



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



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**

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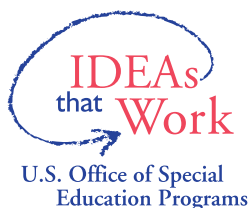
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All resources within this playbook can be found at:

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



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Overview



Special Olympics
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Why Do We Need Middle Level Schools to be Socially Inclusive?

Creating an inclusive, educational atmosphere that ensures every middle school student becomes a healthy, productive, and ethical individual is a central focus of middle grades education. Accomplishing this requires intentional planning and implementation of strong collaborations and initiatives that provide equitable and quality opportunities for all.

Every day, millions of diverse, rapidly changing 10- to 15-year-olds make critical and complex life choices and form the attitudes, values, and dispositions that will direct their behavior as adults. They deserve an education that will enhance their healthy growth as lifelong learners, ethical and democratic citizens, and increasingly competent, self-sufficient individuals who are optimistic about the future and prepared to succeed in our ever-changing world. (Edwards, 2015, p. 12)

Successfully meeting the needs of all students depends largely on the school climate, which affects every aspect of students' school experiences. This ranges from their social and emotional well-being to the overall quality of their educational experiences. A positive school climate creates the necessary conditions where diversity is valued, equity is demanded, and every student is a contributing member.

As reported by Kenneth Brighton (2007) in *Coming of Age: The Education and Development of Young Adolescents*, "Middle school students simply learn best in an atmosphere where their social and emotional needs are addressed." A key aspect of an effective school climate is the way in which students with intellectual disabilities (ID) are provided opportunities to engage in the normal life experiences of school. The sense of belonging or connectedness within the school is particularly important for students with intellectual disabilities and is associated with several important educational outcomes, including regular school attendance (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009a).

Yet, even in middle schools with policies and procedures that provide for academic and physical inclusion, students with ID often are disengaged from school-based, social opportunities. Academically, half of



students with ID spend less than half of their day in classes with peers without ID (McFarland et al., 2019). Also, students with disabilities tend to participate less in school-sponsored sports teams, clubs, and extracurricular or exploratory opportunities than their peers without disabilities, often experiencing social isolation within the school setting (Coster et. al, 2013).

Isolation manifests itself in negative ways across the school setting. Consider the following:

- Bullying and other mean-spirited actions can have violent and tragic outcomes: **71% of young people say they have seen bullying in their schools** (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007). Students with disabilities are at greater risk for being victimized than their peers without disabilities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009b; Rose, Espelage, & Monda-Amaya, 2009).
- **Verbal and social bullying represent the most prevalent types of bullying during the middle grades**, with the highest rates of occurrence reported among sixth graders (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009a).
- **If the norms in a peer group support socially irresponsible behavior (e.g., bullying), students are less likely to be involved in school activities:** and their sense of connectedness to school can suffer, along with achievement levels and health behaviors (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009a).

This can be turned around with attention to social inclusion, and the team structure in middle level schools can help all students to be included through the family-type focus of these teams.

How Does the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Model Impact Youth?

“Unified Champion Schools is something I wish I had been a part of when I was in school. Just seeing the growth in our athletes and partners is eye opening. The skills they are learning now by creating such an inclusive environment will continue to help them in their day-to-day lives through adulthood, so the fact they are learning it as middle schoolers is fantastic.”

— Middle School Administrator

“When I came to Special Olympics it was the first time I met my new friends. Special Olympics takes you to places I’ve never been to.”

– Student with an intellectual disability

“Students...have learned life skills such as acceptance of others, celebrating the unique abilities of others, and compassion towards others. Given the systemic change we are implementing...there is a mindset of inclusivity for all...and the result can be seen as students of all abilities now working together in more settings than before.”

– Middle School Teacher

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. As the data below demonstrates, a Unified Champion School equitably supports students with and without intellectual disabilities and promotes meaningful opportunities for every student to contribute.

91%

91% of liaisons indicated UCS programming **reduces bullying**, teasing, and the use of offensive language in school.

85%

85% of liaisons indicated UCS programming **increase attendance** of students with ID.

95%

95% of UCS liaisons believe UCS programming created more **socially inclusive environments**.

82%

Students who participate in the UCS program feel more supported by their teachers and peers, have higher levels of **grit**...and are more **empathetic** and **compassionate**.

For the most recent data for Unified Champion Schools, visit Special Olympics [Outreach & Messaging webpage](#).

Evaluations conducted by the Center for Social Development and Education University of Massachusetts Boston, 2021

What is the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Strategy?

Special Olympics provides quality sports opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities across the globe. Today, Special Olympics serves as a driving force for social inclusion, with the vision of creating a world where people with intellectual disabilities are welcomed in their communities and join with others to learn, work, compete, and play, having the same rights and opportunities as others.

Since 2008, Special Olympics has been actively engaged in the development and implementation of a school-based strategy, supported and endorsed by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs at the U.S. Department of Education, to promote and increase the social inclusion of youth with intellectual disabilities in schools across the country.

Youth and adults working collaboratively in an inclusive setting create socially inclusive schools. Unified Champion Schools® activities 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.



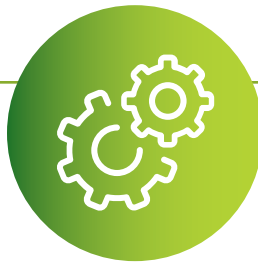
With the Unified Champion Schools® Model:

- Students with and without intellectual disabilities are provided 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 of play.
- Students with and without intellectual disabilities are provided opportunities to interact with their peers and to personally learn and grow.

According to *This We Believe*, the Association for Middle Level Education's landmark position paper (2020), successful middle grades schools are characterized by the active engagement of students and teachers. Successful middle grades practices purposefully empower young adolescents to assume this role, one that includes self-advocacy.

The Unified Champion Schools strategy addresses the social-emotional developmental needs of young adolescents to belong to a peer group while welcoming and benefitting from positive relationships with adults.

At its core, the Unified Champion Schools strategy is about unifying all students, student and teacher collaboration where students learn to be leaders, and sports as a catalyst for social inclusion and change.



How Does the Unified Champion Schools® Model Align with Successful Middle Schools?

How can we expect students to **develop leadership and interpersonal skills** and put them into action if opportunities are not provided within schools?

How can we expect students to **interact with, support, and grow to know and appreciate fellow students** of diverse abilities if they are not provided inclusive opportunities?

Middle level experts assert that effective middle level schools **must provide programs and opportunities** that support this growth.

The Association for Middle Level Education's *This We Believe* affirms that an education for young adolescents must be:

- Developmentally responsive
- Challenging
- Empowering
- Equitable

The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform identifies the following criteria for high-performing middle schools:

- Academically Excellent
- Developmentally Responsive
- Socially Equitable

Furthermore, the National Forum believes that to achieve the high level of performance identified above, middle schools must establish norms, structures, and organizational arrangements to support movement toward excellence.

The focus on schools that are socially equitable provides a direct correlation between research on effective middle schools and Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools. The study *Addressing Schools to Watch® domains of developmental responsiveness and social equity in middle grades through Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®* provides a connection between the characteristics of successful middle schools and the model.

[Find the easy-to-read summary document at the resources webpage: Middle School Playbook.](#)

How does the Unified Champion Schools® Strategy Support the Developmental Needs of Young Adolescents?

“Honestly, it’s been the highlight of my year. I’ve gotten to know so many people. And I feel like it’s helped me as a person...I’ve gotten more patient...more understanding. And I’ve broadened my education on the subject of disabilities and special needs.”

– Student without an intellectual disability

Individual youth between the ages of 10 and 15 experience various rates and times of development. However, as a group they reflect important developmental characteristics that have implications for their education.



The Unified Champion Schools strategy supports the development of young adolescents in a variety of ways. With the emphasis on Unified Sports and wellness, the Unified Champion Schools strategy addresses the following physical characteristics. Young adolescents:

- Undergo bodily changes that may cause awkward, uncoordinated movements.
- Need daily physical activity because of increased energy, and, not actively engaged, often lack fitness.
- Need to release energy often resulting in sudden, apparently meaningless outbursts of energy.



Young adolescents struggle with the issues of right and wrong, and the foundation of the Unified Champion Schools strategy supports youth in a way that encourages them to make moral/ethical decisions regarding interactions with students who have intellectual disabilities. Young adolescents:

- Begin to make principled choices about how to treat one another.
- Develop their own personal values; however, they usually embrace the values of parents or key adults.
- Tend to be idealistic and possess a strong sense of fairness.
- Struggle with making sound moral and ethical choices.



While the Unified Champion Schools program is generally not considered an academic program, it addresses some of the intellectual characteristics of young adolescents through decision-making and leadership opportunities. These youth:

- Need to have learning connected to real life situations.
- Are inquisitive about adults and are keen observers of them.
- Begin to think critically about the world around them.
- Move from concrete to abstract thinking.
- Prefer active to passive learning.



Social and emotional learning provides a strong foundation for Unified Champion Schools activities. It addresses a significant, developmental characteristic of young adolescents who:

- Are very sensitive to feedback and criticism.
- Tend to be self-conscious and seek acceptance.
- Are socially vulnerable as they are developing their beliefs, attitudes, and values.
- Seek to become more independent.
- Are highly sensitive to personal criticism and embarrass easily.
- Desire recognition for their positive efforts and achievements.

As you implement the Unified Champion Schools strategy, be aware of how you are addressing the developmental needs of young adolescents. More information on the developmental characteristics of young adolescents can be found in the Association for Middle Level Education’s foundational document *This We Believe*.

Position Paper

Below are excerpts from the journal article *Addressing Schools to Watch® domains of developmental responsiveness and social equity in middle grades through Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools* published in the April 2023 issue of AMLE's *Middle School Journal*.

“Middle schools are increasingly diverse places where students see and interact with peers different from themselves. However, **students with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) have few opportunities to interact**—they are together infrequently within extracurricular settings and the classroom.”

“For students with and without ID to appreciate and understand one another’s differences, they must first be able to interact with one another. **Physical inclusion is a necessary prerequisite to social inclusion**, but social inclusion presents as a challenge for schools when half of students with ID spend less than half of their day in classes with peers without ID. Being able to work, learn, and play alongside peers without ID provides normative school experiences to students with ID. **This is especially important at the middle level, a time when young adolescents are placing increased value on social norms, identity, and relationships**; and students excluded from such settings can face “othering” from peers. For students with ID, who are often viewed with negative perceptions and attitudes from peers, social inclusion is critical to their positive school experience.

This study shows how **Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® can increase developmental responsiveness and social equity in middle schools**. This can be done through the meaningful inclusion of middle school students with and without ID.



How does the Unified Champion Schools (UCS) program do that?

1. UCS creates positive school experiences for all students.
2. UCS connects with AMLE’s 5 essential attributes of education for middle school students.
 - Responsive
 - Challenging
 - Empowering
 - Equitable
 - Engaging
3. UCS meets the developmental and social needs and interests of middle school students of all abilities.
4. UCS meets STW Program criteria for high-performing schools.
 - Academic Excellence
 - Developmentally Responsive
 - Socially Equitable

How does the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Strategy Work?

The Unified Champion Schools strategy is designed to be woven into the fabric of the school, enhancing current efforts and providing rich opportunities that lead to the creation of a socially inclusive middle level school that supports and engages all learners. What a Unified Champion School looks like can vary greatly from school to school, based on the needs, goals, schedules, and other factors unique to each middle level school, but the basic building blocks remain the same.

A Unified Champion School implements **3 specific components**, all of which are best integrated with the others in a cohesive effort to increase social inclusion throughout the school. Just as an integrated curriculum in middle level schools has long been recognized as a foundation for effective learning, research on the Unified Champion Schools® model has identified that schools in which all 3 components are interconnected and implemented become socially inclusive to a higher degree.



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**



3 Components of the Unified Champion Schools® Model

1 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 Unified Sports, Unified Physical Education or Unified Fitness, and Unified intramurals. These activities occur throughout the school year with the support of an adult coach and may include opportunities for competition.

2 Inclusive Youth Leadership: Students with and without intellectual disabilities working together to lead and plan advocacy, awareness and inclusive activities throughout the school year. Examples include Unified Clubs, leadership classes, inclusive Student Councils, National Junior Honor Society, or similar types of inclusive student groups. The clubs are supported by an adult liaison and offer leadership opportunities or training for students with and without intellectual disabilities.

3 Whole School Engagement: Awareness and education activities that promote inclusion and reach the majority of the school population. All students have opportunities to participate through team or school-wide activities, and students with and without intellectual disabilities are involved with planning and leading awareness events with the support of an adult. Examples include Spread the Word Campaigns, pep rallies or Fans in the Stands for Unified Sports teams, or a Unified Sports Festival.

Learn More about the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Program

Unified Champion Schools Success Stories

The following videos and descriptions reflect how students and adults at middle level schools across the country have implemented the Unified Champion Schools strategy in powerful and effective ways. While each might look a little different, all are committed, socially inclusive middle schools.

DETROIT, MICHIGAN

Meet Krishtan

Since he started participating in Unified Champion Schools activities, Krishtan has thrived. His father and teachers have witnessed him grow into an active student leader with a bright future in whatever he decides to pursue.



“Special Olympics is a type of community where you can meet new people that you never met before, and you can do things that you’ve never done before.”

– Krishtan, Student with an intellectual disability

Learn More about the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Program



EDINA, MINNESOTA

South View Middle School

South View Middle School is a Special Olympics Unified Champion School in Edina, Minnesota. When Unified programs first arrived at South View, first-year teacher Jenni Schaefer was initially overwhelmed. But her students quickly embraced inclusion and began to drive the programming. Unified programming started in advisory, moved to electives and PE, and eventually became the foundation of the entire school. Today, the spirit of inclusion is “palpable” and according to PE teacher Colin Bender, because of Unified programming South View “isn’t a building: it’s a community.”

**“ [South View] isn’t a building:
it’s a community.”**

– Colin, Physical Education Teacher

Learn More about the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Program

OMAHA, NEBRASKA

Millard North Middle School

Millard North Middle School, located in Omaha, Nebraska, has focused on improving their inclusive youth leadership opportunities and whole school engagement experiences. Their Unified Club's biggest event is working together to organize the annual BeKind week. The whole school does a lesson each day on understanding students with intellectual disabilities. There are dress up days and a kindness-themed door decorating contest, where winners are acknowledged and celebrated in front of the whole school. The week ends with a staff versus Unified Basketball team game.



“ I am proud to work at North Middle School... Inclusion is something we pride ourselves on and continuously work to provide a better school experience for every student every day.”

– Nicole, Teacher

Learn More about the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Program



GARNER, NORTH CAROLINA

East Garner Magnet Middle School

East Garner Magnet Middle School is a Title 1 school in Garner, North Carolina. They first introduced Unified PE to their curriculum 8 years ago. With the support of Special Olympics North Carolina, East Garner has since become a National Banner Unified Champion School. The impact of inclusive programs has been widespread. The success of Unified PE has even inspired the creation of other inclusive experiences, like inclusive art. It also opened up opportunities for all students to experience general education classes. UCS has helped students develop authentic friendships, learn how to self-advocate, and have the opportunity try other activities in the school, with full support from staff and peers.

“My hope for everyone’s growth and everyone’s mindset change is that more schools like us strive to have a program that really allows [all] kids to interact.”

– James, Principal

Learn More about the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® Program



LIBERTY, TEXAS

Liberty Middle School

Liberty Middle School in Liberty, Texas hosts several activities that promote inclusion and reach the majority of the school population all year round. To kick off the UCS sports season they put on a “Walking Pep Rally” which engages the band, cheerleaders, prancers, and other spirit groups. In addition, a “Kick’N for Unity” kickball tournament and a “Shoot’N Hoops for Unity” basketball competition are held where students with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) in the school and surrounding areas compete against each other, while celebrating friendship. Later in the year, 4 days are dedicated to Red Ribbon and Kindness week. During this time, students with and without ID lead activities and engage their peers during lunch. For every event, students with and without ID are assigned various jobs and help with planning and executing events. Roles include creating and handing out materials, managing money, helping attendees, running concessions, keeping score, and cleaning up.

**“ I love watching our students reach their goals...
the look on their faces when they make a basket,
throw a ball, or do a push-up. I love my job!”**

– Shelly, Life Skills Teacher

Getting Started with Your Leadership Team

Research has reinforced the power of a leadership team, identifying that schools with inclusive leadership teams more actively implement the Unified Champion Schools strategy.

According to annual evaluations by the Center for Social Development and Education at the University of Massachusetts Boston, schools that had an inclusive leadership team:

- Were able to implement more robust programming.
- Reported more community involvement.
- Provided increased opportunities for general and special education teachers to work together.
- Tended to be more confident in the sustainability of their program.

Intergenerational Leadership

The Unified Champion Schools program leadership team should be **intergenerational**.

The goal of the intergenerational approach to leadership is for young people and adults to share in and benefit from each other's experiences and perspectives, and be open to learning from each other.

It is important for adults to provide space for young people to lead, **as at this age, students are just beginning to perceive themselves as leaders, and express their need for freedom in certain areas of decision making.**

Leadership teams are responsible for:

- Establishing the vision and goals for the school.
- Guiding stages of implementation.
- Ensuring fidelity to quality through consistent monitoring.

Adults as Allies for Young Adolescents

Students are not simply the recipients of programming, but rather the architects of lasting change.



Adult allies modeling the way:

- Understand their personal leadership styles to model the attitudes, skills, and effort required for effective leadership.
- Create and provide opportunities to empower and engage youth, based on individual strengths.

Adult allies changing the process:

- Ask probing questions that allow young people to generate their own ideas.
- Utilize a variety of group protocols.
- Model how groups work together equitably.

Adult allies encouraging the heart:

- Facilitate reflection in a safe environment.
- Take time to celebrate success.

Adult allies inspiring a shared vision:

- Support difficult conversations.
- Build meaningful relationships with others to advance accessibility.
- Ask questions to seek clarity.
- Understand how youth communicate.
- Help youth identify how body language, tone, and other elements play into communication.

Adult allies inspiring others:

- Identify and promote skills of each student.
- Make adjustments so students of all learning styles can engage.
- Ask other adults to participate.
- Access their own professional development.

6 Steps to Get Your Leadership Team Started

Step 1. RECRUIT TEAM MEMBERS

The leadership team responsible for Unified Champion Schools® programming should strive to include all of the following:

- Students with and without intellectual disabilities (3-4 students depending on the size of the school).
- Students from different social and academic groups including those who may not typically be selected to be a leader.
- Teachers (both special and general education).
- Parents of students with and without intellectual disabilities, who preferably are not also a teacher.
- At least 1 administrator or additional staff member with the ability to commit time and resources to the work.

Step 2. BUILD THE TEAM'S CAPACITY

Make a plan and take the time you need to ensure everyone understands why the team has been created, why it is intergenerational, and what each member can contribute. Spend time learning about the Unified Champion Schools strategy and discuss how it can improve your school. Consider what you hope to accomplish through intergenerational leadership.

To create a true collaboration between young people and adults, the following questions need to be answered at the beginning:

- What resources need to be shifted?
- How will skills be developed?
- How do adults integrate and support youth across the full range of work rather than in isolated programs or committee settings?

Step 3. ANALYZE THE LANDSCAPE

Before starting the work, take time to reflect and consider how implementing Unified Champion Schools programming will be received by others in

the school. This can help you plan accordingly. Think about or discuss:

- Who in the school is already a supporter of this?
- Who is unsure of this programming?
- Who may oppose this programming?

Reflecting on others' perceptions can help determine future partners or potential barriers.

Additionally, it's a good idea to brainstorm what resources are available and could support your work. Make sure you decide:

- Where will you meet as a team?
- What will your meetings look like and how will they run?

These small and large questions are important to address early on so your meetings will run smoothly.

REACHING THE ATYPICAL LEADER

Intentionally recruit students who may not immediately come to mind as leaders, such as students with disabilities or a disengaged learner. This is a critical step in assembling an effective leadership team that understands the school experience from multiple perspectives. It can be difficult to reach an atypical leader, so use a variety of strategies to identify students to participate:

- Give a short presentation about social inclusion to each grade level to spark interest.
- Invite students to nominate themselves or others.
- Ask someone who has a relationship with the individual to extend a personal invitation.
- Intentionally identify students who are not currently involved in school activities.

Step 4. FIND YOUR STARTING POINT

Before you can plan and prepare for implementation of the Unified Champion Schools strategy, it is important for the leadership team to consider how socially inclusive the school is currently. This will help the team prioritize goals and first steps, and serve as a baseline for measuring progress. This playbook offers 2 ways to gather baseline data:

- Complete the **Characteristics of Socially Inclusive School (CSIS) Assessment** and/or
- Survey the school community using the **Social Inclusion Scale**

Characteristics of Socially Inclusive Schools (CSIS) Assessment

The CSIS Assessment is based on 7 key elements of socially inclusive learning environments. Each element (or characteristic) has equal importance to the success of efforts to promote social inclusion but is insufficient on its own.

The 7 elements (or characteristics) are categorized into broad functions as **Core Processes** and **Operational Processes**.

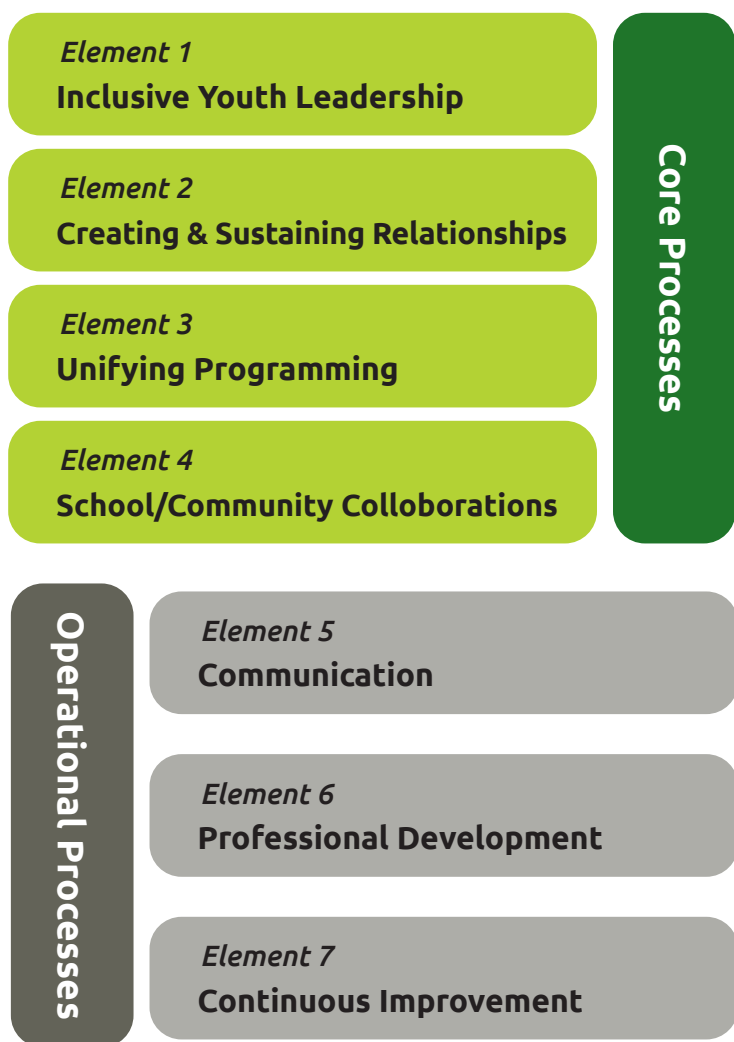
Members of the leadership team complete the **CSIS Assessment** (downloadable at the [Middle School Playbook webpage](#)) individually based on their own experiences. Then the team comes together to discuss the items and work to come to a consensus on the current status of that item specifically, and social inclusion overall in the school. This tool can be particularly useful in identifying differences in the perspectives of various members of the team. Be sure to honor those differences and use them to identify when, how, and where social inclusion happens or not.

Social Inclusion Scale

The leadership team may want to gather additional data from the wider student body, parents, teachers, staff, and administrators. The **Social Inclusion Scale** may be used for this purpose and can be downloaded at the [Middle School Playbook webpage](#).

Although you do not have to gather data from every member of the school community, it is essential to gather a random sample of students with and without intellectual disabilities, parents of students with and without intellectual disabilities, general, and special educators, all across different grade levels.

Once the leadership team has gathered the results, take time to cross check the perceptions of team members with those of the wider community.



Step 5. ESTABLISH A PLAN AND TAKE ACTION

Based on what you discover in your assessments, work as a team to develop a strategic plan. The plan will identify priorities, strategies and outcomes to guide the leadership team and others toward your vision. Map out your goals and make sure they work with and support each other and school priorities overall. Develop action steps that lead toward your intended outcomes. A framework for creating a **Strategic Action Plan** for your Unified Champion Schools programming can be downloaded at the [Middle School Playbook webpage](#).

Step 6. CONDUCT PROGRESS MONITORING AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

As the leadership team engages others and facilitates implementation of the 3 components (Unified Sports, inclusive youth leadership, and whole school engagement), great things are sure to happen in your school. Collect data and stories to measure progress and identify areas for continuous improvement. The **Social Inclusion Rubric**, included with the **CSIS Assessment** found at the [Middle School Playbook webpage](#), can help you identify the data points you want to track.

The rubric provides a picture of a school's social inclusiveness. This information can be used to expand and enhance implementation of the three components. It can also help schools identify new and exciting strategies for improvement.

↓ Download these resources to get started by going to the [Middle School Playbook webpage](#)

- CSIS Assessment
- Social Inclusion Scale
- Social Inclusion Rubric



Youth Leadership Tip

It is important to remember to adequately prepare youth for an active role on the leadership team.

Be sure to intentionally develop their leadership skills through:

- Ensuring they understand each task the team encounters.
- Meaningfully engaging them in ongoing discussions.
- Providing them with opportunities to take leadership in carrying out appropriate tasks.
- Nurturing progress within each student.



Special Olympics Unified Sports®





An Introduction to Special Olympics Unified Sports®

Special Olympics Unified Sports provide students with and without intellectual disabilities opportunities to meaningfully participate in sports activities together.

Unified Sports is an important component because it:

- **Addresses the need** for young adolescents to be physically active.
- **Provides valuable social inclusion** opportunities for all teammates to build friendships.
- **Integrates athletes with and without intellectual disabilities** in a setting where all are encouraged to improve their skills and become physically fit.
- **Prepares students for participation** in other school activities or community sports programs.
- **Strengthens self-esteem and confidence** as students take on leadership roles and activities.
- **Models genuine inclusion** for the entire school community.

Learn more by watching this Inclusion Weekly mini-series video:





Goals of Unified Sports

- **Friendship and Socialization**
Participation in Unified Sports provides a forum for positive social interaction between teammates and often leads to long-lasting friendships.
- **Meaningful Inclusion**
All teammates play important, meaningful, and valued roles on the team.
- **Sport Skills Development**
Students develop sports skills to enable them to compete with greater proficiency and develop physical fitness.
- **Competition Experience**
Students with and without intellectual disabilities benefit from physical and mental challenges by participating in a variety of competitive and non-competitive environments.

What is the Principle of **Meaningful Involvement**?

The principle of meaningful involvement is the most important foundational philosophy when developing inclusive school sports and activities. Students are provided a sports environment that ensures every player is given multiple opportunities throughout the school year to develop and demonstrate their unique skills and qualities.

Indicators of Meaningful Involvement:

- Teammates have the ability and opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the performance of the team/activity.
- Teammates participate according to the rules of competition.
- Teammates compete without causing undue risk of injury to themselves or others.

Meaningful Involvement is *not* achieved when some team members:

- Display superior sports skills without involving their teammates.
- Control most aspects of the game, especially during the most critical periods.
- Do not train or practice regularly and only show up on the day of competition.



Unified Sports Styles of Play



There are 3 basic styles of play of Special Olympics Unified Sports. It is up to each school to choose which style or combination of styles will be most beneficial for their students. These models provide a framework for guiding implementation within each school, offering a variety of Unified Sports options for students:

Competitive

- Students with and without intellectual disabilities train and compete on the same team.
- All teammates should be of similar age and ability levels.
- Teams adhere to training, competition, and team composition requirements.
- School-based teams often compete within an intramural setting, an interscholastic format, or through Special Olympics tournaments.
- Teams compete without rules modifications.

Player Development

- Students with higher skill levels serve as mentors, assisting teammates of lower skill levels in developing sport-specific skills and tactics.
- All teammates should be of similar age.
- There is a non-competitive, less structured, cooperative team environment.

Recreation

- Extends the concept of Unified Sports to non-competitive recreational sports opportunities.
- This is the most flexible style of play because it does not follow any prescribed training or team composition requirements.
- Recreation typically takes place solely on school property and does not advance into competitions.
- Examples of Unified Recreation activities in schools include Unified Fitness, Unified Field Day or a Unified Walking Club.



Basketball



Track & Field



Bocce



Skiing



Bowling



Softball



Flag Football



Soccer



Floor Hockey



Handball



Golf

Types of Unified Sports

As you can see from this figure, there is a wide variety of sports that can be implemented at a middle school. Each State Special Olympics Program offers different sports depending on geographic locations (e.g., snowshoeing), age appropriateness, and interest levels. Some will be easier to implement within your middle school than others, but many will be appropriate for your intramural programs and some will fit into an interscholastic program if you have Unified Sports competitions with other middle schools. If your school wants to include a Unified Sports team under the competitive style of play, check with your State Special Olympics Program to determine which sports are supported in your state.



Inclusion Tip

Certain Unified Sports (e.g., track and field, bocce, bowling) do not require ability matching, which allows students of any ability level to participate. Schools should note, however, that data has shown individual sports provide less inclusive personal relationship building than team sports.

Implementing Special Olympics Unified Sports®

The 1st step to starting a Unified Sports opportunity in your school typically is to have a planning meeting with your school's Unified Champion Schools® program leadership team and/or your Unified Club. You may also want to invite a Special Olympics staff member to the meeting. As you work through the implementation of Unified Sports in your school, be sure students are engaged as co-leaders throughout the process. Each step in answering the questions and completing the checklists found below will be completed by youth, youth and adults working together, or adults as appropriate for your particular school environment.



Topics to discuss with the Unified Champion Schools Program Leadership Team

- Which Unified Sports style(s) of play (Competitive, Player Development, or Recreation) is most appropriate for the students in our school?
- Which sports are of greatest interest to the students with and without intellectual disabilities?
- Which school-based Unified Sports are offered by our State Special Olympics Program?
- Which sport(s) will allow for the most meaningful participation opportunities for students? Are there any existing clubs, teams, classes, or school groups that might be interested in planning and leading a Unified Sports opportunity? The sport(s) we select will determine which students can participate and how many.
- What types of Unified Sports activities does our school need/want to incorporate?
- How will we work with our State Special Olympics Program?
- Where do we already have formal and informal opportunities for students to understand and begin to incorporate social inclusion?
- How will our coaches be trained?
- How does the principle of meaningful involvement impact the type of sports activities that are implemented and how they are presented?
- Who will be the adult advisor/coordinator for various activities?
- Other things to consider:
 - Which sports facilities will we be able to use and when?
 - What paperwork is required for participants?
 - How will transportation be arranged, if needed?

Enhancing Special Olympics Unified Sports

Social inclusion efforts like Unified Sports will have a greater impact and be more sustainable when they are connected to other initiatives and goals of the school. Other strategies for enhancing the impact of the Unified Sports experience and increasing positive impacts throughout the school include:

- Recognizing Unified Sports teams (both intramural and interscholastic) in the same ways as other teams in the school (e.g., pep rallies, morning announcements).
- Encouraging Unified Sports teammates to wear their jerseys, team T-shirts or other team attire before or after a competition so they can be seen and acknowledged by all classmates during the school day.
- Holding inclusive post-game celebrations to build team cohesion and deeper social connections.
- Holding a fun, inclusive sport activity such as a kickball game, yoga, or inclusive walking as part of Unified Sports Recreation opportunities for other members of the school to experience Unified Sports.
- Considering some type of culminating competition, celebration, or recognition within each season.

Integration of the 3 Components Through the Lens of Special Olympics Unified Sports®

Through the styles of play described earlier (Competitive, Player Development, Recreation), schools are able to provide important Unified Sports experiences that work in tandem with whole school engagement and inclusive youth leadership. Examples of this integration include young adolescents working together to initiate a Unified Sports day for the whole school, or working with the physical education teacher to create inclusive sport and recreation opportunities within the school day (e.g., a bocce tournament). The following are examples of how the 3 components can be integrated with an **emphasis on Unified Sports**.



EXAMPLE ACTIVITY



The Unified Bocce team hosts a series of instructional sessions during the lunch period to offer students an opportunity to learn how to play.	✓		✓
After the intramural flag football season ends, the Unified Club helps with a celebration and awards assembly to honor everyone who played or supported the teams.	✓	✓	✓
Students with and without intellectual disabilities on the Unified Sports intramural basketball team organize and speak at an assembly about student collaboration to enhance each other's skills.	✓	✓	✓
Middle school students lead an after-school program to develop soccer skills in elementary students with and without intellectual disabilities.	✓	✓	
The Student Council or National Junior Honor Society organizes Fans in the Stands to engage the whole student body in supporting the Unified Sports teams.	✓	✓	✓
The physical education teacher works with the students on their interdisciplinary team to host a Unified Sports Day focused on 1 of the sports they have studied.	✓	✓	✓



Tips for Success: Special Olympics Unified Sports®

- Integrate Unified Sports into the physical education curriculum.
- Ensure Unified Sports is recognized as an official school sport, activity and club.
- Reduce costs by using the same uniforms across sports and grade levels, where appropriate. Purchase a single set of uniforms that can be used for multiple sports year after year, and share school equipment for Unified Sports teams when possible.
- Work with the Unified Club and/or Parent Teacher Association to raise funds for the Unified Sports program.
- Get key Unified Sports expenses, such as transportation or coach stipends, included within the annual school budget.
- Mentor younger students in leadership roles to help ensure the program will continue after older students move to the high school.
- Start Fans in the Stands to share the excitement of Unified Sports with the entire school and local community.

↓ Download these Unified Sports Checklists
to help you get started:

[Middle School Playbook Resources](#)

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



Coaching Help

- Have the necessary knowledge
- Be a non-playing coach
- Commit to regular practice sessions
- Coach everyone using individualized approaches
- Complete Unified Sports Coach's training at www.nfhslearn.com/courses/coaching-unified-sports
- Complete Middle School Coach training at www.nfhslearn.com/courses/middle-school-coaching



Inclusive Youth Leadership





An Introduction to Inclusive Youth Leadership

Adults may doubt the readiness of young adolescents to be leaders. That concern ignores 1 of the key attributes of effective middle level schools according to AMLE's *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*—effective middle schools empower students and provide them with the knowledge and skills to take control of their lives. (Edwards, 2015).

It is critical that educators help middle school students make decisions that lead to consequences, both positive and negative. If we ever plan to ask students to lead, we must prepare them. If we don't help them practice decision making, we are setting them up to fail (Edwards, 2015).

Learn more by watching this Inclusion Weekly mini-series video:



Goals of Inclusive Youth Leadership



- Young adolescents, representing the diversity of the student body, are engaged in leadership positions; and school staff members prioritize identifying youth leadership for the school.
- Youth with and without intellectual disabilities become co-leaders in their schools, serving as catalysts for change. This is imperative in moving beyond some students being identified as the “helpers” while students with intellectual disabilities are considered the “helped.” Co-leadership is a strengths-based model through which all students have equitable opportunities to contribute to their school community in meaningful ways.
- Administrators and teachers actively support the vision and insight of youth as they step into leadership positions and create inclusive environments in their schools.
- Teachers gain an appreciation of students’ leadership abilities and discover the value in providing opportunities for students with different strengths to collaborate on classroom and academic projects.
- Youth with and without disabilities gain the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to become advocates for themselves and their peers.
- Policymakers and education leaders develop policies and support quality practices to encourage inclusive school climates that are safe and nurturing learning environments for all.

Inclusive Youth Leadership is an *important* component because it:

- Recognizes the leadership assets and values that all students possess and can use to contribute meaningfully to the school community.
- Provides students with and without intellectual disabilities with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to take on leadership and co-leadership roles in their team or school, creating an environment in which socially inclusive opportunities can thrive.
- Offers opportunities for all students to become leaders, developing an understanding that students of varying abilities and backgrounds can lead.
- Encourages intergenerational leadership opportunities that promote a deeper understanding of the strengths, gifts, and skills of all students as co-leaders with adults.
- Guides administrators and teachers to incorporate the vision and insight of young adolescents into their own leadership roles.
- Offers teachers a greater understanding and appreciation for the benefits of increased social inclusion in their classrooms, leading to greater opportunities for students to collaborate on classroom or team projects.
- Supports all young adolescents so that they may contribute meaningfully to the school community.
- Brings together students with and without intellectual disabilities as leaders in their school, creating a socially inclusive environment and lasting friendships.
- Leadership activities help students find their voices by teaching them to become change agents striving for respect and inclusion.

Implementing Inclusive Youth Leadership



The 1st step to starting inclusive youth leadership in your school is typically to have a planning meeting with your school's Unified Champion Schools® program leadership team.

As you work through the implementation of the program in your team and school, be sure students are engaged throughout the process.

Remember to always be on the lookout for opportunities to hand over decision-making and leadership to young adolescents. The roles that each of you play will vary from team to team or situation to situation.

Topics to discuss with the Unified Champion Schools Program Leadership Team

- What types of inclusive youth leadership opportunities do we need/want to offer?
- Where do we already have formal and informal leadership opportunities for students? Are these inclusive opportunities involving typical and atypical leaders?
- Which inclusive youth leadership opportunities are valued by students with and without intellectual disabilities?
- How do we nurture student partnerships to support students with and without intellectual disabilities serving in co-leadership capacities?
- How will we structure youth leadership? Will we incorporate it into existing groups, clubs, or classes, like advisory? Start a Unified Club? Create more intergenerational opportunities?
- Who will be the adult advisor or coordinator for various activities?

Strategies for Enhancing Students' Social Skills

- Assign informal small-group learning activities in a space for groups to congregate and to cooperate in developing peer-led programs.
- Use activities that emphasize social interaction with a heterogeneous mix of students.
- Help students accept and appreciate individual differences.
- Emphasize the need to be sensitive to the feelings of other people.
- Show how differences among people are strengths, especially for problem solving.
- Demonstrate positive social skills in the way you interact with students and others. (Bartz, 2016)



Youth Leadership Tip

Watch for both formal and informal opportunities for students with and without intellectual disabilities to take an active leadership role. Sometimes, adults take control of decisions simply because it's faster and easier.

Integration of the 3 Components Through the Lens of Inclusive Youth Leadership

Leadership skills are an important part of young adolescent development, and learning to work with people who possess different skills and abilities will help each person to become a stronger individual. Leadership comes in a variety of ways, through a variety of opportunities, and we want to provide students with numerous opportunities to lead. The following are examples of how the 3 components can be integrated with an **emphasis on inclusive youth leadership**.



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools**



EXAMPLE ACTIVITY

	Unified Sports	Inclusive Youth Leadership	Whole School Engagement
Students advocate and obtain administrative support for starting a Unified soccer team. They help organize practices and games.	✓	✓	
Students with and without intellectual disabilities work with adults in the school to hold a Unified Sports Day.	✓	✓	✓
Students form an inclusive cheerleading squad for the Unified basketball teams.	✓	✓	
Students and their teachers work together to initiate a Unified Club for their Interdisciplinary team on promoting social inclusion.		✓	✓
Students in the Student Council or National Junior Honor Society work with faculty to revise guidelines to ensure students with and without disabilities have equitable opportunities to be members.		✓	
The Unified Club plans and leads the week-long Spread the Word campaign to build awareness about inclusion.		✓	✓
As part of a social justice instructional unit, each home room class decorates their classroom door, sharing their vision of a socially inclusive school.		✓	✓
The language arts classes or leadership clubs complete the Unified Sports lesson in Unified Classroom to learn about the power of Unified Sports and write a persuasive letter to school officials to start Unified Sports programming.	✓	✓	
Students start a mentoring program pairing middle school students with and without intellectual disabilities with elementary school students to assist students with successful transition to middle school.		✓	✓



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.



Download these Inclusive Youth Leadership Checklists
to help you get started:

[Middle School Playbook Resources](#)

- Inclusive Youth Leadership Action Plan
- Checklist for Unified Sports Competitive & Player Development Styles
- Checklist for Unified Sports Recreation Style
- Checklist for Unified Sports Day or Unified Sports Festival

Whole School Engagement





An Introduction to Whole School Engagement

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® activities provide opportunities for all students to learn about and practice social inclusion through sustained engagement. The expectation is that respect, acceptance and engagement are norms for the entire school environment. The result is a middle level school where all students feel they play a meaningful part in school events, extracurricular activities, sports, and informal interactions that occur in the cafeteria or hallways.

Learn more by watching this Inclusion Weekly mini-series video:



Goals of Whole School Engagement



- Students with and without intellectual disabilities will interact socially and develop mutually beneficial friendships.
- Students with and without disabilities will hold more positive attitudes toward, and demonstrate a greater understanding and acceptance of, each other.
- Schools will become communities of acceptance where students with and without intellectual disabilities feel welcome and contribute meaningfully to all school activities, opportunities, and functions.
- The school climate will be enhanced by nurturing development, learning, and achievement through engaging environments where students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members feel connected, safe, and successful.



Whole School Engagement is an *important component* because it:

- Engages the entire school community in building awareness and understanding of the benefits that can be experienced when each individual is recognized, honored, and supported.
- Creates a socially inclusive school climate and encourages more people to advocate and take action for inclusion.
- Enhances the school climate by nurturing and celebrating the development, learning, and achievement of all students.
- Creates communities of acceptance where students with disabilities feel welcomed and valued as meaningful participants in school activities, classroom learning, and leadership opportunities.
- Models to the larger community that inclusivity can and does have positive outcomes for all.

There are opportunities for every student to contribute to achieving the goals of a team or school. Within schools implementing the Unified Champion Schools strategy, such contributions are realized when students and staff are involved as participants in a whole school or team activity and when students with and without intellectual disabilities serve as teammates on a Unified Sports team, are leaders or members of an inclusive school club or extracurricular activity, or actively serve on the school's or team's intergenerational leadership team.

Implementing Whole School Engagement

When 1st engaging your whole school in advancing social inclusion, have a planning meeting with your school's Unified Champion Schools® program leadership team. Be sure students are engaged as co-leaders throughout the process either at the interdisciplinary team or school level. Young adolescents respond positively to opportunities to connect what they are learning to real-life situations (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010).

Remember to always be on the lookout for appropriate opportunities to hand over decision-making and leadership to young people. The roles that adults and youth play will vary from school to school. The questions and checklists found below will be answered and completed by youth, youth and adults working together, or adults as appropriate for your particular school environment.

Topics to discuss with the Unified Champion Schools Program Leadership Team

- How do we engage all students in the activities and events around the school?
- What types of whole school activities does our school or team need or want to incorporate?
- Where do we already have formal and informal opportunities for students to understand and begin to incorporate social inclusion?
- What types of whole school activities (e.g., assemblies, pep rallies, school-wide events) do we already do in our school? Do any of these activities support social inclusion? If not, how can they be revised to support the social inclusion of all students?
- What types of whole school activities are valued by students with and without intellectual disabilities at the school?
- Are there any existing clubs, teams, classes, or school groups that might be interested in planning and leading a whole school activity?
- Who will be the adult advisor/coordinator for various activities?

How did it feel when other students watched your games?

“It felt good... to be noticed.”

– Student with an intellectual disability



Integration of the 3 Components Through the Lens of Whole School Engagement

While each component is introduced separately, **the greatest value comes when the separate components are integrated** into various activities or learning opportunities. As reflected in *This We Believe*, an integrated curriculum is an important basis of middle level education and emphasizes the importance of youth engagement. The following are examples of how the 3 components can be integrated with an **emphasis on Whole School Engagement**.



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**



EXAMPLE ACTIVITY	Unified Sports	Inclusive Youth Leadership	Whole School Engagement
The Unified Club runs a promotion for Fans in the Stands to attend and cheer for all athletes during every Unified basketball game.	✓	✓	✓
The Unified PE class hosts a Unified Sports Festival to promote wellness and the importance of physical activity for all students.	✓	✓	✓
The Unified Sports teams provide demonstrations during assemblies, lunch, or exploratory periods.	✓		✓
Pep rallies are held for all intramural and interscholastic Unified Sports teams.	✓		✓
The 7th grade team works on a Spread the Word door decorating contest, engaging students with and without intellectual disabilities in planning and implementation.		✓	✓
The Unified Club works with the school leadership committee to incorporate social inclusion as part of the school-wide expectations for student behavior.		✓	✓
A social studies class incorporates lessons on social inclusion into an interdisciplinary unit on social justice and includes a post in the school newsletter or social media page.		✓	✓
The inclusive Student Council or National Junior Honor Society coordinates a Spread the Word campaign to promote inclusion and raise awareness about the hurtful effects of exclusive language.		✓	✓

Enhancing Whole School Engagement Experiences

- Include school administration early in the process.
- Share the goals for whole school engagement with the school community.
- Select and plan an initial activity that is manageable, energizing, and appealing to the whole school.
- Build upon activities that are already being offered to make them socially inclusive activities.
- Develop a process for engaging all students in whole school activities, ensuring the development of socially inclusive attitudes, values, knowledge, skills, and actions.
- When building awareness, nurturing inclusive relationships, and building expectations for inclusive behavior, provide opportunities in both structured and unstructured settings.
- Provide consistent opportunities to engage a broad range of stakeholders throughout the school and wider community in developing, implementing, and sustaining a wide range of inclusive activities.
- Connect with your State Special Olympics Program for support and sharing successes.
- Share photos, videos, and stories of social inclusion activities and events using the school's website or social media.



↓ Download these Whole School Engagement Checklists to help you get started

[Middle School Playbook webpage](#)

- Whole School Engagement Action Plan
- Getting Started Checklist for School Assemblies
- Getting Started Checklist for *It's Our School, Too!* Play
- Getting Started Checklist for Spread the Word Campaign
- Getting Started Checklist for "Fans in the Stands"
- Getting Started Checklist for Unified Sports Day or Unified Sports Festival

↓ Downloadable Resources

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

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Unified Champion Schools® Getting Started Resources:

- 3 Component Action Plans
- Characteristics of Socially Inclusive Schools Assessment
- Social Inclusion Scale (student, family, and staff versions)
- *Addressing Schools to Watch® domains of developmental responsiveness and social equity in middle grades through Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools*

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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

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Inclusive Youth Leadership Checklists:

- Inclusive Youth Leadership Action Plan
- Getting Started with Inclusive Youth Leadership
- Checklist for Unified Clubs
- Checklist for Making Existing Clubs Inclusive
- Inclusive Youth Leadership Unified Classroom

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Whole School Engagement Checklists:

- Whole School Engagement Action Plan
- Getting Started with Whole School Engagement
- Checklist for Whole School Assemblies
- Checklist for *It's Our School, Too!* Play
- 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.

Intergenerational Leadership

Youth and adults work together to implement the Unified Champion Schools® strategy through shared goals that are owned collectively.

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 Adolescents

Youth between the ages of 10 and 15 who individually develop at varying times and rates. As a whole group, they reflect specific developmental characteristics in the physical, cognitive, moral, psychological, and social-emotional dimensions.

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