

Fitness Captains in Schools



Special Olympics
Health
FOUNDED BY
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Background

Fitness Captains in Schools are a subset of the broader [Fitness Captain](#) population. Launched in 2023, the Fitness Captain role has grown significantly, reaching over 2,500 trained Fitness Captains across 80 Programs throughout all seven Regions. Emerging trends have shown an increased interest in expanding the Fitness Captain role into school-based settings. As a result, this athlete leadership role has been adapted to meet the needs of school-aged populations, between the ages of 14-25, inside and outside of the classroom.

Vision

The Fitness Captain in Schools role empowers students to serve as health and fitness leaders within their school community. By sharing health knowledge, encouraging healthy habits, supporting their peers, and promoting inclusion, Fitness Captains can help create school environments where all students have opportunities to be active, healthy, and included.

Using their leadership skills and fitness knowledge, Fitness Captains in Schools will ensure that Unified Sports practices, Unified Fitness Club meetings, and Unified Physical Education classes serve as key implementation settings for Special Olympics fitness programming. Their influence can shape the norms of their classes and teams, positively impacting the behaviors and attitudes of those around them.

Fitness Captains help their classmates:

- Complete appropriate warm-ups and cool-downs
- Learn health or education tips or lessons
- Feel empowered to promote inclusion throughout their school

Fitness Captains and Unified Champion School Components

Deploying the Fitness Captain in School role within this can build on the core three components of Unified Champion Schools:



Unified Sports



Whole School Engagement



Inclusive Youth Leadership

Whether promoting the importance of health and inclusion during a Unified Sports practice or serving as a champion of inclusion across a student body, Fitness Captains in Schools can create school climates where all students feel welcome, empowered, and routinely included.

Youth Leaders as Fitness Captains in Schools

Youth Leaders are ideal candidates for the Fitness Captain in Schools role. This position empowers them to continue serving as role models for their classmates within the school setting, while actively enhancing both their own fitness and that of those around them. In doing so, they help build stronger, healthier, and more inclusive school communities.

In this role, Youth Leaders can also advocate for youth perspectives, helping coaches and teachers better understand their students' needs and goals. Their leadership ensures that youth voices are meaningfully represented in fitness programming and school-wide wellness efforts. Studies have consistently demonstrated

the effectiveness of peer-led health promotion for people with ID, evidence that is further supported by the success of Special Olympics Youth Leader Innovation Grant Projects.

Overall, Youth Leaders assuming the role of Fitness Captains in Schools will spearhead the creation of a Unified Generation alongside their classmates, teammates, coaches, and educators.

Fitness Captains Across School Settings



Unified Sports:

Focus: Sport performance and healthy habits during practices.

A focus on fitness through sport helps athletes build healthy habits that support performance and overall well-being. During Unified Sports practices, Fitness Captains can lead sport-specific warm-ups and cool-downs and use water breaks to share health tips with teammates.



Unified Fitness Clubs:

Focus: Student engagement and extracurricular involvement.

Unified Fitness Clubs give Fitness Captains an opportunity to use their leadership skills beyond sports practices. By promoting fitness activities, encouraging participation, and welcoming students of all backgrounds and abilities, Fitness Captains help create a fun and active club environment where students can build healthy habits and support one another.



Unified Physical Education Classes and High 5 for Fitness:

Focus: Supporting teachers and peer learning.

In Unified Physical Education classes Fitness Captains can serve as peer leaders who support both educators and classmates. Through Special Olympics' primary youth fitness resource, High 5 for Fitness, they can help demonstrate activities, encourage participation, share health tips, and model healthy behaviors, helping make fitness learning more engaging and interactive for all students.



"My students really like learning from their peers and not always me. They taught it, modeled it and then participated right alongside their peer."

— Kaitlyn Bieszk, Bayview Middle School
Special Olympics Wisconsin

Fitness Captains in Schools Recruitment & Resources

People with intellectual disabilities (PWID) and their Unified Partners are highly encouraged to join the existing cohort of Fitness Captains in Schools as soon as this school year. It is recommended that coaches and educators consider all students for this role. The Fitness Captain role is a great fit for youth populations who lead in a variety of ways, from encouraging their peers vocally to demonstrating commitment through their actions.

For more information on the Fitness Captains in School role, along with corresponding training materials and resources please visit: [Fitness Captain Resource Webpage](#).