda samples found here to help guide your meetings.

↓ [Playbook Resources:](#) Use the Characteristics of Socially Inclusive Schools assessment found here as a pre and post assessment of your school's social inclusion.

Enhancements 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.

Special Olympics Unified Sports[®] & Fitness



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools[®]**



Special Olympics Unified Sports® & Fitness

Special Olympics Unified Sports bring students with and without intellectual disabilities together in inclusive sports and fitness activities. Examples include such things as Unified Physical Education or Unified Fitness, sports teams for training and competition, and Special Olympics Young Athletes and Junior Athletes.

Why is it important?

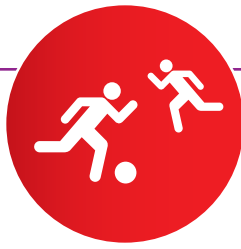
Unified Sports:

- 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 across the school community.

Goals of Inclusive Unified Sports

- **Friendship and socialization:** Students with and without intellectual disabilities have opportunities for positive social interactions and the development of long-lasting friendship.
- **Meaningful inclusion:** Each student is an active participant and has a valued role on a team or in a sports or fitness activity.
- **Skill development:** Students 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 benefit from physical and mental challenges by participating in a variety of sports activities.





Special Olympics Unified Sports® Styles of Play

There are 3 basic styles of play in Unified Sports. It is up to each school to choose which style or combination of styles will be most beneficial for its students. Many elementary schools do not have an existing structure for competitive team sports. Since sports are the foundation for the Unified Champion Schools program, it is essential that each school provide 1 or more Unified Sports opportunities regardless of the style of play.

Recreation

- This is the most flexible model and is the one used most by elementary schools 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

Player Development

- Students with higher skill levels might serve as mentors, assisting teammates of lower skill levels in developing sports-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 bocce team is one example

Learning and Competing

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.

Junior Athletes

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

Unified Sports

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

Unified Sports & Fitness Ideas

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!

Unified Physical Education (PE): 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 resources are based on the national PE standards and empower students to create an inclusive school environment.

Special Olympics Fitness: Special Olympics Fitness includes 3 models, and complementary resources for implementation of fitness-focused Unified experiences. The activities promote optimal health and performance through physical activity, nutrition, and hydration.

Basketball Buddies: Host an informal after school Unified basketball program that focuses on basic skills and teamwork. Check with your local high school for students who might be interested in assisting.

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/Rolling Club: Invite school staff members and students with and without intellectual disabilities to walk/roll 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's a great opportunity for students to strike up conversations with peers with whom they might not otherwise have the opportunity to socialize.

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 a Unified bocce group.



↓ **Playbook Resources:** Download the **Getting Started Checklists** to help you implement **Unified Sports**. Then use the **Action Plan** template to track your progress.



Special Olympics Young Athletes

Special Olympics Young Athletes Year Long Lesson Plans are a sport and play resource for children with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) in early childhood and elementary school. It incorporates all 3 components of the Unified Champion Schools model.

These lessons are designed to be used 3 times a week for 30 minutes a day. The lessons are aligned to Common Core and SHAPE standards and incorporate literacy, math, and social emotional skills.

Each lesson is broken down into 4 separate parts:

Leadership Time: Each week will focus on a different social emotional skill and connect to a read aloud or discussion. This mini lesson can be incorporated into any part of your day and allows students opportunities to be leaders.

Strength & Endurance: This warm up gets students ready for the activities and can be used throughout the day as mini brain break times.

Focus Skill & Game: A specific sports-related skill will be explicitly taught to students and they will have an opportunity to practice through different activities and games.

Cool Down: Similar to strength and endurance, this allows students to cool down and reset their body for the next thing. This can also be used as a brain break throughout the day.

All lesson resources and sports equipment are included for classrooms interested in starting this program. Reach out to your Special Olympics area staff member to learn more about how to start this in your school or classroom.



Additional information about **Special Olympics Young Athletes** may be found on our website, [here](#).



Tips for Success: Special Olympics Unified Sports®

✔ Use people-first language

Always put the student 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 include team-building or “get-acquainted” activities as part of Unified Sports. Participating together in sports and fitness activities are a great way for all students to make new friends.

✔ Promote leadership

Involve students in leadership roles such as setting up skill stations, designing an obstacle course, or leading warm-up drills.

✔ Keep it positive

Avoid elimination activities and having students pick teams. No one wants to be “out” or the last player chosen.

✔ Help students track their progress

Use demonstrations and exhibitions to show how students with and without intellectual disabilities have improved their sport and fitness skills.

✔ Generate enthusiasm

If your school has a Unified intramural team or interscholastic sports team, include the game dates and team achievements in the morning announcements. Invite students, families and staff to show their support at rallies or as Fans in the Stands.

✔ 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 share their experiences with others.

✔ Share events and accomplishments

Use the school’s website, newsletter or social media to post photos, videos and stories of Unified Sports events and activities.



Inclusive Youth Leadership



Special Olympics
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Inclusive Youth Leadership

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

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.

Goals of Inclusive Youth Leadership

- **Everyone leads:** Students representing the diversity of the student body are engaged in leadership roles.
- **Everyone contributes:** All students have equitable opportunities to contribute to the school community in meaningful ways.
- **Everyone has a voice:** Administrators and teachers 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 gain the skills, knowledge, and disposition to become advocates for themselves and their peers.

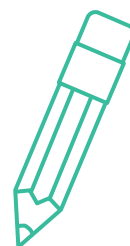




Inclusive Youth Leadership What Does It Look Like in Action?



Students with and without intellectual disabilities leading warm-up drills for Unified PE classes.



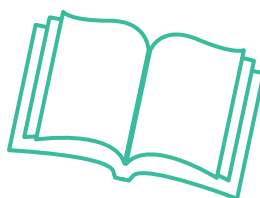
Older students with and without intellectual disabilities acting as mentors for younger students.



Students planning and leading whole school engagement activities with adult assistance.



Students with and without intellectual disabilities serving as leaders in school activities like safety patrol, student council, and morning announcements.



Inclusive Youth Leadership Ideas

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—1 with and 1 without an intellectual disability—is an effective approach.

Involve students in planning Unified Champion Schools 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.

Promote student leadership during Unified Sports experiences.

Have students:

- weigh in on which sports they want to do each semester.
- set up and run skill stations for sports practices or field days.
- 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. Engage a group of students with and without intellectual disabilities in leadership skills training. Seek input from this group to the leadership team about goals, activities, and their experiences.

Start a peer mentoring program: Pair older students with and without intellectual disabilities with younger students. Have the mentors help the younger students complete whole school activities or train for Special Olympics competitions.



↓ [Playbook Resources:](#)

- Incorporate **leadership skills** into the curriculum.
- Download the **Getting Started Checklists** to help you implement **Inclusive Youth Leadership**. Then use the **Action Plan** template to track your progress.



Tips for Success: Inclusive Youth Leadership

✔ Involve diverse students

Spread leadership opportunities to a wide range of students including those who might not typically be considered leaders. 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 mindset

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, newsletters, or social media to share photos, videos, and stories of social inclusion activities.



Whole School Engagement



Special Olympics
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Whole School Engagement

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

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.

Goals of Whole School Engagement

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



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.

Recess

- **Inclusive Recess:** Work with your school to set up an inclusive 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.

↓ [Playbook Resources](#): Download the **Getting Started Checklists** to help you implement **Whole School Engagement**. Then use the **Action Plan** template to track your progress.



Tips for Success: Whole School Engagement

- ✔ **Start small!:** Make sure your first activity is manageable and then build on that success.
- ✔ **Build on your strengths:** Consider enhancing 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 social and emotional learning 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?"



↓ Downloadable Resources

These PDFs are available to download at the [resources webpage: Elementary School Playbook](#).

Unified Champion Schools® Getting Started Resources:

- 3 Component Action Plans
- Elementary Leadership Team Monthly Agendas
- Characteristics of Socially Inclusive Schools Assessment
- Social Inclusion Scale (student, family, and staff versions)

Unified Sports Checklists:

- Unified Sports Action Plan
- Checklist for Unified Sports Competitive & Player Development Styles
- Checklist for Unified Sports Recreation Style
- Checklist for Unified Sports Day or Festival
- Unified Classroom
- Young Athlete Resources

Inclusive Youth Leadership Checklists:

- Inclusive Youth Leadership Action Plan
- Getting Started with Inclusive Youth Leadership
- Leadership Skills Curriculum
- Checklist for Elementary School Unified Clubs
- Inclusive Youth Leadership Unified Classroom

Whole School Engagement Checklists:

- Whole School Engagement Action Plan
- Getting Started with Whole School Engagement
- Checklist for Whole School Assemblies
- Checklist for Spread the Word Campaign
- Checklist for “Fans in the Stands”
- Checklist for Unified Sports Day or Festival
- Whole School Engagement Unified Classroom

Glossary

Co-leaders/Co-leadership

2 or more people who communicate and collaborate to achieve a shared goal. In Special Olympics, co-leadership can take many forms. 1 example is when 2 people decide to start a Unified Club together. While the 2 people may have different responsibilities within the club, they both work toward the same goal of leading a successful club. With Unified Champion Schools® programming, the goal is for 1 co-leader to be a student with an intellectual disability and the other to be a student without an intellectual disability.

Fans in the Stands

A formal way of encouraging students to support and cheer on students with and without intellectual disabilities at Unified Sports or Special Olympics events.

Inclusive Youth Leadership

Students with and without intellectual disabilities working together to lead and plan advocacy, awareness, and other Special Olympics-related inclusive activities throughout the school year. Examples include such things as Unified Clubs or a similar type of inclusive student group. The clubs are supported by an adult liaison and offer leadership opportunities and/or training for students with and without disabilities.

Special Olympics Activities & Lessons Educational Resources

A number of lessons, activities, and resources that teach students of all ages about respect and acceptance of differences, while providing them with the tools to serve as active agents for change in not only their school, but also the community.

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools model is a comprehensive program of the Unified Schools strategy that combines Unified Sports, inclusive youth leadership, and whole school engagement to create the greatest impact. This model is implemented in the United States.

Special Olympics Unified Sports®

A fully-inclusive sports or fitness program that combines an approximately equal number of students with and without intellectual disabilities. Examples include such things as interscholastic Unified Sports, Unified PE, or Unified intramurals. These activities occur throughout the school year with the support of an adult coach, and include opportunities for competition.

Spread the Word Campaign

A set of resources and tools to help students eradicate the hurtful and harmful use of language that demeans and diminishes others, and encourages pledging acts of inclusion.

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Program Leadership Team

A group that takes responsibility to design, implement, and sustain socially inclusive strategies in the school. It is generally comprised of at least 1 special education student and 1 general education student; at least 1 special education teacher and 1 general education teacher; at least 1 school staff member/counselor/social worker; and the principal, assistant principal, or other school-level administrator.

Whole School Engagement

Awareness and education activities that promote inclusion and reach the majority of the school population. Examples include Spread the Word Campaigns, pep rallies or Fans in the Stands for Unified Sports teams, Respect Campaigns, and student fundraising. Ideally, students with and without disabilities are involved in planning and leading awareness events with the support of an adult in the school.

Young Athletes

The Young Athletes program was created to reach out to children with and without intellectual disabilities ages 2 to 7 and introduce them to the world of sport, with the goal of preparing them for Special Olympics training and competition. It is conducted as an inclusive program, and is often part of a Unified Champion School at the elementary or preschool level.



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools[®]**