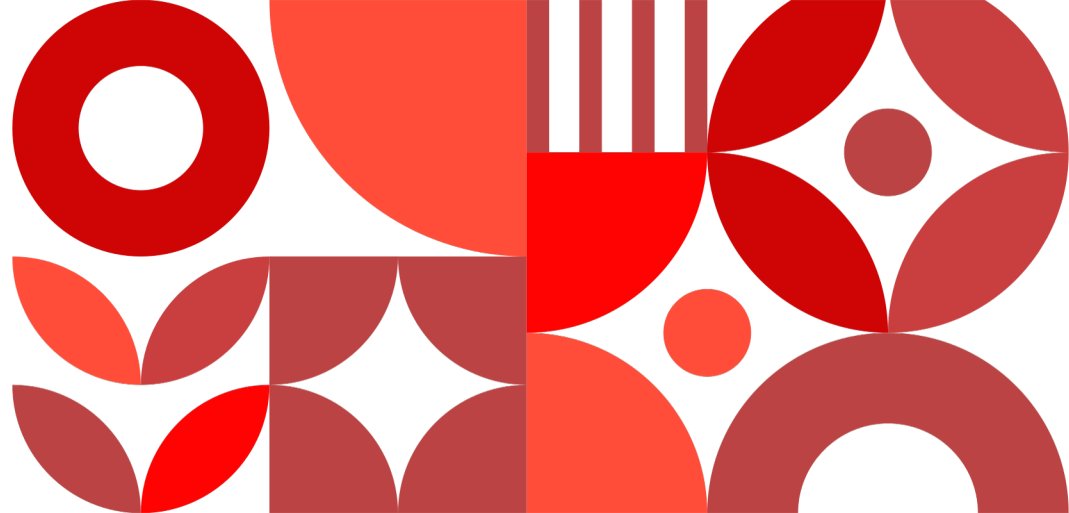


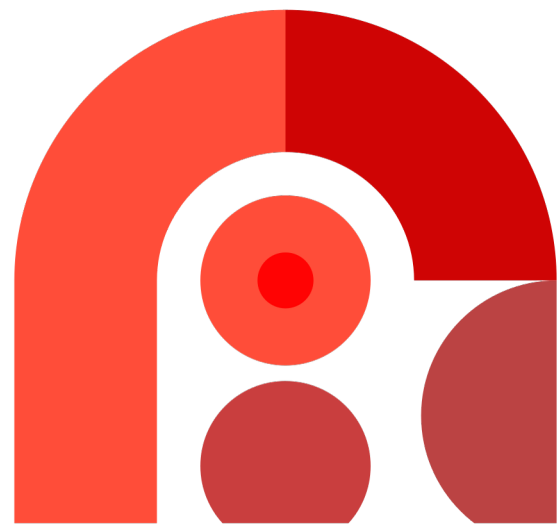
***Special
Olympics***



2025

HIGH 5 FOR FITNESS LESSON PLAN PHASE II EVALUATION REPORT

Fitness and Health Evaluation



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Project Overview

Special Olympics Fitness programming supports athletes across the lifespan in achieving optimal health and performance through physical activity, nutrition, and hydration. To advance these goals for younger populations, Special Olympics Fitness offers a range of initiatives tailored to youth. High 5 for Fitness (“High 5”) is a comprehensive set of resources designed to empower youth ages 8-21 with and without intellectual disabilities (IDD) to take charge of their own fitness by promoting physical activity, nutrition, and hydration. High 5 aims to increase knowledge and awareness of healthy behaviors while actively engaging youth in activities that improve flexibility, strength, and endurance.

Recognizing the need to provide educators with tools for using High 5 effectively within school-based programs, a series of 12 structured fitness lessons were created. The lessons were designed to be ready-made for educators and included step-by-step activities, instructional strategies, and supplementary materials. To ensure the quality, relevance, and usability of the newly developed High 5 lessons, Special Olympics Fitness conducted a two-phase evaluation project in collaboration with Programs across the United States between 2023-2025.

Phase I of the evaluation ([REPORT LINK](#)) focused on assessing the practicality and feasibility of implementing the High 5 lessons in school settings. Feedback from this initial pilot was invaluable in identifying strengths, addressing areas for improvement, and refining the lessons to enhance both their impact and usability. Phase II introduced significant revisions to the lessons, including a stronger emphasis on exercise training for health-related fitness. The number of activities within each lesson was reduced to ensure a more focused approach, making the lessons suitable as part of a class rather than taking up the entire period.

Purpose

The Phase II project expanded on lessons from Phase I by evaluating the implementation of the revised High 5 for Fitness lessons in school settings. The primary aim was to assess educator satisfaction with the revisions, with a secondary focus on examining their impact on behavioral mediators of youth physical activity such as self-efficacy, motivation, and enjoyment.



Approach

Special Olympics International (SOI) collaborated with 13 educators across 6 Special Olympics Programs to pilot the revised High 5 for Fitness lessons. A mixed-methods evaluation approach was employed, combining educator surveys, focus groups, site visits, and student surveys to gather qualitative and quantitative feedback on:

- The relevance and usability of the lessons in real-world school settings.
- Educator perceptions of the lesson structure, adaptability, and ease of implementation.
- Student engagement and reported enjoyment of fitness activities, as well as perceived benefits in strength, flexibility, and endurance.

Key Findings

Educator surveys & focus group feedback confirmed the relevance and usability of High 5 for Fitness lessons in schools. Educators reported that the lessons are adaptable, easy to integrate into existing curricula, and effective in engaging students. Focus groups identified several strengths, including optimal lesson durations, clear exercise progression and regression guidelines, and the effectiveness of activity stations for managing groups and engaging students. Areas for improvement were also identified, including reordering the sequence of some lessons to more naturally build on previous lessons, the introduction of additional competition or “game-like” features in a “Make It Fun” section, and the provision of supplementary resources to aid caregivers in facilitating at-home fitness activities.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, Special Olympics refined the High 5 for Fitness lessons to better align with educator and student needs. The finalized lesson packet will be widely disseminated to schools and Special Olympics Programs to maximize reach and impact, with future plans for ongoing data collection and continuous quality improvement.



INTRODUCTION



High 5 for Fitness lesson plans, as part of Special Olympics' Unified Champion School programming, have the potential to promote social inclusion and lifelong healthy behaviors within student bodies. The lessons are highly adaptable and can be implemented in a variety of settings, including community centers, after-school programs, and sports, to support inclusive fitness and wellness programming.

The lesson plans are intended to address growing concerns about low levels of physical activity among youth ages 8–21, particularly those with IDD. While the Special Olympics Fitness Team acknowledges that participation in the High 5 fitness lessons may not lead to immediate health improvements for youth populations, we believe that these resources will enable educators and community leaders to foster long-term gains in the performance, health, and wellbeing of youth populations.

Incorporating feedback from both students and educators into the development of these lesson plans is a critical step in strengthening Special Olympics programming within school settings. Understanding how these groups engage with High 5 materials allows Special Olympics to design more effective, targeted activities that meet the needs of individual classrooms, schools, and community-based organizations.



ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY



- **6 SPECIAL OLYMPICS PROGRAMS**

- Delaware, Missouri, Mississippi, Hawaii, Wisconsin, and Arkansas

- **13 EDUCATORS PARTICIPATED**

- 8 Physical Education
- 4 Special Education
- 1 Community Service Provider

- **430 STUDENTS PARTICIPATED**

- 16 Classes
- 2 Elementary Schools, 5 Middle Schools, 9 High Schools

- **2 PROGRAM SITES VISITED**

- Delaware
- Wisconsin



The picture above depicts a Unified PE class at Shoshoni Elementary School in Wyoming after completing a High 5 for Fitness lesson.



METHODS



Procedure

The following steps outline the pilot project procedure:

- **Program Collaboration:** Staff from selected Special Olympics Programs attended an informational session detailing the pilot project protocol. Programs identified educators to participate in the project, provided ongoing support in planning the lesson delivery in schools, and facilitated communication between educators and the Special Olympics Fitness Team.
- **Educator Training:** Participating educators attended a remote training session led by Special Olympics Fitness Team members to review the project objectives, expectations, and the structure of the High 5 for Fitness lessons.
- **Project Materials:** Educators received all necessary project materials, including High 5 for Fitness cards and instructional guides, to support lesson delivery.
- **Lesson Delivery:** Educators implemented 12 High 5 for Fitness lessons over a 6- to 12-week period between January and May 2025. Lessons were designed for flexible delivery in various school-based settings, such as physical education (PE/Unified PE) classes, student clubs, classroom activity breaks, or before/after school programs.
- **Inclusive Participation:** Schools were asked to ensure that student participants included both youth with and without IDD to promote inclusive fitness engagement.
- **Technical Assistance:** Special Olympics Fitness Team conducted check-ins with educators and provided ongoing technical assistance with lesson delivery and evaluation as needed.
- **Student Feedback:** Educators administered pre- and post-program student surveys (online or paper).
- **Educator Feedback:** Educators completed pre- and post-program surveys and participated in a remote focus group meeting after they completed the lessons.
- **Incentives:** Each participating educator received a \$1,000 voucher for equipment or supplies from School Specialty. Each student participant received a Special Olympics Unified Fitness Kit to encourage ongoing fitness engagement.



High 5 for Fitness Lesson Structure

The following bullets outline the structure of the High 5 for Fitness lessons:

- 12 lessons designed to be delivered twice per week over 6 weeks.
- Lessons include 15 - 20 minutes of structured, health-related fitness activities focusing on endurance, strength, and flexibility.
- Easy-to-follow format with inclusion strategies and clear instructions for educators.
- Variety of exercise training formats to engage students, including:
 - **Circuit Training** - students move between stations to target different muscle groups or skills.
 - **Intervals** - students alternate between periods of work and rest, with exercises designed to build endurance and strength.
 - **Sports Skills Training** - students practice specific sport-related skills in a way that mimics fitness training.
 - **Fitness Challenges** - students work individually or in teams to complete as many repetitions or rounds as possible within a set time.
 - **Supersets** - students pair two or three exercises back-to-back with little to no rest, to enhance strength and endurance
 - **Unified Partners** - students complete exercises or activities in pairs, emphasizing teamwork, communication, and mutual support.
- Exercise science tips to enhance educator knowledge of fitness principles and training practices.
- Step-by-step progressions for strength exercises to support students of all abilities.
- Alignment with SHAPE America's Health and Physical Education Standards, emphasizing fitness concepts and physical activity knowledge.



Measurement & Evaluation

A multi-method evaluation approach was used to assess the feasibility, implementation, and effectiveness of the High 5 for Fitness lessons. Feedback from educators and students, a cornerstone to this assessment, was obtained through the following mediums:

- **Educator Survey:** Designed to gather information on educator demographics, perceptions, practices, knowledge, and experiences related to fitness and on the implementation of the High 5 fitness lessons.
- **Student Survey:** Focused on mediators of physical activity including student perceptions, enjoyment, and beliefs about fitness, as well as their experiences with the High 5 for Fitness lessons. All questions were multiple choice format and used plain language.
- **Educator Focus Group:** Included structured questions and discussions on lesson implementation, ease of use, and recommendations for improvement. Meetings were conducted remotely and led by a member of the Special Olympics' fitness team.
- **Site Visits:** Conducted by a member of the Special Olympics Fitness Team to observe lesson implementation in real time, provide technical assistance, and gather qualitative insights on lesson delivery and student engagement.



KEY SURVEY FINDINGS



Survey Details

Educator surveys were completed electronically, and 12 of 13 educators completed the post-program survey. Educators were given the option to administer the student surveys electronically using a computer/tablet or to use paper and pencil. Of the 430 student participants, 330 completed the post-program survey.

Survey responses were compiled by the Special Olympics Research & Evaluation team and descriptive data analyses were conducted.

Positive Findings: "What Worked"

Educator and student survey responses assisted in identifying areas of strength within the High 5 fitness lessons. Some of the key positive findings are displayed below:

Educator Survey Responses (n=12)

- 100% agreed the exercise progressions were helpful to students.
- 75% agreed the fitness lessons were effective in engaging all students.
- 92% reported satisfaction with the fitness lessons.
- 92% reported that they would recommend the fitness lessons to other educators.
- 83% agreed their students responded positively to the fitness lessons.
- 83% reported that they would use the fitness lessons again in the future.
- 83% agreed the fitness lessons were appropriate for their students' grade level.
- 92% agreed the fitness lessons provide clear and easy to follow instructions, and are user-friendly.
- 83% agreed that students responded positively to the fitness lessons.
- 83% agreed that the fitness lessons are adaptable to different skill levels.

Student Survey Responses (n=330)

- 48% reported they liked doing the fitness activities "a lot."
- 58% reported that the level of High 5 fitness activities was "just right."
- 10% more students selected the correct definition of aerobic fitness in the post survey compared to the pre survey.
- 7% more students selected the correct definition of muscular fitness in the post survey compared to the pre survey.



KEY SURVEY FINDINGS (cont.)



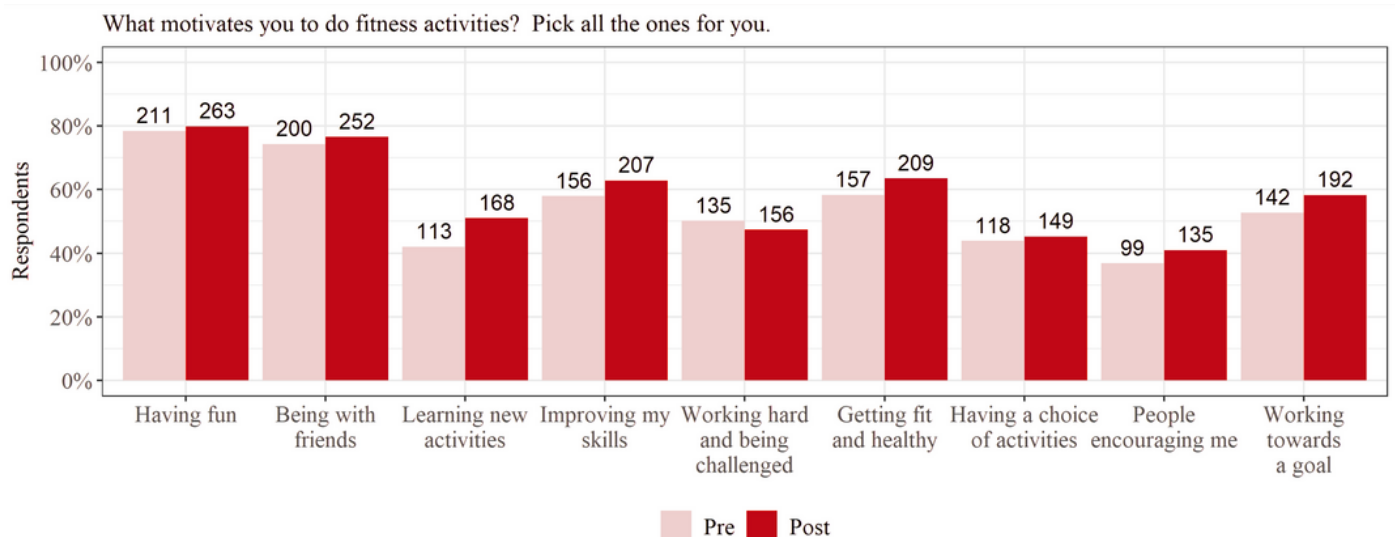
- 7% more students rated their fitness as “good” in the post survey compared to the pre survey.

Areas for Improvement

- 58% of educators reported that the fitness lessons require modifications to be used in schools.
- There were no notable changes in the student mediators of physical activities (i.e. enjoyment, fitness knowledge, self-efficacy, etc.)

Good to Know

- When asked “What motivates you to do fitness activities?”, students most frequently answered:
 - Having fun
 - Being with friends
 - Getting fit and healthy



Students were asked to identify what motivates them to do fitness activities before and after their involvement in the High 5 Phase II pilot. The complete results of these surveys are illustrated by the graph above.



Educator Focus Group Results



Focus Group Details

Following the High 5 for Fitness programming, educators participated remotely in focus groups facilitated by a member of the Special Olympics Fitness Team. A total of five focus groups were conducted, within six weeks of the program's conclusion, with group sizes ranging from one to five educators. Sample focus group questions included:

- How easy or difficult was it to incorporate High 5 for Fitness lessons into your regular teaching routine?
- How effective were the exercise progressions, and how helpful were they for both you and your students?
- Which lessons or activity types did your students enjoy or engage with the most?

Focus Group Summary & Findings

- **Lesson Plan Implementation**
 - Lesson plan flexibility enabled educators to use activities as warm-ups or cool downs.
 - Unified Partners and students without IDD frequently assisted educators with activity execution through exercise demonstrations.
 - Educators without physical education background found some lessons to be too complex.
- **Student Engagement**
 - Games and challenges increased student excitement & participation.
 - Students enjoyed the activity stations. The stations allowed them to move around and try a variety of activities.
 - Student physical competencies influenced their engagement levels during the muscular strength exercises. The alternative exercise options and progressions helped to bridge gap for lesser-skilled students.
- **Educator Suggestions**
 - Strategies for at-home activities could be helpful to reinforce learning of exercises.
 - Improved visual aids would assist educators in setting up and implementing activities.



Site Visit Observations



Site Visit Details:

Two site visits were conducted: one at a Special Olympics program site in Wisconsin and one at a program site in Delaware. The following is a summary of our observations from these visits:

Site Visit Findings:

- **Lesson Plan Implementation**

- Prompts and step-by-step instructions appeared helpful for educators without a physical education background.
- Lesson plan flexibility allowed for educators to modify exercises based on each student's ability and degree of mobility.
- Activities could be set up and cleaned up quickly and required minimal additional equipment.

- **Student Engagement**

- Activity gamification and teammate activities increased student engagement.
- Students responded well to exercise videos and the virtual timers.

- **Educator Suggestions**

- Add objectives to each fitness lesson to assist educator in explaining the purpose, and promote student understanding.
- Create a document that outlines High 5 for Fitness goals, resources, and location.
- Add incentives to increase student engagement. Consider aligning with school reward systems.
- Increase training opportunities for educators to support students with high support needs.
- Add more visuals to lessons and ensure printability in large sizes.



Takeaways & Next Steps



Takeaways

Site visits to three Special Olympics programs in the U.S., combined with surveys and focus groups with UCS educators, confirmed that the High 5 for Fitness lessons successfully engaged students ages 8–21 in becoming fit and staying active. At the same time, the review highlighted several opportunities to strengthen and improve the resource.

Lesson Updates

After a thorough analysis of feedback from High 5 for Fitness facilitators, the Special Olympics International Fitness Team revised the lessons to better align with educator needs and student engagement.

Key updates included:

- Reorganized lesson flow – Moved Lesson 10 (flexibility, warm-ups, cool downs) earlier in the sequence.
- Age group adjustments –
 - Ages 8–11: Swapped inchworm (Lesson 2) with hand push (Lesson 4).
 - Ages 12–14: Swapped curl-up (Lesson 4) with knee plank (Lesson 2).
- New “Make It Fun” sections – Added games, challenges, or competitions to lessons lacking them.
- Enhanced visuals – Clearer images for exercise and learning progressions.
- Expanded resources – Added an appendix of supplementary High 5 for Fitness materials.
- Improved navigation – Icons highlighting unique lesson elements and supporting resources.
- Nutrition support – Printable logos to reinforce nutrition-related activities.

Next Steps

The Special Olympics International Fitness Team recognizes that continued refinement is essential to ensure the High 5 for Fitness lessons remain responsive to the needs of students with and without IDD, as well as educators, families, and youth fitness professionals. Moving forward, we are committed to ongoing engagement with youth fitness champions by regularly gathering input through the High 5 for Fitness Lesson Plan [survey](#).

