

SPECIAL OLYMPICS PROJECT UNIFY YEAR FIVE

**Results from
2012-13 NATIONAL YOUTH ACTIVATION DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM**

A Final Report to the U.S. Department of Education
Office of Special Education Programs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is in response to an award from the U.S. Department of Education to Special Olympics International (SOI) under authorities of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Special Olympics Sport and Empowerment Act. The project focused on one central area of activity: Project UNIFY, a National Youth Activation Demonstration program which brings youth with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) together through sports and other school-based activities, providing them with the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to create school communities of welcome for persons with ID.” (The project was inaugurated under U.S. Department of Education funding awarded in June 2008, and was subsequently funded for a second, third and fourth year in 2009 and again in 2010, 2011. This report describes the fifth year of the project, funded in June 2012.)

Since its inception, Project UNIFY has had an overarching goal to create more inclusive school communities in which “all young people are agents of change – fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities (ID). Project UNIFY is built upon the premise that in order to have the greatest impact, the change process needs to start with young people. In keeping with this belief, Project UNIFY aims to foster youth leadership, providing youth with opportunities to have a voice and to take on active, leading roles in their schools and beyond.

Project UNIFY uses the inclusive sports initiative Unified Sports[®], as the catalyst for student awareness, understanding and engagement. There is strong empirical evidence that SO Unified Sports[®], provides a platform for youth without disabilities to come to understand and value their peers with ID, and to empower and activate all youth to make friends (Norins, Harada & Brecklinghaus, 2007). With inclusive sports as the foundation, Project UNIFY combines additional and complementary Special Olympics (SO) initiatives that provide additional opportunities to bring young people with and without disabilities together in meaningful ways to promote awareness, understanding and friendships. It is the unification of these initiatives in purposeful combinations that is at the heart of Project UNIFY.

For the past five years the U.S. Department of Education has awarded funding for Special Olympics International (SOI) which, among other activities, allocates funds to U.S. State Special Olympics (SO) Programs to engage schools as partners in creating climates of inclusion and acceptance for students with ID. Project UNIFY has been implemented at three levels since the program was first launched in 2008 – the national level, including collaborations with national education organizations and the formation of a National Education Leaders Network (NELN) and a National Youth Activation Committee (YAC) of youth leaders; the state level, made up of the state SO Programs, building collaborations with schools to deliver the Project UNIFY activities; and, the school level, made up of the individual schools and students within states and where Project UNIFY programming is conducted. Generally, State SO Programs have been given a range of choices within the specific framework of the Project UNIFY core components of Inclusive Sports, Youth Leadership and Advocacy, and Whole School Engagement, underpinned by its seven key characteristics: Youth Leadership, School-Community Collaboration,

Unifying Programming, Creating and Sustaining Relationships, Communication, Continuous Improvement and Professional Development.

Project UNIFY has spent the past five years in more than 3,000 schools in 45 states identifying the most effective, achievable and sustainable models of implementation that support and engage youth as leaders and contributors to project design, implementation, evaluation and sustainability. The evaluation of Project UNIFY is ongoing as SOI strives to improve the programming and in an effort to delve deeper into the ways in which Project UNIFY programming helps students with ID succeed in school, socialize with their peers, and prepare for a productive future, and prepares students without disabilities to be respectful of and advocates for youth with ID in their communities. The overall goal is to help assure that students with ID, like all students, have the best education experience possible.

After five full years of implementation, Project UNIFY is an integral part of the SO Movement as a key strategy for fulfilling the organization's mission. It has had an influence on the way many State SO Programs collaborate with schools and the education community, and youth activation has been incorporated as a critical component of the 2010-2015 Special Olympics strategic plan, within which "Building Communities" and youth engagement and activation are focal areas of growth for the organization globally. More specifically, youth activation now serves as the basis for many of the organization's recruitment, resource development and sustainability platforms, such as athlete growth, the promotion of social inclusion as a primary message, the development of a youth driven awareness campaign, and targeted marketing and development strategies. Moreover, Unified Sports®, the cornerstone of Project UNIFY, continues to be of the highest priority for the organization, especially for youth and as a pathway for transition to community life.

All of this progress to date has contributed to the development of a 5-year plan to guide Project UNIFY through the next important phase of progress and development which will focus on growth, quality enhancement, and a deeper understanding and demonstration of the program impacts on all stakeholders. This includes the impact and implications of Project UNIFY on the Special Olympics organization, and more broadly, the on the social inclusion for persons with ID in schools and community. According to Special Olympics Chairman, Timothy P. Shriver, *"Special Olympics Project UNIFY is one of the fundamental pillars to the Special Olympics foundation as we engage a new generation of unified leaders, advancing this century's most vital social justice movement for promoting the rights of people of all abilities through sports, health and community acceptance."*

I. Special Olympics Project UNIFY

A. *Description of the Program*

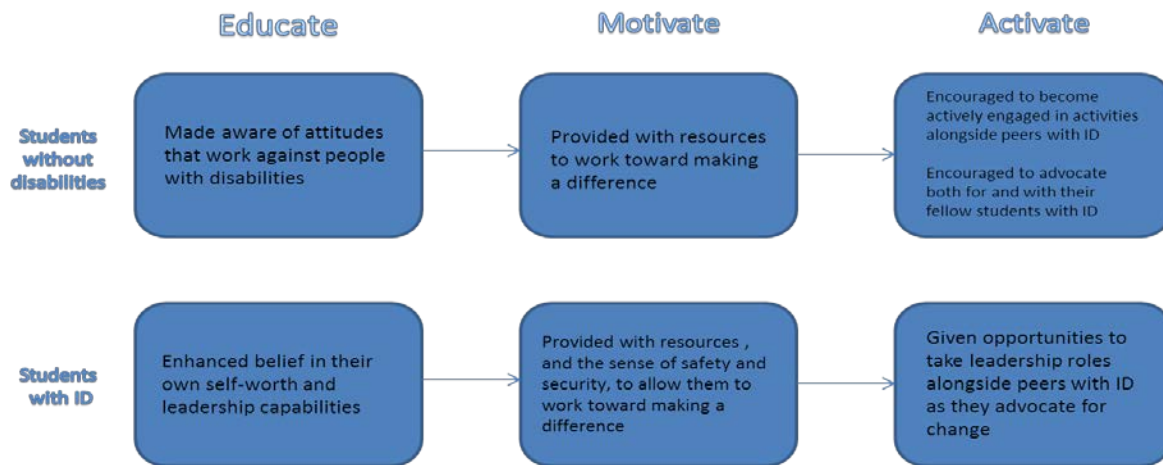
Project UNIFY is built on the premise that in order to have the greatest impact, change must start with young people. For years, Special Olympics (SO) has recognized the role that youth play in achieving long-term societal goals of acceptance and inclusion. SO views youth as **“powerful and effective advocates...open-minded to new things”** and as having **“the courage of conviction to step up and defend their beliefs. For this reason, [SO] find(s) that young people are some of the most powerful and effective advocates on behalf of acceptance”**. In practice this vision means our thinking and actions have shifted significantly, not just including students with disabilities but *unifying all* students; from adult-led programming to *student-led mobilization and action*; from *sports as simple recreation opportunities* to *sports as a catalyst for social inclusion and attitude change*. At the core of Project UNIFY is a paradigm shift with young people no longer seen as recipients of learning and programming, but rather as architects of lasting change and community building, and adults as allies rather than managers of youth.

Using schools as natural partners, given that youth spend so much of their time in school settings, Project UNIFY brings students with and without ID together through education and sports related initiatives, providing them with knowledge and skills necessary to create and sustain school communities that promote acceptance, respect, and human dignity for all students. Special Olympics Project UNIFY is committed to ensuring that whole school and community change result from the individual growth among young people who have been empowered to foster more inclusive and accepting attitudes toward people with ID. The Project UNIFY vision is that by inspiring change in young people, the attitudes of the next generation and their actions towards those with ID will be radically different and exponentially more inclusive than what has ever been witnessed in the past.

Project UNIFY seeks to nurture the natural motivation of young people towards social justice by employing a framework of *educate*, *motivate*, and *activate* (See Figure 1). Project UNIFY introduces youth and their school communities to the grassroots and community principles, practices, and experiences that have guided SO over the past 45 years as a catalyst for change in promoting greater acceptance of persons with ID, while at the same time working at the national and state levels to establish policies, programs and support systems to support social inclusion.

. Youth who are under informed about ID, or who may hold attitudes that work passively or actively against people with ID, are made aware (*Educate*). They are provided valuable opportunities to gain an understanding of their peers with ID (*Motivate*), and ultimately, become more actively engaged in sport and non-sport activities with youth with ID (*Activate*). Youth with ID gain experience enhancing a belief in their own self-worth and their role as change agents (*Educate*), are provided with the resources with which to make a difference (*Motivate*), and are given leadership opportunities with their peers without disabilities to advocate together on their own behalf and that of others (*Activate*). This last aspect is critical to ensure the success and ultimately it is the combined inclusive leadership between students with and without ID that ensures the success of Project UNIFY.

Figure 1. Educate, motivate, activate framework



With sports as the foundation, SO has combined its core initiatives and developed a number of complementary initiatives, which together support the framework detailed above. For example, the inclusive sports program, Unified Sports®, is complimented by education and social initiatives such as Special Olympics “Get Into It” k-12 resources, Partners Clubs, Youth Activation Committees, and Youth Summits, and school wide activities such as Youth Rallies and assemblies, Fans In the Stands, or campaigns such as the national Spread the Word to End the Word (R-Word) campaign. These initiatives are grouped into three core components. Central characteristics of each component are: inclusive youth leadership; school/community collaborations; social networking and interactive communications; skill development and enhancement of educators through professional development; and, continuous improvement. (See Appendix for detailed descriptions of Project UNIFY Key Characteristics.) (See Table 1 for a brief description of selected initiatives that fall under each component.) These components are:

Inclusive Sports and Fitness Opportunities - provide students with and without ID opportunities to participate in sports activities alongside one another;

Youth Leadership Opportunities – provide students with and without ID opportunities to take on leadership roles in promoting Project UNIFY activities in the school and in the community;

Whole-School Involvement – provide opportunities for *all* students in the school to participate in Project UNIFY through sustained school-wide activities.

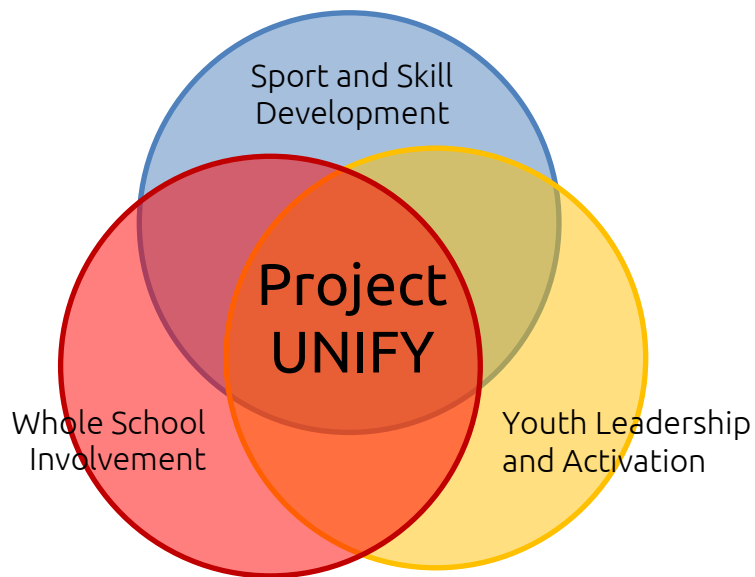
Table 1. The Project UNIFY components and selected Project UNIFY activities (For full descriptions see the Appendix.)

<p>1) Inclusive Sports and/or Fitness Opportunities</p> <p>Unified Sports® Options <i>a program that places athletes with ID and “partners” (athletes without ID) on the same team to compete in team sport and foster positive social interaction between individuals with and without ID.</i></p> <p>Inclusive Young Athletes® <i>an early intervention motor skills development program for preschool and early elementary aged students that promotes motor skill development and provides the opportunity for positive social interaction between young children with and without ID.</i></p>
<p>2) Youth Leadership Opportunities</p> <p>Partners Clubs <i>non-academic, school-based clubs that bring students with and without ID together for planning and participating in sports, recreation, social and community activities that foster understanding and acceptance and promote leadership and collaborative skill building.</i></p> <p>Youth Activation Committees <i>groups of youth with and without ID from an individual school, or from across the state if organized on a state level, that work with the State Program to educate, motivate, and activate youth to become agents of change in their schools and communities.</i></p> <p>Youth Leadership Training <i>trainings to give students with and without ID the tools and confidence needed to be active agents for change and action in their schools and local communities.</i></p>
<p>3) Whole School Awareness and Involvement</p> <p>Get Into It® Educational Resources <i>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 the community as well.</i></p> <p>Spread the Word to End the Word, or R-Word Campaign <i>a prescribed set of resources and tools to help students eradicate the hurtful and harmful use of language that demeans and diminishes others.</i></p> <p>Youth Rallies/Forums/Assemblies <i>where young people educate each other on issues, motivate each other, and activate on a set of agreed upon engagement practices.</i></p> <p>Fans in the Stands <i>a way for students of all ages to engage with persons with ID when direct interaction is not possible, where entire student bodies cheer their athlete peers with ID and support SO athletes at events.</i></p> <p>Fundraising Activities, <i>such as Cool Schools, Pledge and Plunge, or Walk for Respect conducted by student leaders to engage large numbers of students and community members in events that raise awareness and funds to support Special Olympics as well as the Project UNIFY activities in their schools.</i></p>

The “unification” of these components, and the individual activities and initiatives that make up the separate components in purposeful combinations is at the crux of Project UNIFY (see Figure 2). For example, implementation of Unified Sports programming in combination with other non-sport activities such as school assemblies, Partners Clubs or the Spread the Word to End the Word Campaign, provide the most opportunity for supporting peer relationships and provide for the most measurable impact on

attitude and behavior change. Moreover, changes in attitudes and increasing knowledge are best made through the one-on-one interactions that occur when one is participating in sports activities or clubs where peer group influence is leveraged with larger group activities. And, when students with and without ID engage as equal status participants in inclusive sports programs, not only does it foster positive peer relationships, but it also improves the sports skills, social skills and self-confidence of all students. (See Appendix for a full description of the Project UNIFY combinations that exemplify the interrelationships.)

Figure 2. Diagram of the relationship between Project UNIFY Components



To carry out Project UNIFY, State SO Programs receive funding from SOI. Generally, State SO Programs have been given autonomy to create unique programming combinations consistent with Project UNIFY characteristics and definitions, and aligned within the framework, described above, taking advantage of local opportunities for implementation. Moreover, State SO Programs are expected to establish partnerships with the educational community, as well as garnering the support of broad-based state and national campaigns and coalitions. The establishment and nurturing of these relationships is an essential feature of Project UNIFY given the constant flux in personnel at the school and district level. Buy-in and engagement at the state level by government, education organizations and associations support sustainability. In all layers of the educational community there must be a sharing of information and insights, a connection of SO Programs with their constituents, and a true collaboration between all stakeholders.

In summary, Project UNIFY is not simply a collection of initiatives, but a way to provide youth of all abilities with the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, confidence and skills necessary to be effective champions of social justice. At the same time, utilizing resources and tools provided by SO, schools and educators are given opportunities to promote school climates that engage adults in the school across content and grade levels to increase their knowledge and skills in the development of all students,

that support positive changes in attitude and behavior toward students with ID, reduce stigma and social isolation, enhance engagement, and sustain positive peer relationships where *all* children regardless of differences, are welcomed into and contribute to the social fabric of the school and experience true inclusion.

B. Progress and Learning Years 1-4

Over the past four years SO has worked at building relationships, developing resources, and creating a foundation for introducing Project UNIFY to schools in ways that result in the most optimal impact on acceptance and social inclusion of students with disabilities among their peers. Project UNIFY provides the resources and tools for schools to replicate the success SO has seen in its community and volunteer programming in order to create socially inclusive environments where students with and without ID can learn about each other.

During the start-up years of Project UNIFY, State Programs were given latitude to work creatively with local education communities in implementing Project UNIFY programs. It was important that SO Programs were able to work with the school districts and schools in their respective states to understand how Project UNIFY could be practically implemented, given not only the varying ways in which SO Programs had partnered with schools in the past, but also the variability of the schools themselves (e.g. geographical variability, variability of curriculum, structure and priority at the school level – elementary, middle, high). These early years provided valuable information as to how the framework of Project UNIFY worked programmatically and practically, and how it would be implemented and sustained across the country by school districts and the schools within those districts.

Specifically, Year 1 was spent observing and documenting, and Year 2 more clearly defining the preferred combinations of initiative that make up Project UNIFY (see Table 1 for a sampling of initiatives). In Year 3, in an effort to broaden reach and enhance sustainability, State SO Programs were called upon to break from their traditional way of doing business (i.e., working with adapted PE, or special education staff or teachers within the schools with which they partner), and reach out to schools and forge relationships through different portals. SO also challenged Programs to move beyond adult driven programming and involve students with and without ID in the planning and implementation of Project UNIFY, as well as in leadership positions.

It was also in Year 3 that we began to invest additional financial and other resources to those SO Programs who were prepared to implement more complex and comprehensive Project UNIFY programming (designated as *High Activation*), to help us understand optimum Project UNIFY programming. This included: developing programming that provided more extensive opportunities for inclusive collaboration among youth with and without ID, and more meaningful youth leadership opportunities, and the creation of state-level Education Leaders Networks (ELN) and Youth Activation Committees (YAC). The hallmark of each *High Activation* State Program was that the participating schools or school districts become Centers of Excellence, or models of effective practice, in one or more areas of Project UNIFY programming, and serve as models for other SO Programs participating in Project UNIFY.

Based on the learning from the *High Activation* Programs, in Year 4 all states were required to create youth (YACs) and adult networks (ELNs) as a way to develop internal sustainability and build the Program's capacity to engage, inform and influence educators and youth (e.g., youth, teachers, education leaders and Project UNIFY staff). There was also substantial growth among SOI in the building of relationships with national youth leadership and education organizations and associations that share ideals and constituents similar to those of Project UNIFY. Specifically, certain organizations were identified (e.g., *The Whole Child Initiative*, *the National Association of Student Councils*, *the Learning First Alliance*, *After School All Stars*) and customized action plans and guidelines were developed for how these organizations could support State Programs in the implementation of Project UNIFY programming.

In addition, Project UNIFY national staff and State SO Programs were able to better define and categorize the menu of initiatives and categorize them under three specific components: Inclusive Sports Programming, Youth Leadership and Advocacy and Whole-School Awareness and Engagement (see Table 1). In doing so there was a recognition that schools needed time to build Project UNIFY programming that encompassed initiatives from each of the three components. As a result, two types of schools were recognized in Year 4 - those just beginning Project UNIFY, or Category 2 (*Emerging Project UNIFY* - originally identified as "Building Bridges") schools, and those with more comprehensive and developed programs, or Category 1 (*Project UNIFY*) schools.

As a result of the focus placed on *High Activation* State Programs, we were able to develop strategies that could support all states, even those still struggling or just starting out. And, the increasingly specific criterion for what constitutes a "Project UNIFY" school also provided State Programs with a clearer, attainable path and measurable formula for success. This specificity has allowed SOI to monitor not only the quantity of schools participating in Project UNIFY, but also the quality of programming. The more rigorous guidelines and guidance given to *High Activation* Programs were converted to a universal set of guidelines that directed all State Programs in Year 5. For example, all states were expected to have at least one third of their schools at the Category 1 status and to develop an ELN, among other criteria. (See Table 2.) We were also better able to identify how state SO Programs and schools operationalize Project UNIFY from the outset and better understand how it works and fits within the school, not only in terms of the types and numbers of initiatives they are implementing, but also where the focus of programming lies. That is, in Year 4 two models of implementation were identified at the school level: schools that begin their participation in Project UNIFY by focusing on the inclusive sports component of Project UNIFY and those that begin by focusing on the school-wide education and awareness and/or youth leadership components. This has allowed SO to begin to identify the potential for different applications of Project UNIFY and their impacts, as well as begin to identify how to best guide schools in embracing all three components as well.

Table 2. Description of Category 1 and Category 2 schools

Category 1 or “Project UNIFY” school: In a *Project UNIFY* school there is an understanding that Project UNIFY is not just an incident or event that happens for one day, or a single experience, but rather year-long or seasonal integrated activities. In a Project UNIFY school there is an expectation that the objectives of acceptance and inclusion are part of the everyday activities and experiences that have an impact on individual students, as well as on the entire student body. Each *Project UNIFY* school is expected to do the following:

- Offer a combination of activities representing each of the three core components of Project UNIFY (see Appendix for possible combinations of activities in a school at different grade levels);
- Have a Project UNIFY liaison or teacher advisor assigned to work with the local SO Program to coordinate activities;

Category 2 or “Emerging Project UNIFY” school: In an *Emerging Project UNIFY* school youth activation and leadership are key components that should be present in all schools. This includes schools that are just beginning to implement Project UNIFY activities, or those that have been active in Project UNIFY up to now only at a minimal level. Each *Emerging Project UNIFY* school is expected to do the following:

- Conduct at least 2 initiatives or programs from any of the three core components that are connected to each other;
- Have a Project UNIFY liaison or teacher advisor assigned to work with the local SO Program to coordinate activities
- Have plans to move to Category 1/*Project UNIFY* school status after no more than 3 years.

One of the most significant features of Year 4 was creation of the “Project UNIFY Tool Kit” - a comprehensive set of resources which includes training guides, best practices, templates for implementing initiatives, and youth created how-to guides, that can be used to support new schools and enhance the programming in existing Project UNIFY schools. During Year 4 a series of professional development opportunities were also held for all stakeholders in the form of webinars, regional workshops, and culminating meetings and forums in topic areas connected to the Project UNIFY initiatives.

II. Project UNIFY Year 5

In Year 5 there was an increased emphasis on strengthening the collaboration between State SO Programs and educators particularly in identifying the role that Project UNIFY can play in supporting their state, district and individual school's strategic goals, whether it is promoting a positive school climate, developing physical fitness, building character, preventing bullying, enhancing student engagement, or other important school reform. The relationship between State SO Program and their area staff, and district and local educators is especially important because the majority of Project UNIFY activities takes place locally. Therefore, more than 70% of the total funds received in Year 5 were provided to State SO Programs for local and district project funding.

Based on the previous four years, the criteria for funding outlined in the application process for Year 5 (the 2012-2013 school year) was clarified to ensure the required benchmarks were addressed consistently across states. Specifically, in Year 5 *all* State SO Programs were required to form state level YACs and at least make specific plans to form an ELN. These requirements were enacted based on the success, in the previous two years, of High Activation Programs in increasing their engagement with state and district education leaders and including young people in leadership roles at the local and state levels.

Besides adhering to specific criteria formulated to support sustainability, in Year 5 State Programs were also required to demonstrate collaboration with school communities (district superintendents, school principals and other school administrators) (see Appendix for full description of requirements). In addition, they were tasked with seeking in-kind and cash support from community and corporate partners, ensuring a diversified funding stream for Project UNIFY activities, resulting in a 100% matching funds profile. They were also to make efforts to include youth leaders in their infrastructure and actively engage young people in multiple Project UNIFY experiences at a variety of levels within a single community. Finally, *all* State SO Programs were to ensure that at least 33% of their schools meet Category 1 standards, with the overall goal of moving all schools to the practice of implementing multiple, connected Project UNIFY activities representing a more embedded and therefore sustainable approach.

In Year 5, nearly three quarters of the total funds received for the project this year (or \$5,835,794 total) were provided to 38 state SO Programs in the form of contract funding and direct support for local implementation. State SO Programs were encouraged to integrate and expand school and community-based educational initiatives that built upon the positive effects achieved in the first four years and to supplement these initiatives with new ones. The unique opportunity that the funding in Year 5 provided was for State SO Programs to bring together expanded, integrated approaches that can impact the school and broader community.

To distinguish the different levels of Project UNIFY development and engagement among states, in its fifth year, SOI continued with the two funding categories; sustaining funding was given to state SO Programs that were still developing their programming while a higher investment was made in State SO

Programs that exhibited higher potential for intensive programming in their schools, more engagement within Project UNIFY activities, and expansion into new schools and school districts.

The more developmental funding was available at up to the \$150,000 level to all state SO Programs, continuing progress from previous years, or getting started with the understanding that building capacity takes time, but that states must show progress in expanding their programming. The guidelines put forth by SOI for State SO Programs receiving this level of funding, included the following:

- Provide leadership opportunities for youth with and without ID, within schools and at the state level;
- Implement at least one inclusive sports initiative in each school;
- Include whole school awareness activities such as Spread the Word activities; and,
- Include the revised Get Into It Resources in plans.

Investment funding was the more competitive of the two categories, with only five new awards made available in Year 5, in addition to the 14 (11 instated in Year 3 and 3 added in Year 4) states continuing to warrant high investment dollars. States applying for higher levels of funding were expected to demonstrate a more intensive level of collaboration with schools and to more actively engage youth leaders and members of the education community in strategic planning. Funding to these State SO Programs ranged from \$150,000, up to \$300,000 for those with the highest potential for enhancements and expansion. The guidelines put forth by SOI for State SO Programs receiving higher levels of funding, and for programming offered within the schools they served, included the following:

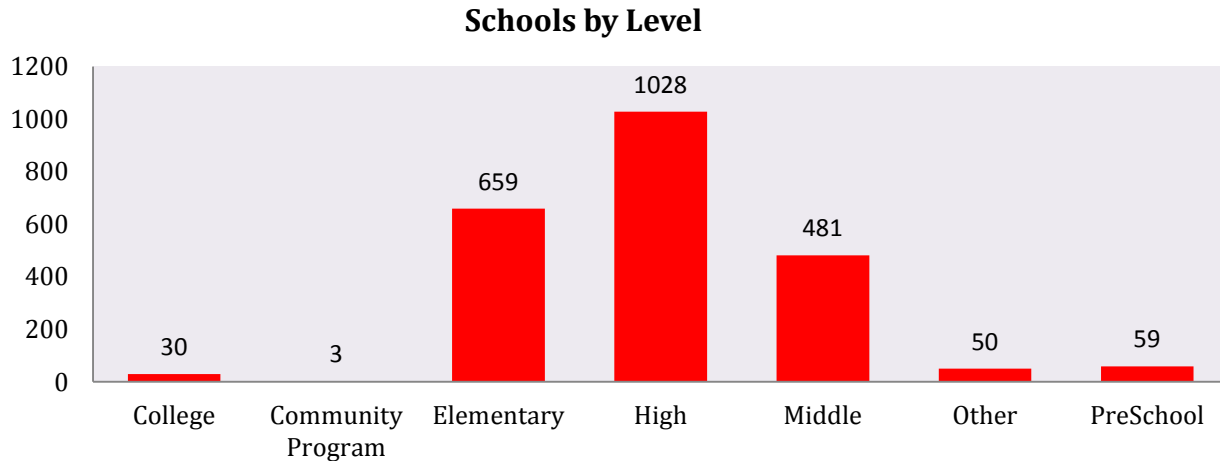
- Implement Project UNIFY in multiple schools districts, including elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and schools in urban and rural areas, where applicable;
- Implement Unified Sports as a key element of programming;
- Include school-wide awareness campaigns such as Spread the Word activities;
- Implement and track usage of the Get Into It Resources;
- Include social justice or service-learning components in activities;
- Foster youth leadership by developing a state-level Youth Activation Committee as well as implementing at least one youth leadership project in each school; and,
- Implement a state-level Education Leaders Network that will provide strategic direction to the SO Program.

Of the 38 state SO Programs implementing Project UNIFY in Year 5, 19 received a higher investment of funding, promoting expansion and deepening quality of programming in 50 percent of State SO Programs.

A. School and Participant Data

During Year 5, 2,310 schools were implementing Project UNIFY programming, with the majority being at the high school level (see Figure 3). This represents a 10% increase in schools over the previous year. These 2,310 schools were divided fairly evenly across Category 1 (43%) and 2 (57%) status with just over half of the schools were categorized as Category 2 in Year 5, with under a half categorized as Category 1.

Figure 3. Project UNIFY schools by level.



As has been the case each year, and as expected due to the differences in local, district and state education structures and priorities, there is variation among State SO Programs and schools in the implementation of Project UNIFY. This includes differences in the types of SO initiatives implemented from each of the three components across schools, the number of activities implemented, and the frequency with which they were implemented. Table 3 below provides an overview as to the participation of students in each of the broad components across all schools.

Table 3: Participant numbers¹ collected from State SO Program Project UNIFY Year 5 Reports

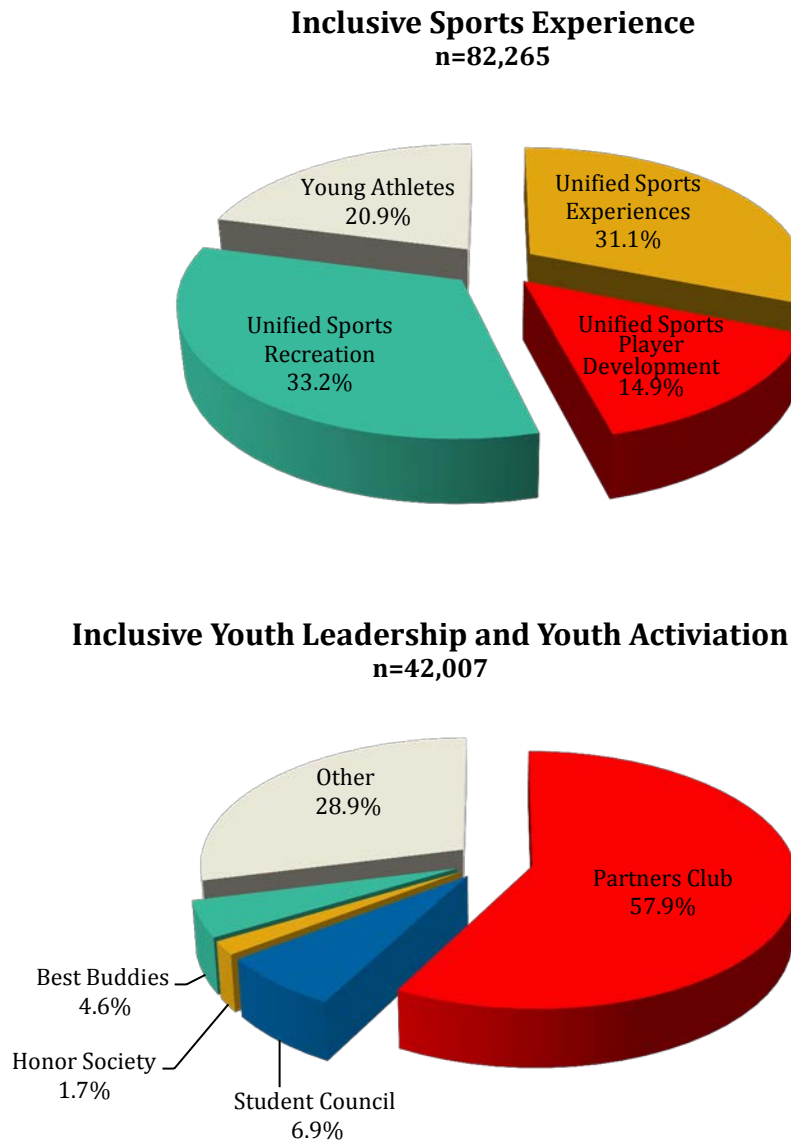
Schools	Inclusive Sports Experience	Inclusive Youth Leadership and Activation Experience	Whole School Awareness and Education Experience
2,310	82,265	42,007	1,666,707

¹ Data reflect the number of students reported as engaged in each component. Students may be engaged in more than one component.

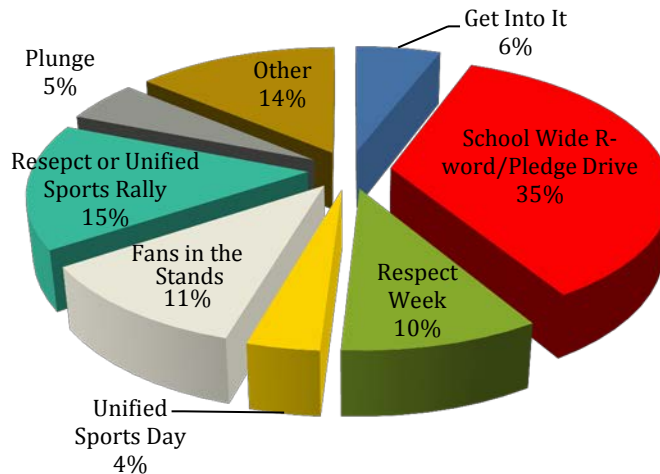
While these numbers provide a broad overview of participation, it is also important to explore the variability in participation within the components. For some students with and without ID, participation meant ongoing involvement over time, and for others it represented attendance at a single event (e.g. a school-wide assembly). There is a continued effort to distinguish between students who had an ongoing intense relationship in Project UNIFY and those who had some exposure to the messaging or experience, especially considering the compelling evidence that there is increased impact for those students more

deeply engaged. While our definition of “exposure” takes into account all interactions, whether it be for a day, or over time, our reporting of exposure distinguishes those activities that represent a more intense experience such as being a Unified Sports athlete or Partner, engaging in Young Athletes, or serving as a youth leader, from those that represent more minimal levels of participation such as attendance at an assembly or another school-wide program, such as a Rally or Fans in the Stands event. Therefore it is important to examine each component more closely to determine the numbers of students participating in more intense ways (see Figure 4.).

Figure 4. Percentage of students participating in the activities that make up each of the three components.



Community Awareness and Education n=1,666,707



B. Project UNIFY Year 5 Highlights

Overall, over the past four years Project UNIFY has witnessed an evolution guided by the seemingly simple but truly complex concept of social inclusion. Building on past experiences and successes, the goal in Year 5 was to take what has been learned over the past four years and use that knowledge to ensure value in its execution. One of the important findings leading into Year 5 was that Project UNIFY provides significant positive outcomes for students.

Yet, if Project UNIFY is to be viewed as an effective, replicable and sustainable program, efforts must be made to create and maintain high quality resources, models and guidelines for implementation that represent best practices. Moreover, it is important that all stakeholders are aware not only of the goals and objectives of Project UNIFY, but also amenable to the policies and practices that it promotes. For example, national level education reform leaders, or organizations with like-minded or missions related to Project UNIFY must be understanding of, and amenable to, the practices that Project UNIFY promotes in order to be welcomed or embraced in the schools those leaders are responsible for and/or influence. At the same time, State SO Programs that support and implement Project UNIFY must develop greater alignment between the mission, goals and practices that promote social inclusion, and then be prepared to foster social inclusion in the schools with which they partner. Finally, schools and educators need the tools and training to allow the grassroots activation work in the schools to flourish.

So, as we moved into Year 5, the next priority was an increased focus on deepening quality and building sustainability of Project UNIFY, with true social inclusiveness at all three levels of Project UNIFY programming; in schools, among state SO Programs and within the education community. In order to support this shift in focus, five strategic areas of focus were identified:

- **Supporting and strengthening the infrastructure** needed in a **Project UNIFY State SO Program** to support social inclusion, inclusive and meaningful youth leadership, and collaborations with schools through continued emphasis on relationship building, examination of exemplary schools, and analysis/use of evaluation results;
- **Promoting and further evaluating Project UNIFY, including the optimum combinations of the three components** and the programs and initiatives that make up those components in a “**Project UNIFY School,**” documenting the different out of school and after school innovations and extensions of Project UNIFY, measuring impact on youth leaders transitioning to post-secondary education, identifying specific strategies for urban school districts, and exploring the value of summer camp programming;
- Establishing an ongoing and national call to action for young people and educators, by **creating** new curricula, tools and resources, **revising** existing curricula **and broadly disseminating resources that support sustainable practices** to both internal and external audiences, utilizing digital messaging tools, and the Project UNIFY Tool Kit that includes curriculum and support materials;
- **Deepening collaborations with other organizations** through dissemination of a Project UNIFY-created set of online courses and resources devoted to **social inclusion and inclusive youth leadership** and providing a common language that enhances opportunities for coalition building and supports partnerships in programming and practice; and,
- **Expanding professional development and skill enhancement** for educators, SO Program staff and youth, in an effort to share best practices, accomplishments, and outcomes with education stakeholders through a school site visit protocol developed in Year 4 and a new SO Program peer-to-peer mentoring program.

In the following section we will highlight the activities conducted to support these strategies and demonstrate how all stakeholders have worked to advance a social inclusion agenda in State Programs and schools, and among organizations with an affinity toward this work.

1. Resource Development

The development of resources to guide and assist Special Olympics Programs in the implementation of Project UNIFY was an important priority in Year 5. A comprehensive toolkit was developed for State SO Programs to further assist them in supporting schools that are building communities of inclusion nationwide. The toolkit, containing well over 200 pages with numerous links embedded to resources available online, provides a multitude of information. For example, strategies to assist Programs in their work with teachers, students, administrators and school districts as well as guidelines for each Project UNIFY component and subsequent initiatives. Each Program received an initial quota of toolkits and was encouraged to access it [online](#) and share it with their constituent base.

Many supplemental resources were developed over the past year and launched at the SONA Conference in July 2013. These resources include:

- *Special Olympics Unified Sports: A Student's Guide* -a handbook for students starting Unified Sports programs in their schools;
- *Ignite with Project UNIFY* - an interactive game to introduce students to the concepts of inclusion and acceptance through Project UNIFY;
- *The Inclusive Youth Leadership Guidebook* - a training curriculum for students to enhance their co-leadership skills. (A more complete description is provided later in the report.); and,
- *Social Inclusion Resources* – a set of resources that include the “Framework for Socially Inclusive Schools”; “Inclusive Youth Leadership Guidelines”; and the “Policy Guide for Socially Inclusive Schools”. All of the tools are used to educate the educational community about Project UNIFY and the role it can play in promoting social inclusion in the school.

All of these resources were developed either mainly by students-leaders, or by students working in close collaboration with Project UNIFY staff and its partners.

The response from Programs to the toolkit has been overwhelmingly positive, validating its need and usefulness. As new resources are developed they are added to the document as its structure and availability online make it easily amenable to change. As changes are made, the revisions are promoted to Programs through the appropriate communication channels. Encouragingly, the popularity of the resources and guides created is evidenced by the fact that many Programs have used the Project UNIFY toolkit and resources as a starting point for the creation of their own state-specific guides – guides that include content and strategies specific to their state-based Project UNIFY programming.

In addition to the dissemination of Project UNIFY resources through the creation of a toolkit and social inclusion resources, there were also efforts to disseminate information to a wider national, education audience. In Year 5 Project UNIFY and the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) collaborated on the content for an entire issue of the associations’ publication, *The Standard* being dedicated to social inclusion and Project UNIFY programming. This is an important reference compilation for state and district education leaders, and was sent to over 3,000 members and leaders.

As part of our collaboration with the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE), the October 2013 issue of *The AMLE Magazine* included a cover article on Unified Sports and an interview with Special Olympics chairman Tim Shriver on the importance of social emotional skill development for all students, especially at the middle level. The circulation for this publication is 14,000 with a total readership of 47,000.

Finally, Get Into It® Educators Download Data Profiles were created for 3,201 educators, with 2,724 of those from the United States.

2. Youth Leadership

a) Champions Together

In November 2012, 15 student leaders from around the country traveled to Atlanta, GA to share their stories and experiences with Special Olympics and Project UNIFY on camera. The dynamic footage was pulled together and premiered as the [“Champions Together”](#) video at the Global Youth Rally at the 2013 Special Olympics World Winter Games. The video (which has 15, 30 and 60-second PSA versions, along

with a 2:22-minute full-length version) directs viewers to an [interactive website](#) that shares information about ways young people can get involved with Special Olympics as volunteers, teammates, friends, advocates and leaders. Special Olympics' communication team continues to utilize the video to encourage youth participation in the movement and it was also shared with Special Olympics State Programs for use in local media efforts. Finally, the "Champions Together" video was featured on Special Olympics' YouTube channel and to date has over 9,000 views (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vR7IMakNtsE>).

b) 2013 World Games – Youth Activation Summit

From January 24 to February 6, 2013, almost 80 Project UNIFY youth leaders with and without ID from around the world gathered in PyeongChang, South Korea for the *2013 Special Olympics Global Youth Activation Summit* (GYAS). Over the week and a half Summit, these youth leaders discussed leadership and shared their experiences about spreading the message of Special Olympics to their schools and communities. Among the youth leaders were three unified delegations from Arizona, Oregon and Southern California. Additionally Clement Coulston and Rachel Ward, two youth leaders from Delaware, served as Youth Facilitators for the GYAS, organizing content, facilitating discussions and leading sessions.

Clement and Rachel also participated in the inaugural Global Development Summit, which gathered 300 world leaders from areas of government, business, education, economic and social development, media and civil society. These leaders convened in PyeongChang during a session entitled, *Ending the Cycle of Poverty and Exclusion for People with Intellectual Disabilities*. Rachel and Clem were panelists for a discussion that focused on the Transformative Power of One to Effect Change.



c) National Service Learning Conference

In March 2013, five members of the National YACs Inclusive Youth Leadership sub-committee presented a session on inclusive youth leadership at the *National Service Learning Conference* in Denver, CO. Through interactive activities and discussions, the session highlighted the abilities of all students to become leaders and emphasized the importance of determining individual strengths vs. focusing on perceived weaknesses. The student presenters shared two pillars from the *Inclusive Youth Leadership Guidebook* – inclusion and environment (a full description of the guide can be found in section e. on page 18) – and presented the material to a non-Special Olympics audience with the goal of “testing” the content before the Guidebook’s official launch in July 2013. The session drew over 115 attendees and the presenters received positive feedback about the content and delivery, along with constructive ideas for improving the activities.

In addition to the session on inclusive youth leadership, National YAC members Kaitlyn Smith and Danielle Liebl served as keynote speakers during one of the plenary sessions at the Conference. Their 20-minute [keynote address](#) spoke to the power of friendship and the positive force of inclusion in their lives. Their influential and genuine speech moved the 1,000+ audience and drove lots of traffic to the Project UNIFY booth following the session.

d) Special Olympics North America (SONA) Conference Youth Experience

To help further educate young people about the Special Olympics Movement and provide better training on the concept of inclusive youth leadership, Special Olympics Project UNIFY offered each State Program the opportunity to send 2 youth leaders and 1 staff ‘mentor’ to the SONA Conference for a professional development opportunity. Unlike previous youth leadership experiences, the 2013 SONA Conference was an opportunity to fully integrate youth leaders into an existing Special Olympics conference, allowing them to learn with their adult program leaders and share their questions and experiences with the general conference participants.

The group of Project UNIFY attendees included 110 youth leaders, 60 state mentors, 10 staff members and 4 speakers/special guests. Youth participants ranged in age from 12 to 18, with the median age of 15. Approximately 75% of the students were in their sophomore year of high school, or younger. Participants represented 45 different State SO Programs, with only 5 Programs declining participation (Alaska, Florida, Mississippi, Nevada and Tennessee).

In addition to the Project UNIFY-specific Inclusive Youth Leadership session (see section e. on the following page), Project UNIFY conducted five individual sessions during the overall conference to provide information about Project UNIFY to attending SONA staff:

- **“IGNITE with Project UNIFY”** was an interactive game-type session that placed participants in teams of adults and young people and had them go through activities that exemplified the core components and activities of Project UNIFY.
- Project UNIFY National Education Leadership Network (NELN) member Arnie Fege led **“Achieve More, Succeed More with Young People”**, which included State SO Program CEOs, Project UNIFY state staff members and youth leaders. The ultimate goal of the session was to help Programs understand the opportunities and potentials of working with young people at a high level.
- **“What Have Your Schools Done for You Lately?”** was a panel session that looked at the various relationships State Programs have with schools and how Project UNIFY can benefit schools and the school climate, while schools can conversely benefit SO Programs. Dr. Jo Ann Freiberg was the session moderator and was joined by Program staff, Project UNIFY staff and youth panelists.
- **“Youth as Fundraisers and Communicators”** focused on the power of young people to raise money for and spread the message of Special Olympics and Project UNIFY. The session also connected with adults about their support and guidance of youth in these roles.
- **“The Department of Education. Guidance and Unified Sports: What does this mean for me?”** was an in-depth session for Programs to learn more about using inclusive sports to get the attention of schools and administrators. Session featured National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) members and Special Olympics staff.
- Additionally, Project UNIFY supported two sessions around strength-based leadership to support leadership development of State SO Program staff.

While there were major successes and challenges throughout the SONA Conference, below are just a few of the many powerful moments and experiences that impacted the atmosphere of the Conference:

- Successful models of inclusive youth leadership in action and practice;
- Youth actively and naturally participating in sessions and discussions;
- Relevance of young people throughout the conference and a sense of “cohesion” within delegations;
- Partners and athletes socially engaged within real-life, non-school, interactions.

A common theme for youth participants attending the conference was the excitement of getting to meet new friends from around the country who share a similar passion and dedication for Special Olympics.

“My favorite part of the SONA Conference was meeting new people from across the country that share the same passion for Project UNIFY that I do. Being able to share ideas and gain insights from adults was extremely rewarding.”

The SONA Conference was a unique opportunity to meaningfully integrate youth within the Special Olympics organization and as such, provided a springboard for ongoing work to promote youth

involvement. The conference provided SO Program staff and leaders with a valuable learning experience with regard to how to engage and work with youth (e.g., recognizing that young people learn at different speeds, and through various methods). Based on the SONA conference experience, along with post-conference discussions and surveys, a communication and education plan was developed to help support the activation of the attending youth leaders, specifically around the Inclusive Youth Leadership Guidebook, throughout the upcoming school year.

e) Launch of Inclusive Youth Leadership Guidebook

In support of an inclusive-style of leadership, members of the National YAC developed a 100-page *Inclusive Youth Leadership Guidebook* to be used as a resource for enhancing knowledge, skills and dispositions in becoming a lifelong inclusive youth leader. The Guidebook was premiered at the SONA Conference and was kicked off on Monday July 22nd with a 4.5 hour Inclusive Youth Leadership training. The training started with Sue Schank, who presented a one-hour session on various leadership styles. Following a break, members of the Inclusive Youth Leadership Committee on the National YAC gave a



presentation outlining the basic tenets of inclusive youth leadership. Specifically, their session covered the general concept of inclusive leadership, a complete run-through of Pillar 1 from the Guidebook, and the guides for facilitation and activation.

Following the SONA Conference, members of the National YAC developed a communication and support plan to ensure the conference participants understood the information shared and felt confident and comfortable in their ability to facilitate an

inclusive youth leadership training of their own. Between October and December 2013, seven video vignettes were created and shared with participants to provide more background information on each of the pillars outlined in the Guidebook as well as related topics such as adult allies and facilitation. Additional video messages will be shared in 2014 and conference call teams will be developed to provide an opportunity for youth leaders to engage in a discussion and feedback process to support their inclusive youth leadership efforts.

f) National Youth Activation Committee

With the departure of the remaining founding YAC members, the National YAC added 10 new members from six different states in August, 2012. National YAC members played a large role in many national youth leadership opportunities in Year 5; however, they also had a core set of work that was the focus of their work throughout the year. Their sub-committee work focused in four specific areas: the SONA

Conference, Inclusive Youth Leadership, State Mentorship, and Collaborative Partnerships. The following are details of this work:

- SONA Conference:
 - Created activities for the *IGNITE with Project UNIFY* game;
 - Lead the development of content for three Project UNIFY-specific sessions for the general conference attendees;
 - Supported the overall youth experience at the SONA Conference.
- Inclusive Youth Leadership
 - Wrote and launched a 100-page training manual to guide young people in leading their peers to become co-leaders;
 - Presented 4-hour training on Inclusive Youth Leadership;
 - Educated “outsiders” to Special Olympics on inclusive youth leadership at the National Service Learning Conference.
- State Mentorship
 - Developed a coalition of state-level YAC leaders to “test” a process for communicating and sharing across states;
 - Hosted monthly conference calls to begin idea sharing and problem solving.
- Collaborative Mentorship
 - Determined need to focus on one partnership – Best Buddies – and conducted experiential research;
 - Identified resources within Project UNIFY – specifically, “It’s Our School, Too!” – and strategized the best ways to share externally.

g) Interns

Special Olympics places great importance on engaging youth in key leadership roles. Within the Special Olympics organization, Project UNIFY provides a strong example for both youth leadership and internship development. Project UNIFY had year-long internship opportunities in three areas: communications, youth leadership, and finance. During the summer of 2013, Project UNIFY also offered four full-time internship opportunities (from June-July), one of which was filled by a person with an intellectual disability. These internships focused on conference support, communications, finance, and inclusive youth leadership development. Training was provided at the beginning of the internship and an ongoing professional relationship was established with all summer interns. Two of the summer interns transitioned into larger, year-long internship positions - one in financial planning and reporting, and the other in inclusive youth leadership, serving on the IDEA Partnership Transition Community of Practice. The internship process helps develop youth that are committed to a continuing role with Special Olympics and are interested in furthering the Project UNIFY strategic vision of social inclusion. In turn, it also models for SOI new ways of engaging/developing youth through internships.

h) Other Highlights

- During the first week of September, 2013, Special Olympics Project UNIFY youth leaders shared their experiences, insights and strategies with students, educators, parents and the community through Social Media. “Student Voice” (<http://stuvoice.org/>), a recent initiative formed to provide a venue for students to be heard, hosted a Twitter Chat and a Google+ Hangout on the topic of Special Olympics Project UNIFY. Clement Coulston, a former member of the National YAC and currently a Project UNIFY intern, hosted both events and created a Storify of the Twitter Chat. If you are interested in following the conversation, please use this link (<http://storify.com/clementc27/draft>) and see the Google+ Hangout (<http://bit.ly/1e6heV8>).
- Project UNIFY collaborated with American Institutes for Research (AIR) to highlight Project UNIFY youth leaders on the federal resource website FindYouthInfo.gov. National YAC members Clement Coulston and Roberto Eguia shared their story of inclusive leadership and the collaboration necessary to co-develop the [Inclusive Youth Leadership Guidebook](#). Their "[Voices of Youth](#)" story appears on the website.
- Music is an important motivator for youth. Country music star [Lauren Alaina](#) continues to be the SONA Global Ambassador for Project UNIFY. Her story of unconditional acceptance of her now deceased cousin with an intellectual disability has given her an authentic connection to Project UNIFY. Her commitment to the initiative was evident during the 2012-2013 school-year in many respects. In October 2012, she attended the fall games of Special Olympics Georgia which is also her home state. She sang during the opening ceremony and participated in the parade of athletes. The Program was enamored with her dedication to the athletes. In July of 2013 she performed at the opening of the SONA Conference in Charlotte, NC. One of the songs performed was written by Lauren for Special Olympics and dedicated to the athletes. She has recorded songs to help raise money for Special Olympics on the [A Very Special Christmas](#) series, and has created PSAs for Project UNIFY.

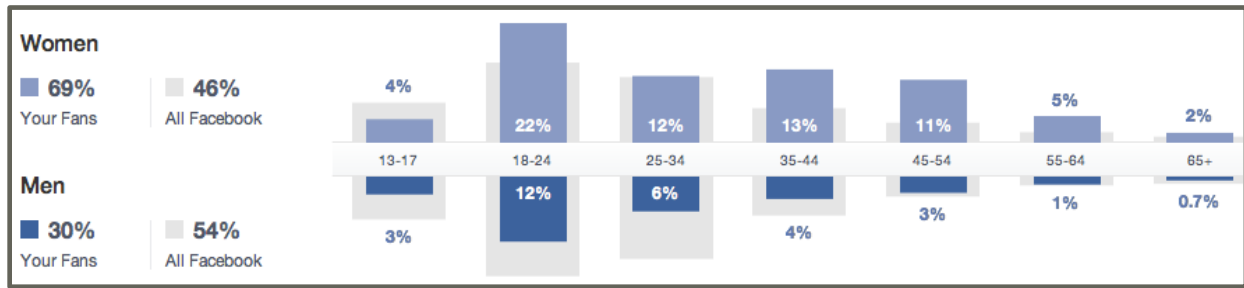
3. Social Media

a) Facebook Fans and Engagement

From August 1, 2012 to July 31, 2013, the Project UNIFY Facebook page added almost 1,000 new fans, increasing the pages like count from 2,715 to 3,668. An additional 300 fans have been added between August 1, 2013 and December 15, 2013 (see Figure 5).

Gender demographics for Project UNIFY’s fan base have remained consistent since Year 4, with approximately 69% of the “page likes” coming from women, and 30% from men. Age demographics are also consistent with Year 4 data – as expected, 41% of the Project UNIFY fan base is under the age of 25, and 59% is under the age of 35.

Figure 5. Facebook demographics.



When evaluating effectiveness through social media it is important to not only look at number of Facebook ‘likes’ for any given page, but also the level at which followers are engaging with a page. A simple equation is required to determine the percent of actively engaged users for a page:

$$\frac{\text{Daily Engaged Users}}{\text{Daily Reach}} \times 100$$

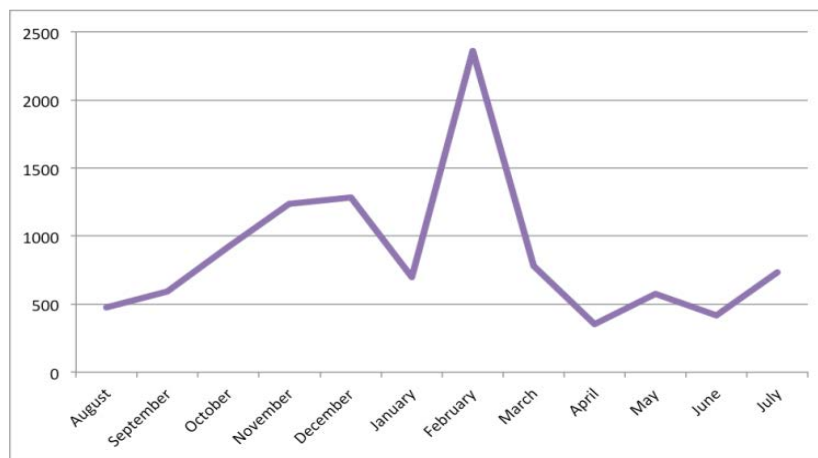
In this equation, “Daily Engaged Users” refers to the number of unique people who have clicked on a specific post to either comment, like, or share the post; “Daily Reach” refers to the number of unique people who saw a particular Facebook post, whether on the Project UNIFY Facebook page or within their own news feed.

Based on the number of Daily Engaged Users and Daily Reach throughout Year 5, the Project UNIFY Facebook page had an average **daily engagement of 3.45%**, which is a 0.35% increase in engagement from Year 4. Between August and December 2013, the level of daily engagement on the Project UNIFY fan page was 5.38%.

In addition to engagement, it is also important to look at a few other statistics that help provide a detailed picture of Project UNIFY’s presence on Facebook. One of the most significant statistics is around impressions, or the number of people (total, not unique) who saw any content associated with the Project UNIFY page (whether directly from our page or timeline stories, or shared through others’ interactions). In Year 5, the Project UNIFY Facebook page had a total of **1,438,453 impressions** – that’s 1.4 million engagements with Project UNIFY! Breaking the number of impressions down, we find that of our total impressions in Year 5, **959,845 were viral impressions**. This is a valuable number because it shows the numbers of impressions that came from people who have not “liked” the Project UNIFY Facebook page, meaning these are new engagements with our social content. (Note – it does not necessarily mean these “viewers” are new to Project UNIFY overall; however, it means they are outside of our social network.) While these impression numbers illustrate the total number of views – versus unique individual users who viewed content – it still represents a significant reach and validates the use of social media as a way to share relevant content to new and existing audiences.

While the engagement numbers above provide valuable insight into the overall activity level on the Facebook page, it is also important to look at the activity surrounding the actual posts made to the Project UNIFY page as a way to determine the effectiveness of individual content (see Figure 6). In Year 5, our post reach was 173,925, which means over the year nearly 200,000 people viewed a post on the Project UNIFY page – or an average of **628 people per post**. Over the 12-month span, a total of 227 posts were shared on the Project UNIFY page, resulting in **10,546 likes, 1,362 shares, and 492 comments**. Similarly, among the 85 posts shared from the Project UNIFY page between August and December 2013, there have been 2,900 likes, 368 additional shares, and 112 comments.

Figure 6. Monthly Project UNIFY post likes for 2013.



Looking at specific posts, the two most engaging and successful posts on the page had very direct calls to action for followers (data below includes interactions from stories, i.e. likes based on a post that was shared):

- [December 18](#) - Video post with call-to-action to make bracelets for Global Youth Activation Summit:
 - 616 likes
 - 61 comments
 - 188 shares
- [February 19](#): Album post asking fans to “pick” their favorite pictures for the Project UNIFY banner:
 - 1903 likes
 - 55 comments

b) Wordpress

In Year 5 the Project UNIFY blog experienced 9,814 unique views, with an average of 817 views per month. Between August and December 2013 alone the blog received 3,000 unique views. In Year 5, a total of 33 blog posts were shared and covered various topics relating to Project UNIFY. With regards to

the content featured on the blog, the post "[Generation #StandUp](#)", which talks about the Project UNIFY youth leaders involved in the book, was most successful in engaging and connecting with the blog audience. The post was viewed 448 times, with countless more views through the Project UNIFY blog homepage. Additionally, two Project UNIFY-specific blogs were shared on the Special Olympics blog. [2013 PA Summer Games Experience](#), a blog about youth leader Jordan Schubert's Summer Games experience received 242 views, 3 comments and 60 Facebook shares. [Unified by a Common Goal](#), shared in early November 2013 about the Alabama-LSU Unified Sports event, received 100 views and 50 social shares.

c) Inclusive Leadership YouTube

In October 2013, Project UNIFY launched the *Inclusive Youth Leadership YouTube Channel* as a place to share video on inclusive leadership and the inclusive youth leadership process. In Year 6, following the 2014 Special Olympics USA Games Youth Summit, the channel will transition into a more generic channel for all of Project UNIFY's video content. Between October and December 2013, 11 videos have been uploaded to the YouTube channel, accounting for 535 views and 832 minutes watched. Thus far, the channel has only been publicized to the youth leaders and mentors who attended the SONA Conference, so the viewership levels indicate significant penetration within this 150-person group.

d) Student Voice Engagement

During the first week of September 2013, Special Olympics Project UNIFY youth leaders shared their experiences, insights and strategies with students, educators, parents and the community through social media. [Student Voice](#), a recent initiative formed to activate the student voice through building community and opportunity, provided Project UNIFY the opportunity to educate their supporters about the power of our work. Student Voice hosted a Twitter Chat and a Google+ Hangout on the topic of Special Olympics Project UNIFY.

For the Twitter Chat, about 30 participants shared insights, posed questions, and exchanged resources. Many links relating to the topics were shared, including content from the [Special Olympics Project UNIFY WordPress Blog](#), Special Olympics website and YouTube videos. During the one-hour timespan, a total of 613 tweets (includes original tweets, retweets and @message tweets) were shared using the Twitter Chat hashtag, #StuVoice. Following the event, a [Storify](#) was created to capture the discussions that took place.

The Google+ Hangout with Student Voice was an opportunity for seven Project UNIFY youth leaders – Clement Coulston (DE), Connor Moore (DE), Karina Vargas-Silva (WA), Kabir Robinson (WA), Lindsey Conlan (NJ), Erin Meyer (NJ) and Kelsey Foster (SC) – to share their powerful stories and leadership experiences with the three components of Project UNIFY. The Google+ Hangout was both educational and inspiring for audiences and engaged approximately 45 viewers through YouTube and the Student Voice website.

4. Education Conferences

Over the course of the year Project UNIFY and social inclusion were present at many conferences and presentations. Below is a description of some of the opportunities of which Special Olympics was able to take advantage.

➤ **American School Counselors Association (ASCA)**

At the 2013 ASCA conference in Philadelphia, counselors from across the country participated in a session that included discussion around social inclusion. Specific questions addressed include: *What does social inclusion look like?; How do you know if a school is socially inclusive?; Which students are socially included?; Create a picture of a socially inclusive school; and Describe your ideal socially inclusive environment.* One participant commented in the evaluation, "Thank you! Great information and resources provided. I am so inspired and ready to get to work at my school."

➤ **Schools to Watch**

In June, Project UNIFY presented at the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform conference "Schools To Watch" held in Washington DC. The topic of social inclusion was addressed in the session: *It's Our Middle School, Too* addressed how a middle level school can become a socially inclusive. Special Olympics Project UNIFY presented as a program that helps create school climates of inclusion, acceptance, respect, and human dignity for students with and without ID. Participants unanimously rated the session as outstanding.

➤ **Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE)**

Project UNIFY had a major presence at the 2013 AMLE's annual conference in Minneapolis. Project UNIFY was the focus of the first general session with middle level students performing the play, *"It's Our School, Too."* Special Olympics Chairman Tim Shriver recorded a video welcome for attendees and Danielle Liebl and Jamie Behymer (members of the National YAC) presented the keynote address. Project UNIFY conducted two concurrent sessions presented by national and State Program staff, educators and students. Project UNIFY had a large presence in the exhibit hall with Special Olympics Minnesota staff designing and working the large exhibit. With follow up marketing of the materials and resources created, it is anticipated that Project UNIFY will spread into many middle schools after this conference.

➤ **International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)**

Youth leader Clement Coulston represented Special Olympics Project UNIFY at the [2013 ISTE Conference](#) in San Antonio, Texas. During this three-day conference, Clem was able to network for Project UNIFY through connections already established through his participation on Twitter. Clem and Rebecca Ralston co-presented an educational workshop on *Social Inclusion in Schools in the Age of Social Media*. Using a mixture of interactive activities, discussions and demonstrations, the session helped teachers better understand social inclusion and the tech-based tools we can use to further positive school environments. Topics covered in the session included:

- Empowerment of young people of all abilities to be able to share their ideas with the group;
- Differences between physical and social inclusion;
- Promoting equitable conversations;
- Power of video conferencing;
- *Get Into It* mobile app.

5. Internal and External Communications

At the beginning of the 2013, a new communication strategy was developed to better reach State SO Program staff, teachers, youth, administrators and supporters. An internal monthly newsletter was established and is circulated to Program leadership and staff directly working in the Project UNIFY arena on a monthly basis. This newsletter focuses on grant requirements, new resources, professional development opportunities, financial news, success stories and Special Olympics news. The average open rate for this communication is 54%.

The second monthly newsletter that Project UNIFY distributes goes to a larger audience of over 9,000 supporters. This list of recipients includes students, teachers, administrators, supporters and Special Olympics staff in the field. The newsletter focuses on national issues related to policy and education, stories and information about Project UNIFY's core components, news about Project UNIFY schools, and resources for teachers. The average open rate for this communication is 27%.

a) Education and Professional Development

Building the capacity of Program staff through professional development opportunities was a priority for Project UNIFY in Year 5. Although there had been sporadic professional development opportunities during the four previous years, Year 5 brought a more calculated approach. This approach began with the release of a Project UNIFY Professional Development calendar in the fall of 2012. This calendar provided a list of the different opportunities that would be available including:

- Webinars
- Presentations
- Trainings
- Conferences
- Site and School Visits
- Important Deadlines

State SO Programs were encouraged to attend all webinars and consider suggested trainings and conferences that were taking place around the country. Webinars were the preferred method of information delivery in Year 5 as this format allows for multiple attendees and therefore extremely cost effective. Webinars can also be recorded and made available for future reference.

These webinars conducted in Year 5 focused on a variety of topics that ranged from the logistics of running Project UNIFY to classroom resources. The first webinar series was held in April of 2012 and was dedicated to preparing Programs for Year 5 of Project UNIFY. Below is a list of the topics that were covered.

- Introduction to Year 5
- Financial Reporting
- Coaching Unified Sports
- The Use of Social Media
- SO College
- School Climate
- Year 4 Evaluation
- Mid Term Reporting
- Project UNIFY Toolkit
- Navigating the Online Application
- Budgeting Best Practices
- Partnerships and Collaborative Opportunities
- Utilizing your YAC and ELN

There were several other Professional Development opportunities made available to Programs during the year for building Program capacity or other stakeholders. Those opportunities included:

- Interscholastic Unified Sports Workshop
 - This workshop was offered to State Program staff who were encouraged to bring a member of their State Interscholastic Athletic Association.
 - OCR guidance letter and best practices for interscholastic association partnerships were presented.
- Unified Sports Coaches Training
 - Partnered with NFHS to offer a no cost online Unified Sports Coach training offered via the NFHS website - www.nfhslearn.com.
- School/Site Visits
 - Visits to Southern California, Michigan, Louisiana, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Texas, Arizona and Hawaii.
 - Met with school administration and teachers, school based YAC members, Unified Sports participants, coaches and Program staff.
 - Identify best practices and areas for technical assistance.

b) School Climate Pilot Research Project

Project UNIFY is collaborating with the National School Climate Center (NSCC) on the School Climate Pilot Research Project, which compares Project UNIFY schools with schools of similar demographics on social inclusion and other research-based school climate variables. This important research project will help to identify those factors, including Project UNIFY, that contribute to the creation and sustainability

of practices that promote socially inclusive school climates as reported by students, teachers, staff, administrators, and parents.

This exploratory study, which began in the Fall of 2013, is examining the climate in 10 schools that have implemented Project UNIFY and 8 schools that have not implemented Project UNIFY. The 8 non-Project UNIFY schools have been matched on key demographic variables and are similar to the Project UNIFY schools. Results are expected in the Spring of 2014.

As a result of this work, the NSCC will be incorporating the newly constructed "social inclusion sub scale" into its Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (<http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/csci.php>).

c) Project UNIFY Policy Project

The Special Olympics Project UNIFY staff is working with NSCC and three State SO Programs (CT, IN and NY) on the sustainability policy project. The primary goal of this work is to develop a simple matrix that allows State Programs to self-assess how specific Project UNIFY programming aligns with education policies at the state and federal level. This resource will ultimately assist State SO Programs as they work with school administration to create and tailor Project UNIFY program to meet the school's needs and specific goals. This will be a valuable tool for State Programs to use in their introduction to and work in new school systems in particular.

C. Project UNIFY Initiative Updates

The Special Olympics Athlete Development Model (ADM) was developed to support not only sport skill development and competition, but also health and well-being so that participants have an opportunity to live healthier and more rewarding lives from pre-school through adulthood. Project UNIFY strives to align with this model by creating a continuum of participation that starts from the youngest age of entry at 2 years old and extends into adulthood. As Project UNIFY has gained momentum and expanded in the numbers of schools and students reached beginning in kindergarten all the way through high schools, more and more young people are becoming activated. Therefore, there has been an increased demand and need for transition activities to allow these young people to stay involved after high school through the community or through college. Project UNIFY address this need by offering the Young Athletes program to our youngest participants, and providing programming through high school and beyond with SO College. Below are updates on selected Special Olympics initiatives offered through Project UNIFY.

1. Young Athletes

Young Athletes (YA) is an inclusive program that uses play activities and motor skill development for children ages 2.5-7. Introduced in pre-school and early elementary school settings, is the earliest SO opportunity for students to engage in inclusive physical education and motor activities. The YA program has been shown to promote significant motor development in young children with development delays. A randomized intervention study showed that the motor skills of young children participating in YA

improved at twice the rate of children in the control group who did not participate in YA (Favazza, Siperstein, Zeisel, Odom & Moskowitz, 2011). A follow up study confirmed these results and found that motor skill development can be accelerated by participation in the YA, regardless of gender, age, or level of severity in disability, and that most of these gains (particularly in locomotion and object manipulation) can be maintained for a limited period of time (Favazza, Siperstein, Zeisel, Odom & Moskowitz, 2013).

Over the first four years, Project UNIFY facilitated the participation of more than 50,000 new young participants between the ages of 2-7, including them in a pipeline of school based SO activities as they grow old enough to participate in regular SO sports activities (such as the Unified Sports options). In Year 5, Project UNIFY schools offered Young Athletes to 17, 171 new participants.

During the final months of Year 5 of Project UNIFY, a professional development workshop was conducted focused entirely on pre-k and early elementary inclusion programming. The event was supported financially by the Carolyn and Peter Lynch foundation and was the launching ground for a new training curriculum based on pilot testing conducted in three states: Virginia, North Carolina and Colorado.

In total 35 Special Olympics Program staff members and early childhood (EC) professionals representing 21 states and one Caribbean sub-region were invited to attend the conference. The group of EC professionals included a wide variety of individuals with a range of backgrounds including physical and occupational therapists, special education teachers, and directors of programming for young children (e.g. pre-K, early intervention, and community based programs).

A train the trainer model was selected as the method of delivery at the conference as a way to empower and mobilize a cadre of State Program staff and Early Childhood educators to grow the YA Program across the North American region. Special Olympics will rely on these newly trained individuals as a base of support and growth for years to come as they train and educate other professionals, volunteers and family members in their communities. The expectation is that these newly trained professionals will recruit and engage another 500 front line professionals throughout the country to offer the YA program.

In addition we now have a few emerging “models” of sport-specific training programs which help our YA participants transition from play activities to later sport training and competition (i.e., Unified Sports options). One such model that has seen the greatest success is the “Little Feet Meet” program developed in Virginia for students ages 6-12 years of age. Training for the culminating track & field “Meet” held during PE classes at local schools leading up to the district-wide meet which are organized by high school students attending Project UNIFY schools. This model will be shared more widely across the country as a best practice in elementary inclusion and high school leadership in the coming year.

2. Spread the Word to End the Word/R-word Campaign

Across the 2,310 Project UNIFY schools, 591,191 youth were exposed to the R-word Campaign. On March 6th alone (Spread the Word to End the World Day), **19,582 online pledges** were made. As the events continued through March, an additional 15,000 online pledges were received with over 43,000 total by the end of the month. From Tweets, Facebook posts, pictures and news articles, THOUSANDS

more handwritten pledges were verified. (A complete report on the R-word Campaign can be found in the appendix.)

Notable event highlights from 2013 include:

- The Unified Sports team at Pacific University in Oregon (the first SO College Program for Special Olympics Oregon), created a [video](#) to support the 2013 STW Day of Awareness.
- The Youth Activation Committee at Washington Woods Middle School of Holt, MI organized pledge tables and, with assistance from school administration, videos, classroom discussion and writing assignments were conducted school-wide.
- George Read Middle School in the Colonial School District (New Castle, DE) created a [video](#) that includes a student written song about ending the use of the R-Word.
- The student council at Cibola High School in Yuma, AZ, collaborated with their Project UNIFY club to put together an [inspiring video for the STW awareness day](#).
- Anser Charter School, a Project UNIFY school in Idaho rocked the STW campaign this year by presenting to another elementary school and holding two assemblies. They also went above and beyond by creating 500 spirit bags for Special Olympics Idaho's State Winter Games athletes and coaches.
- Celia Grijalva, a student at Bend High School in Bend, Oregon participated in a youth rally about the R-Word in her freshman year and now plans on keeping it going next year when she is a Senior and even in college. Celia used the r-word campaign as a springboard to influence one person at a time.

Web traffic for www.r-word.org was down slightly in 2013 compared to 2012, with about 52,000 visits on March 6th. However of those 52,000, 86% were first time visitors. For the first time, R-word site visitors had the chance to share their own stories of dealing with the R-word. During the first three weeks of March 2013 close to 200 stories were submitted and published on the R-word site. One story shared from the site on Facebook on March 12, drove a spike in site traffic six days after Spread the Word day. That story entitled, "Stupid Girl" had 4,239 page views on that day, and 4,100 of them were driven to the site by Facebook. In addition, there is good evidence that people going to the pages are reading the stories as the average time per page on an R-word stories page is 3 minutes 8 seconds, compared with an average of 1 minute 33 seconds for the site at large.

Mobile traffic also increased 21% from 2013, yet our biggest success this year was found in the engagement levels driven through social media. Special Olympics ambassadors, board members and several sports league "partners" activated in a big way that lead to **over 52 million impressions on Twitter** alone. On Facebook our reach and number of engaged users increased significantly, while we saw only a modest 15% increase in the number of new fans acquired compared to 2012. Across several engagement categories on Facebook (stories created, unique impressions, and unique engaged users) we saw increases of 197%, 834%, and 650% respectively. Also, 80% of our impressions were from fans sharing content virally. In total, **Facebook and Twitter tallied over 75 million impressions in 2013, compared to 16 million in 2012, a 369% increase.**

More specifically, over a the 5-day period in March (4th-8th), Facebook traffic increased exponentially from 2012 with 23,013,383 total impressions (and increase of 433%!), 37,286 stories created from our Page's content shared by fans (+197%), and 363,069 unique engaged users (clicked on or shared story) (+650%). Twitter also saw similar growth with 52,600,000 total impressions (+338%), 7,996 total tweets (+204%), and 5,952 retweets (+255%).

Much of the success on Twitter can be attributed to the great amount of support received by influencers, celebrities, athletes, and sports teams. There was great individual support by Michael Phelps, SOI Board Members, and other ambassadors, but also tremendous support by both the NBA & MLS which leveraged their community outreach programs, NBA Cares and MLS Works, to engage several teams and dozens of their athletes.



In addition to the traffic through social media, there was significant exposure through traditional media outlets. Over a 6 day period (March 1-6), there were 48 local media hits reaching a potential viewership of 145,414,818. In addition there were several print media outlets that ran stories or blogs on the r-word campaign including those highlighted below:

- [New York Times op-ed](#) by Lawrence Downes
- Huffington Post
 - Soeren Palumbo and Tim Shriver, [What's Wrong with 'Retard'?](#)
 - Matt Holder: [A Word Can Be a Matter of Life and Death](#)
 - Ellen Seidman, Quiz: [Do You Get Why You Shouldn't Say The R-Word?](#)
- Huff Po Live chat
 - [Tim and Soeren](#)
 - Frank Stephens Live Chat
- [Parenting.com blog by Frank Stephens](#)
- [Parenting.com, Changing the World, One R-Word at a Time](#)
- [About.com posts & resources from Terri Mauro](#)
- [John C. McGinley interview on Denver television](#)
- Representative Glenn Thompson (R-PA) on CSPAN

3. Unified Sports/Interscholastic Sports

Special Olympics Unified Sports® is an inclusive sports program that combines an approximately equal number of Special Olympics athletes (individuals with intellectual disabilities) and partners (individuals without intellectual disabilities) on teams for training and competition and is core to Project UNIFY. School-based Unified Sports programs provide opportunities for all students to participate in their school's athletic program and promotes social inclusion through shared sport training and competition experiences. Athletes feel a sense of belonging; they can meaningfully interact with others, develop mutually rewarding relationships, are recognized as contributors, and are received with acceptance and respect. This can be a highly effective way to support any school's inclusion efforts.

During Year 5, Project UNIFY worked with school systems as they sought to address the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights 504 Guidance released in January 2013 that focuses on the inclusion of students with disabilities in school activities. Since then, Project UNIFY has been working with our key education and sports partners to demonstrate how Special Olympics and the Unified Sports program are an ideal community partner in helping them address this OCR guidance. Recommendations from the Project UNIFY NELN were utilized in developing a communication and education plan to support to State SO Programs as they responded to the increased interest in Project UNIFY and Unified Sports generated by the guidance. The following was accomplished:

- Webinars were held to educate our State Programs on the OCR guidance and the opportunities for Special Olympics.
- State SO Programs were surveyed to determine their needs and questions and collect best practices.
- Materials were provided to the Department of Education/OCR for them to integrate into their technical assistance communications.
- A variety of articles were published in education/sports publications including: Learning First Alliance Blog (LFA); Association of Middle Level Education (AMLE); Palaestra (AAHPERD-American Alliance of Health, PE, Recreation & Dance); NASBE.
- An internal webinar series was planned and implemented to help State SO Programs align with and address the Guidance.

In 2013 we also strategically expanded our collaboration with the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and a new relationship was forged with the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA). An "Interscholastic Workshop" was co-sponsored by Special Olympics in February which was attended by 80 people, including 20 people from State High School Interscholastic Athletic Associations (IAAs). For the first time, Special Olympics delivered presentations at three big interscholastic conferences: NFHS Legal Summit, NFHS Summer Conference and the National Athletic Directors Conference. Finally, NFHS Staff attended and presented at the SONA Conference.

In addition to these accomplishments, several interscholastic partnerships were formed at the state level and a model of "Interscholastic Unified Sports" was developed, where the State SO

"Inclusive school sports is an area of focus for us at the NFHS and we feel that Special Olympics Unified Sports is an ideal model for our schools to accomplish this"
– Robert Gardner, NFHS Executive Director

Program partners with their respective State High School IAA to offer Unified Sports as an officially sanctioned sport/program. In this model, Unified Sports is offered just like any other sport in the schools and recognized as such. This recognition and acknowledgement of Unified Sports has fostered an incredible level of inclusion and provides a high platform of learning for everyone involved, either as a participant or spectator, as a coach or organizer. In 2012, there were only 7 states with this type of partnership. Over this past year, we have seen dramatic growth with 23 State SO Programs with either an official partnership or are in the planning stage. (See Figures 7 and 8.)

Figure 7. Interscholastic Partnerships in 2012

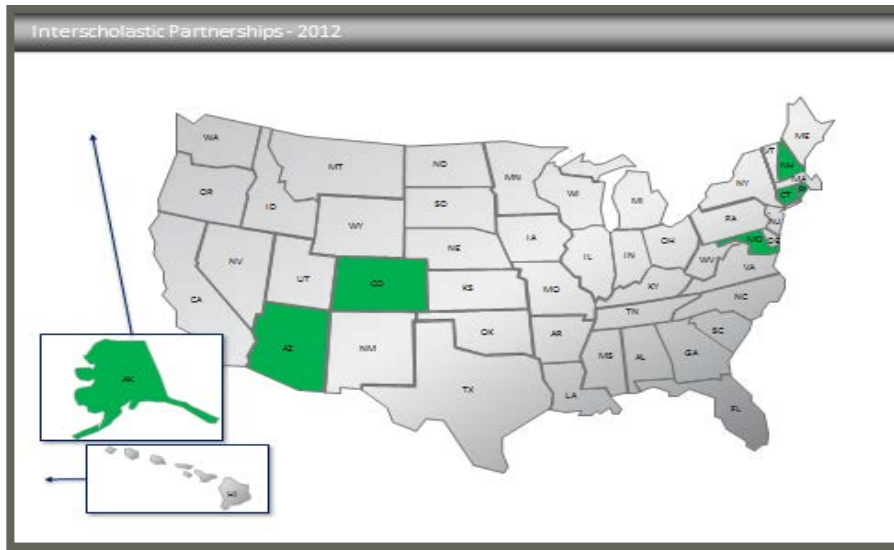
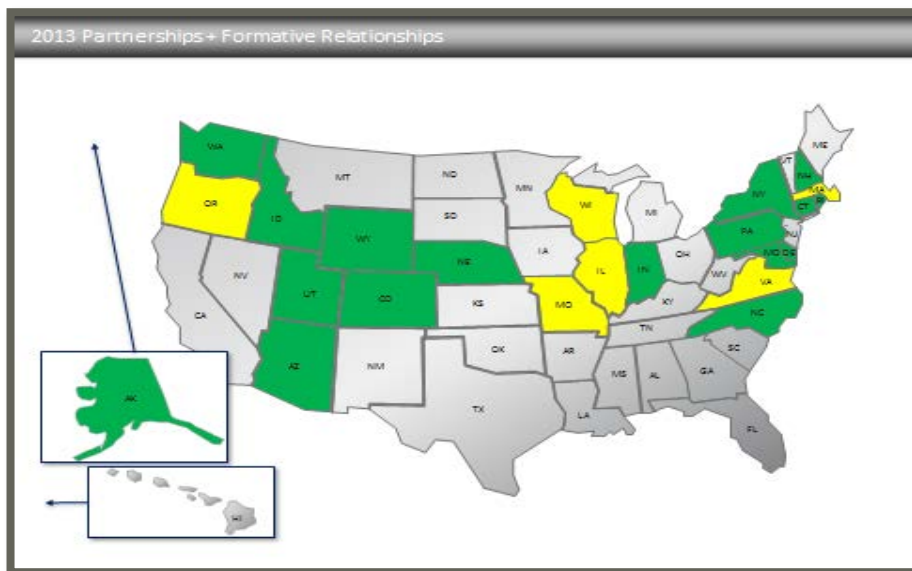


Figure 8. Interscholastic Partnerships in 2013 (green) + Emerging Relationships (yellow)



In addition to the interscholastic work, the implementation of Unified Sports in urban settings was also addressed. Programming in urban schools has always posed challenges for State SO Programs but the advent of Project UNIFY has provided the impetus for many to get creative in how they work with some of the most challenged school systems in their state. A Unified Sports “Urban Soccer Program” was developed a few years ago in the Seattle Public Schools in partnership with the Seattle Sounders Football Club (MLS). This model was expanded to other markets in 2012-13 including: Denver, Portland, Kansas City, Philadelphia, and DC. In 2013, the MLS and Special Olympics signed a proclamation in support of urban sports partnerships.

Another strategy to promote Project UNIFY and inclusive sports in urban schools is its integration into the Physical Education curriculum. This is a very sustainable model that aligns well with the curriculum needs in schools as it not only allows Unified Sports to take place during school hours but also provides Project UNIFY leadership opportunities for students, without the need to rely on after school transportation or parental support – two areas of challenge in urban schools. A few noteworthy districts that are implementing this strategy include: Los Angeles Unified School District, Philadelphia Public Schools, and Peoria (Arizona) Unified School District. A Unified Sports PE Curriculum was also endorsed by the South Carolina Department of Education in 2013, where it is being implemented in many of the school systems.

4. SO College

SO College is a transition program that allows activated high school leaders to continue their involvement with Special Olympics upon graduation creating a pipeline to community-based SO Programming. SO College functions as an officially recognized club on a college campus that engages students throughout the year. SO College incorporates the three main components of Special Olympics Project UNIFY -- Sports, Youth Leadership, and Whole Campus Involvement -- while building college campuses of inclusion and acceptance.

Since its inception in 2009, the mission of SO College has been to *“unite college students and people with intellectual disabilities to enhance lives through sports, friendship, advocacy and other activities.”* In its formative years, SO College solely focused on inclusive sports opportunities and Spread the Word to End the Word events. However, feedback from State SO Programs provided valuable information on how college-level programming was incorporating many different types of engagement activities that were not initially included in the SO College model. Based on Program feedback, the main components of SO College were changed to mirror those of Project UNIFY: sports, youth leadership, and campus-involvement. This transition occurred at the start of Project UNIFY Year 5. See Figure 9 for a detailed explanation on how each Project UNIFY component can be executed at the college level.

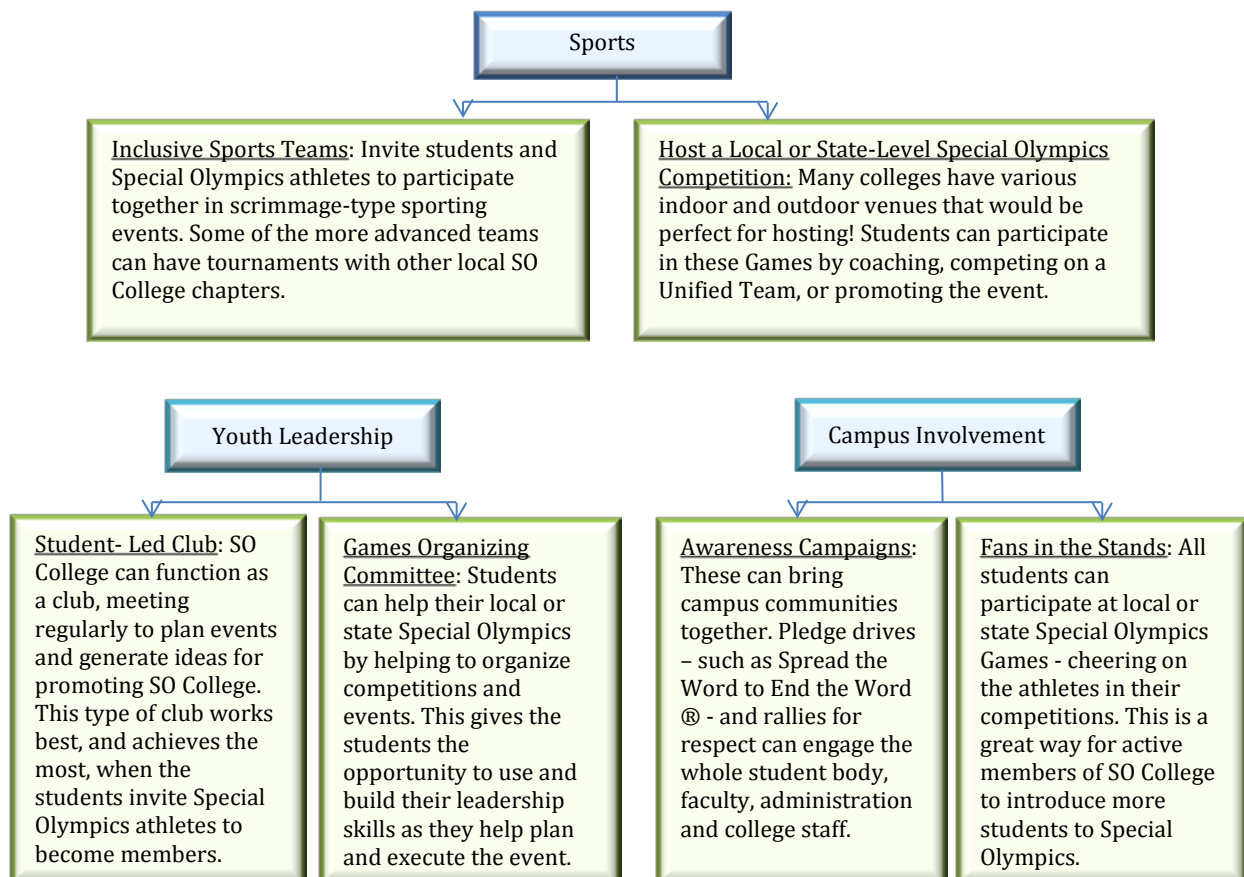
SO College now directly falls under Project UNIFY as a transition program to continue the activation of involved high school seniors into SO College leaders. SO College supports the transition of both special and regular education students through college and into the community. It is important to reiterate that SO College is for every student, regardless of ability level, and also for local community members who are in a post high school transition program that want to remain involved with Special Olympics. The SO

College leaders will reach out to these individuals and invite them to events and to participate in Unified Sports teams. We understand that not every student with or without ID will attend a community college or 4-year school, but through SO College these students will remain involved and engaged as SO college helps close the gap and transition issues from school to community that have been an issue for State SO Programs.

To facilitate the growth of SO College it was important to partner with other respected and recognizable collegiate organizations. One such organization is NIRSA (National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association) considered the leaders in collegiate recreation. NIRSA, dedicated to equality, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of their work, comprises nearly 4,000 dedicated professionals, students, and businesses, serving an estimated 7.7 million students. With the backing of NIRSA, Special Olympics is able to gain legitimacy in the collegiate recreation world and expand our current reach.

In 2013 Project UNIFY expanded its partnership with NIRSA to create Unified Sports recreation leagues in colleges across the country. In the process of setting up these leagues, Special Olympics has educated collegiate recreation professionals and students about Project UNIFY. This education process has allowed our current SO College students the opportunity to work with the University Recreation Department (whom have been educated on the benefits of Unified Sports) on expanding and growing their current Unified Sports endeavors on their campus. This also gives college-aged Special Olympics athletes a true collegiate-level intramural experience.

Figure 9. SO College Programming



SO College has also grabbed the interest of Special Olympics' most recent global sponsor, ESPN who is very interested in highlighting and expanding not only our collegiate Unified Sports efforts but also increasing the number of SO College programs. ESPN recently aired a segment of a Unified Sports flag football game between the SO College chapters at Louisiana State University and Alabama, promoting SO College at a national level. The viewing audience for the segment was nearly 2 million and ESPN plans to air a similar event between the SO College Unified Sports basketball teams at Duke University and the University of North Carolina during the spring of 2014.

In the later part of 2013, SONA strategically planned and reorganized the current scope of programming and partnerships that exist at the collegiate level to ensure that all efforts were combined under the SO College umbrella. In the coming year SONA and Project UNIFY will focus on creating additional engagement opportunities for students to remain involved after high school. Below is a current list of SO College partners who are working with Special Olympics and SO College leaders in many different capacities:

- NCAA Division III
- US Fund for UNICEF
- IACLEA
- BIG XII Conference
- PGA of America
- American Academy of Developmental Medicine and Dentistry
- Phi Sigma Kappa
- Alpha Sigma Alpha
- Sigma Tau Gamma

Since 2009 SO College has seen substantial growth and continues to add nearly 9 chapters a month (see Table 4). In the past year SO College has almost doubled in size because of the continued emphases SONA and State Programs have placed on SO College and the increased number of graduating high school students that have been involved in Project UNIFY that are seeking ways in which to remain involved. With continued funding and new resources, SO College is on-track to achieve more than 100 chapters across 32 states by the end of Project UNIFY Year 6 (June 2014).

Table 4 Growth in SO College from 2012 to 2013.

	SO College Statistics Fall 2012	SO College Statistics Fall 2013
Active SO College Chapters	43	78
States Represented	25	30
Student SO College members	1,720	2,730
Special Olympics Athletes	645	1,560

III. Project UNIFY Evaluation Approach and Report

SOI is committed to documenting the effectiveness of its programs and its principles through various evaluation and evidence based approaches. Over the past four years qualitative and quantitative data has informed the continuous revisions and refinements of Project UNIFY. SOI believes the relationship between program evaluation and program implementation yields significant and powerful results which work to ensure the overall success and future of Project UNIFY. To gather information about Project UNIFY in the spirit of continuous improvement, SOI has again partnered with the Center for Social Development and Education (CSDE) at UMass Boston for the purpose of evaluating the program. Each of the past five years, CSDE have conducted an extensive evaluation of Project UNIFY at the State SO Program and school levels, focused on understanding what Project UNIFY looks like in practice and how it impacts those involved. (See the full “Project UNIFY Evaluation Report 2012-2013” in the Appendix.) In addition, as an ongoing function of the Project UNIFY work, there is reflection, review, and an incorporation of modifications in activities at all three levels (national, state and school) and on a continuing basis. Various ad hoc advisory teams consisting of a diverse set of stakeholders are engaged in the review of activities, materials and processes and assist SOI in making improvements and enhancements to Project UNIFY on an ongoing basis. In addition, information obtained through our assessment measures each year has been shared with staff and constituents at all levels and serves as the foundation for improving and expanding Project UNIFY in subsequent years, and is reflected in the enhancements and opportunities outlined for each subsequent year’s work.

The Year 5 evaluation of Project UNIFY had several objectives, including an examination of how Project UNIFY was implemented in all schools, as in previous years, with a more specific emphasis on assessing the combinations of initiatives carried out in Category 1 and 2 schools (see Table 3). In addition, building on what was learned in the previous four years, a continued emphasis was also placed on documenting the value of Project UNIFY to schools and students with and without disabilities. This objective was further extended in Year 5 to better capture the voice of students with ID participating in Project UNIFY and to better characterize their experiences in Project UNIFY and in school. In addition, beyond continuing to document the basic participation of students in Project UNIFY activities, the evaluation continued to explore student engagement in Project UNIFY and opportunities for youth leadership. Finally, the evaluation also focused on those factors associated with the sustainability of Project UNIFY in a school and State SO Program.

Using these objectives as a guide, the evaluation was designed to address the following specific questions:

1. What was the scope of Project UNIFY programming in schools?
2. What is the value of Project UNIFY?
3. What are the opportunities for youth leadership among students with and without disabilities in Project UNIFY?
4. What are the factors that contribute to the sustainability of Project UNIFY in a school and State SO Program?

The evaluation methodology utilized in Year 5 retains many of the features of previous evaluations in that information was collected about Project UNIFY from multiple sources. This included State SO Program staff, school liaisons¹, students, and teachers. As in Year 4, the evaluation methodology involved a mix of qualitative and quantitative data such as large-scale surveys, site visits, and one-on-one interviews. This multi-method, multi-source design aimed to document the value and benefit of Project UNIFY for all constituents, particularly students and schools. In the spirit of continual development and improvement of Project UNIFY, the following recommendations have been offered based on the evaluation results.

Recommendation 1: *Acknowledge and address the differences between grade levels in terms of students' developmental level and provide age-appropriate Project UNIFY programming across schools.*

Recommendation 2: *Create opportunities within the schools that foster youth leadership for both students with and without disabilities in Project UNIFY.*

Recommendation 3: *Ensure sustainability of programming through increased liaison support and clearer communication at the State Program and school levels.*

The plan for Year 6 will consider and capitalize on these evaluation findings and recommendations.

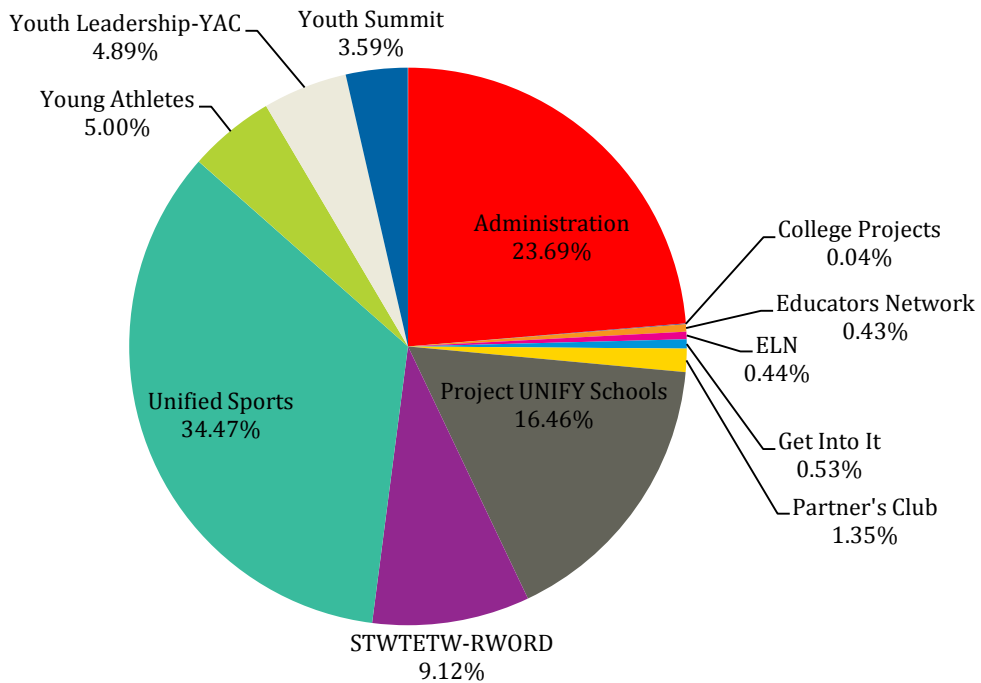
¹ The liaison is the person responsible for the implementation of Project UNIFY activities that took place in the school.

IV. Financial Reports

Each year State SO Programs receiving Project UNIFY funding have been required to provide information as to how the funds are spent. Each year the reporting requirements have gotten more detailed to provide SOI with the information needed to make improvements and enhancements to the funding allocations and structure. Doing so allows SOI to better invest and allocate funds in a strategic manner, helping to achieve the goals of Project UNIFY.

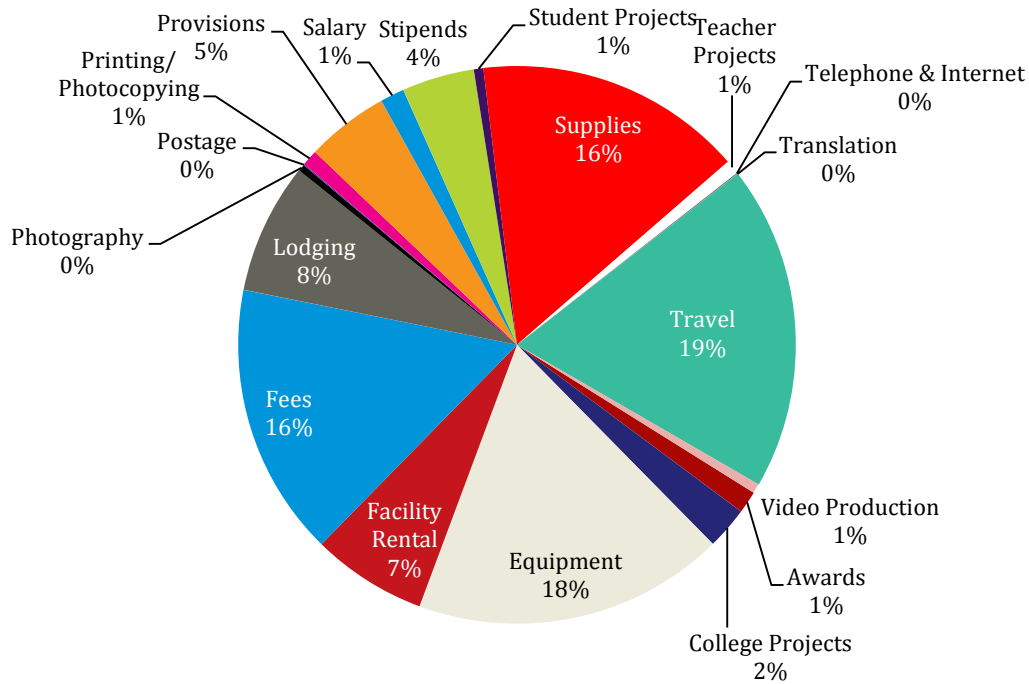
The following chart illustrates how funds were spent by State Programs during Year 5 (see Figure 10). The majority of funds were spent supporting school-based Unified Sports programming (35%) and administrative costs associated with implementing Project UNIFY in a state (24%). Beyond those costs, 17% of funds were distributed to schools directly to support Project UNIFY programming while the remaining was used to support State-level activity (e.g. Youth Summit or ELN), or to promote specific initiatives within the state (e.g. Young Athletes).

Figure 10. Program project funding by activity Year 5



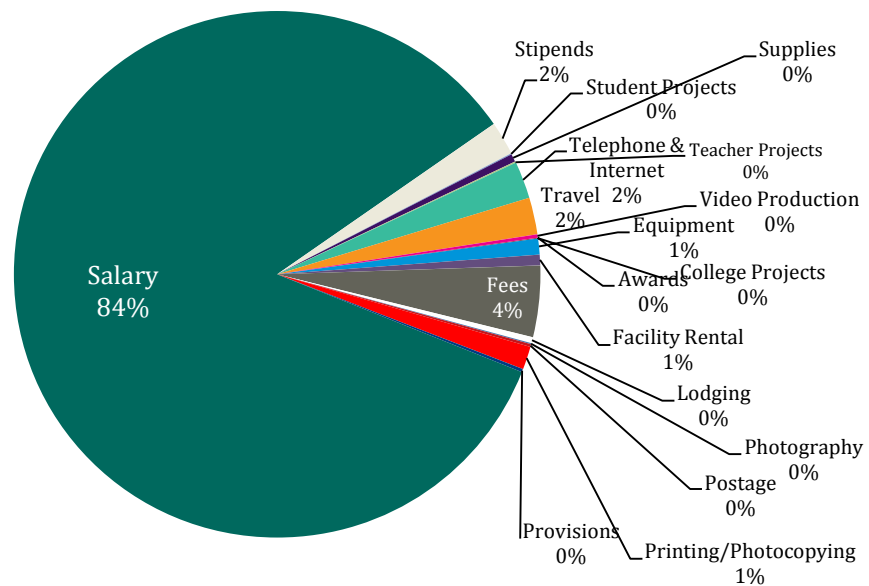
Given that the majority of funds are spent on Unified Sports and administrative costs, we were interested in breaking these down further. Examining Unified Sports more closely demonstrates how funds are used to support this scholastic sports program (see Figure 11). The majority of funds used to support Unified Sports go to supplies and equipment, travel expenses and fees.

Figure 11. Costs associated with Unified Sports at the State Program level



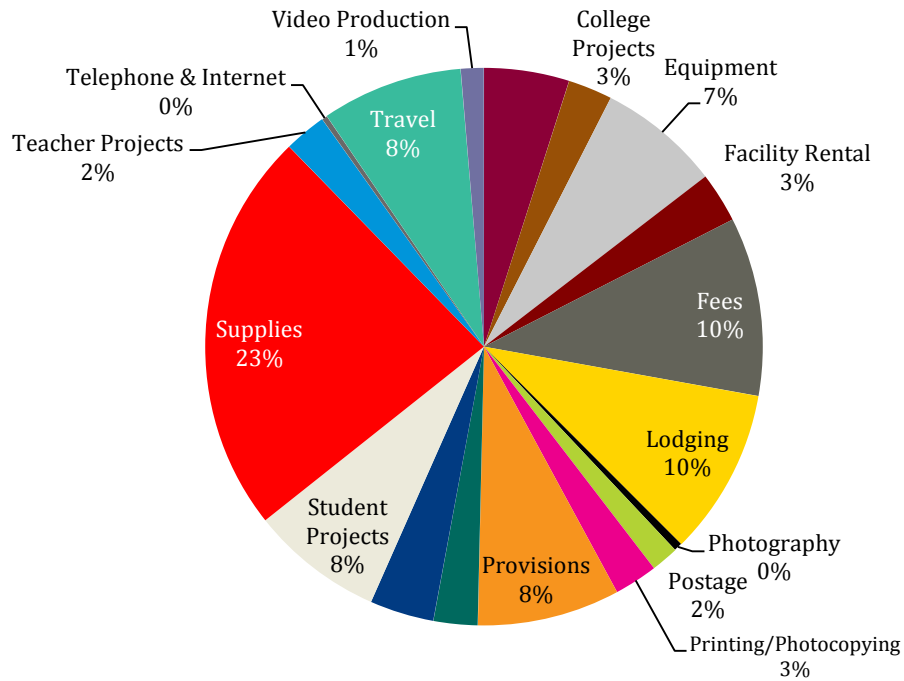
When breaking down administrative costs more specifically, as expected the far majority of funds (84%) were used to support Project UNFY staff at the State Program level, with remaining funds distributed fairly evenly between travel, equipment and stipends (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Administrative costs at the State Program level



When looking at funding that was distributed directly to schools, it is clear that the majority of those funds are dedicated to providing schools with supplies to implement the program, fees (such as field use and officials) and lodging for Unified teams attending competitions (see Figure 13).

Figure 13. Project UNIFY funds allocated to schools by State SO Programs.



With a strong emphasis on sustainability and the need for State Programs to raise money to support Project UNIFY activities at the state level, much of the Department of Education sourced funding in Year 5 was supplemented by local funding, either through corporate or foundation support, or by students participating in school-based and SO- initiated fundraisers. It is also evident that the majority of costs are budget relieving for schools who are seeking ways to provide inclusive sports and youth leadership opportunities, but relying on their State SO Program to support the necessary teacher and coach stipends, transportation, equipment and facility costs.

V. Project UNIFY Impact and Opportunities for Growth

► Impact: Whole School Engagement

“I notice that things have changed around the school. That kids became more considerate and they watch what they say, and they are willing to accept kids with ID, sit at their tables, they talk to them more in the hall than they used to.”

~ Special Olympics Project UNIFY student.

The results of the ongoing evaluation combined with school site visits, and reports from Programs reveal the significant positive impact Project UNIFY has on students and schools. In fact the past five years of implementation and evaluation have verified the originally conceived guiding principles for Project UNIFY first proposed to the Department of Education in 2008; for Special Olympics to be transformative within schools and to foster a more inclusive and welcoming environment for students with intellectual disabilities, simply providing students the opportunity to engage in single, SO-specific initiatives is not enough. Rather, it is the connection between the three Project UNIFY components of inclusive sports, youth leadership and whole school involvement and awareness (see Table 1) that is the foundation of Project UNIFY. These three central components have become critical platforms to initiating and sustaining youth engagement in schools. Additionally, there also must be opportunities for youth to assume leadership roles and the schools’ adoption of Project UNIFY as a school-based program as a way to promote sustainability.

► Impact: Inclusive Youth Leadership

“[The Project UNIFY club is] a fun new place to make friends and to have fun. Once you join you will never look at things the same way.”

~ Special Olympics Project UNIFY student

The innovation and activities at the school and State Program levels have also influenced what is now a complete array of activities at every level of the organization. Youth activation has been recognized as a priority of the SOI strategic plan beyond Project UNIFY, and is a focus for every division of the entire SO movement. Not only is Project UNIFY and youth activation a core of the organization’s programming, but education is one of the four strategic entry points for our work along with sports, health and community. In fact, the Project UNIFY work in the U.S. has positioned SOI to launch a major initiative leading a global youth movement focused on inspiring a new generation that embraces the principles and characteristics of Project UNIFY that will begin in 2014. We are at an historical point in the lifespan of Project UNIFY where we are attempting to accomplish two major objectives: 1) to bring all the State SO Programs to a consistent level of quality that we know is achievable; and 2) to demonstrate to the field the true efficacy of the Project UNIFY strategy, by initiating a clinical trial that will substantiate the value and impact of this program and establish it as a reliable and proven intervention.

► **Impact: Inclusive Sports**

“I love going to school. I always look forward to the next day to see my friends and teammates.”

~ Special Olympics Project UNIFY student

To ensure its success and sustainability of Project UNIFY in Year 6, six strategic areas of activity have been identified:

1. Supporting and strengthening the capacity needed in a Project UNIFY State SO Program to support social inclusion, inclusive and meaningful youth leadership, and collaborations with schools through technical assistance;
2. Promoting and providing professional development more deeply explain and connect the core components of Project UNIFY, including a strong focus on inclusive youth leadership, expanding Unified Sports activities and documenting the different innovations and extensions of Project UNIFY;
3. Emphasizing Social Inclusion as an essential element of a positive school climate;
4. Capitalizing on the U.S. Department of Education guidance which reminds federally funded K-12 school districts their obligation to students with a disability in providing them extracurricular athletic opportunities;
5. Supporting a national call to action for young people and educators, to *Play Unified, Speak Unified and Live Unified* as we lead toward the SOI hosted 2014 National Youth Activation Summit (See Appendix for details of these events.); and,
6. Demonstrating the value and impact of Project UNIFY on students with and without ID.

In addition, building on five years of implementation in schools and communities throughout the United States and corresponding evaluation, assessment, analyses and reflection, SOI is poised to map out the next five years through the development of a formal long range plan for Project UNIFY activities in the United States. The Project UNIFY Strategic Plan will guide Project UNIFY and its constituents over the next five years to move social inclusion to the expected experience of students. Each member of the Project UNIFY community – youth with and without intellectual disabilities, teachers, parents, community members, Special Olympics staff and more – will be called upon to play a role in supporting and executing the strategies outlined and helping to achieve its identified goals and benchmarks. The overarching goals of the strategic plan are as follows:

- Develop internal capacity to advance and sustain social inclusion as an organizational priority for SOI.
- Deepening understanding and use of effective social inclusion practices;
- Strengthen and expand mutually beneficial national partnerships resulting in recognition of the value of social inclusion;
- Support State SO Programs in integrating and sustaining social inclusion as an organizational priority;
- Support State SO Programs in expanding Project UNIFY and social inclusion efforts at the local level.

These guiding pillars will lead us through the next 5 years on a variety of investigations and activities, including: continued review on the relationship of Project UNIFY activities and school climate, development of a social inclusion scale that can be used in school assessments and to inform school improvement plans, development and implementation of a research agenda to deepen our knowledge of quality practices and sustainability strategies, further enhancement and dissemination of social inclusion resources and social inclusion on line course to accelerate teacher training opportunities, broad use of the alignment of Project UNIFY activities to common core standards, expansion of effective deployment of state YACs and ELN and increased attention on education partnerships, a focus on transition of students upon graduation from school-based to community based and college programs and opportunities, and the expansion of our interscholastic sports partnerships. There is still much compelling and important work to be done.

VI. About Special Olympics

Special Olympics International (SOI) is an international organization that changes lives through the power of sport by encouraging and empowering people with intellectual disabilities, promoting acceptance for all, and fostering communities of understanding and respect worldwide. Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the Special Olympics (SO) movement has grown from a few hundred athletes to more than 3.7 million athletes in over 170 countries in all regions of the world, providing year-round sports training, athletic competition and other related programs. Special Olympics now takes place every day, changing the lives of people with intellectual disabilities in places like China and from regions like the Middle East to the community playgrounds and ball fields in every small neighborhood's backyard. Special Olympics provides people with intellectual disabilities continuing opportunities to realize their potential, develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, and experience joy and friendship.

Special Olympics has implemented sports training and competition for people with ID continuously since its founding in 1968. SO is designed to provide opportunities for people with ID, who have been consistently isolated by society, to participate in Olympic-type sports activities, develop skills and friendships, gain competency, and demonstrate their dignity and ability to contribute to society. As an organization, SOI has come to understand how powerful a platform sport can be for demonstrating what people with ID can achieve; however, research indicates that too few members of the public have availed themselves of the opportunity to experience and understand people with ID and what they can accomplish (Siperstein, Norins & Corbin, 2003).

Because of success in the sports arena, Special Olympics is traditionally perceived as just a sports event for people with ID. This does not reflect the current reality, as SO has become a global social change movement using sport as a platform to build understanding, acceptance and tolerance for all. This is clearly part of the Special Olympics mission: to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with ID, *giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community*. The focus has often been on the first part of the mission statement, with a dismissal of the important outcomes defined in the second part.

VII. References

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