



# MIDDLE LEVEL PLAY BOOK

A GUIDE FOR GRADES 5 - 8



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
Schools®



U.S. Office of Special  
Education Programs

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**The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform**

All resources within this playbook can be located at:

[resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/](https://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/)

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# INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW



# WHY DO WE NEED MIDDLE LEVEL SCHOOLS TO BE SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE ?

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

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

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

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

Yet, even in middle level schools with policies and procedures that provide for academic and physical inclusion, students with intellectual disabilities often are disengaged from school-based, social opportunities. Students with disabilities tend to participate less in school-sponsored sports teams, clubs and extracurricular or exploratory opportunities than their peers without disabilities, often experiencing social isolation within the school setting (Coster et. al., 2013).

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

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

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



# HOW DOES SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS IMPACT YOUTH ?

"It's a lot of fun. You get to meet a lot of new people and it's just a fun experience that you get to hang out with them on like a regular school day. You get to know them better. If you see them in the hallway, you say, 'hi.' Instead of last year, I didn't really know them. So I just said, 'hi,' but now I can say, 'Hey [name]. Hey, [name],' or all that."

-Unified Champion School Student without ID

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

-Unified Champion School Middle School Administrator

"As a teacher, it is the best decision our school has made to foster inclusion and acceptance. Our athletes and partners do everything together, and the friendships will last a lifetime"

-Unified Champion School Middle School Teacher

**The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools strategy promotes a socially inclusive school climate where acceptance, respect and human dignity for all students are the norm. As the data below demonstrate, a Unified Champion School equitably supports students with and without intellectual disabilities and promotes meaningful opportunities for every student to contribute.**

Within Unified Champion Schools, students without disabilities hold more positive attitudes toward their peers with intellectual disabilities, are more tolerant, and realize the impact their words and actions have on others (Center for Social Development and Education, 2012, 2013, 2014).

Socially inclusive school and classroom climates are more evident where students with disabilities feel welcome and are routinely included in, and feel they are a valued part of, all activities, opportunities and functions (Brighton, 2007).

Extensive evaluation of the Unified Champion Schools program has revealed the following positive impacts (U.S. Department of Education, 2013; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009a; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008):

84%

**84% of students** generally regard the experiences they've had with a **Unified Champion School as a positive turning point in their lives.**

87%

**87% of students** learn that **standing up** for something they **believe is the right thing to do.**

Developing Pro-social skills

**Students** who are engaged in programming develop valuable pro-social skills. The majority of schools report that students learn about helping others (87%) and how their emotions and attitudes can affect others (85%).

82%

**82% of students** feel that they are able to change their schools for the better.

# WHAT IS THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS STRATEGY ?

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

Essential to this work is a focus on youth. Special Olympics 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, Special Olympics finds that young people are some of the most powerful and effective advocates on behalf of acceptance.

According to the research of Dr. Peter Scales of the Search Institute, this point is true for students in middle grades schools. **The characteristics of young adolescents identify that these youth are generally idealistic, desiring to make the world a better place and to make meaningful contributions to causes larger than themselves.** They also value direct experiences in a participatory democracy (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010).

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

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program is aimed at promoting social inclusion through intentionally planned and implemented activities. With sports as the foundation, the three-component model offers a unique combination of effective activities that equip young people with the tools and training necessary to create classroom and school climates of acceptance. These are school climates where ALL students feel welcome and are routinely included in, and feel a part of, all activities and events.



**Youth and adults working collaboratively in an inclusive setting create socially inclusive schools. Unified Champion Schools promote a school climate that:**

- Is free from bullying and exclusion.
- Combats stereotypes and negative attitudes.
- Eliminates hurtful language.
- Promotes healthy activity and interactions.
- Is welcoming and values the engagement of all students.

## Within Unified Champion Schools:

- Students with and without intellectual disabilities are provided opportunities for physical activity and for building positive peer relationships across the school setting—in hallways and lunchrooms, in classrooms and gymnasiums, and on athletic fields of play.
- Students with and without intellectual disabilities are provided opportunities to interact with their peers and to personally learn and grow.



According to *This We Believe*, the Association for Middle Level Education's landmark position paper (2009), successful middle grades schools are characterized by the active engagement of students and teachers. It could not be otherwise, for everything that is known about the nature of young adolescents and the principles of learning points to the reality that the most successful learning strategies are ones that involve each student personally. ...Successful middle grades practices purposefully empower young adolescents to assume this role, one that includes self-advocacy.

The Unified Champion Schools strategy addresses the social-emotional developmental needs of young adolescents to belong to a peer group while welcoming and benefitting from positive relationships with adults. At its core, the Unified Champion Schools strategy is about unifying all students; student and teacher collaboration where students learn to be leaders; and sports as a catalyst for social inclusion and change.

**Students in the middle grades have the ability to perceive deep truths and are making decisions that will affect the way they live the rest of their lives. This transitional time between childhood and adulthood is the prime time to introduce students to important concepts, such as the need to seek social justice. (McHugh, Reedy, & Yehle, 2017)**

**Social inclusion can be a strong basis for an interdisciplinary unit.**



## What are the connections between middle level schools and Unified Champion Schools?



How can we expect students to develop leadership and interpersonal skills and put them into action if opportunities are not provided within schools for students to interact with, support, and grow to know and appreciate fellow students of diverse abilities, characteristics and backgrounds? Middle level experts assert that effective middle level schools must provide programs and opportunities that support this growth.

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

- Developmentally responsive.
- Challenging.
- Empowering.
- Equitable.

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

- Academically Excellent.
- Developmentally Responsive.
- Socially Equitable.

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

The focus on schools that are socially equitable provides a direct correlation between research on effective middle schools and Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools. The document, "Middle Level Schools and Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools" provides a crosswalk between the characteristics of middle level schools, middle level concepts, and the elements of Unified Champion Schools. Find the document in the Resources section at the end of the Playbook.

# HOW DOES THE UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS STRATEGY SUPPORT CURRENT EDUCATION INITIATIVES?

The activities of the Unified Champion Schools strategy enhance a number of key educational initiatives in important and relevant ways. Those found below are frequently a part of school improvement plans and activities as school staff seek to increase student success. If your school is already focusing on any of the following, becoming a Unified Champion School will amplify and enhance your current emphasis.

## Core Content and 21st Century Skills

The resources and activities provided through the Unified Champion Schools strategy **allow students to gain core content and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills across the curriculum.** Deep understandings and abilities to use acquired skills develop when students are provided experiences that draw on prior knowledge and utilize higher-order thinking skills as they apply their learning to improve the school environment. Critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, social and cross-cultural skills, and leadership and personal responsibility are all 21st Century Skills that are reflected and reinforced through implementation of the Unified Champion Schools strategy.

## A Positive, Caring, Equitable School Climate

Context matters. There is growing research demonstrating that students perform better academically, socially and emotionally when they are meaningfully engaged, contributing members of a school **with a positive, caring and equitable school climate. A successful middle level school is inviting, safe, inclusive and supportive of all and developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering and equitable (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010).** A school that expects, encourages and supports inclusive practices is a critical underpinning to the establishment of an equitable learning environment for all students. This has been shown to result in positive impacts on student performance, and is supported by the Unified Champion Schools strategy.

## Behavior Interventions and Supports

**Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)** are being used to better teach and reinforce expected behaviors throughout the school. The Unified Champion Schools strategy supports this work across all school settings by **providing meaningful opportunities for students to work and learn together in ways that support all learners and create an equitable, caring environment for all.**

The cognitive-intellectual developmental needs of young adolescents include a preference for interaction with peers during learning activities. Culturally responsive educational strategies, differentiated instruction and positive behavioral supports are just some of the bedrock practices employed in inclusive schools. Inclusive education should be a universal commitment and a core value to ensure equitable access and success for students and adults at all three tiers of a PBIS school-wide system.

## School Connectedness

School connectedness is a characteristic of school culture in which **students have meaningful relationships with adults within the school, are engaged in school, and feel a sense of belonging in the school.** It is an important factor in student success and well-being. Students who feel they belong and are valued contributors to the community are more likely to attend school, have higher grades and test scores, and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors and harmful activities such as bullying.

**Practices that promote school connectedness are incorporated into the Unified Champion Schools strategy by providing opportunities for all students to engage in meaningful school-based activities. One aspect of the middle level program is advisory in which an adult advisor meets with a group of students to provide academic and social-emotional mentorship; enhance personalization; and facilitate a peer community of learners, which leads to a stronger connection to the school.**



SANTARY INSPECTION REPORT  
SATISFACTORY

Carly Strangari  
Middle School  
Special Olympics New Jersey

Troy De...  
Middle School  
Special Olympics New Jersey

Carly Strangari  
Middle School  
Special Olympics New Jersey

Carly Strangari  
Middle School  
Special Olympics New Jersey

Special Olympics New Jersey

Janice Pickett  
Middle School  
Special Olympics New Jersey

Special Olympics New Jersey

Special Olympics New Jersey

Megan...  
Middle School  
Special Olympics New Jersey

Amy...  
Middle School  
Special Olympics New Jersey

Rebekah...  
Middle School  
Special Olympics New Jersey

Special Olympics New Jersey

Special Olympics New Jersey

# HOW DOES THE UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS STRATEGY SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF YOUNG ADOLESCENTS?

**“Honestly, it’s been the highlight of my year. I’ve gotten to know so many people. And I feel like it’s helped me as a person. And I’ve gotten more patient. I’ve gotten more understanding. And I’ve broadened my education of this subject of disabilities and special needs. And I’ve become a certified volunteer at a local Down syndrome achievement center. And I’ve done an eight-week volunteering thing there. And I got like 16 hours in, which is really cool.”**

**– Unified Champion School Student Without ID**

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

**The Unified Champion Schools strategy supports the development of young adolescents in a variety of ways.**

**With the emphasis on Unified Sports and wellness, the Unified Champion Schools strategy addresses the following physical characteristics. Young adolescents:**

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

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

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

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

**These youth:**

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

**Social and emotional learning provides a strong undergirding of Unified Champion Schools. It is a significant, developmental characteristic of young adolescents who:**

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

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

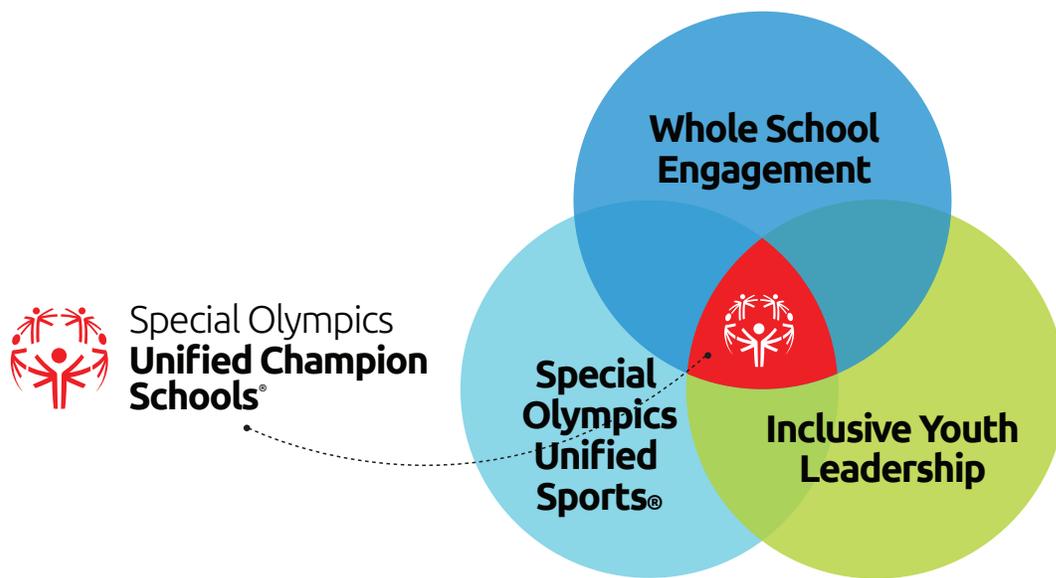


Wanted:  
**RESPECT**

Be A Fan  
**UNITY**

# HOW DOES THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS STRATEGY WORK?

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



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

The components of Unified Champion Schools are:

- **Whole School Engagement:** awareness and education activities that promote inclusion and reach the majority of the school population. All students have opportunities to participate through team or school-wide activities, and students with and without intellectual disabilities are involved with planning and leading awareness events with the support of an adult. Examples include Spread the Word Campaigns, pep rallies or Fans in the Stands for Unified Sports teams, or a Unified Sports Festival.
- **Inclusive Youth Leadership:** students with and without intellectual disabilities working together to lead and plan advocacy, awareness and inclusive activities throughout the school year. Examples include Unified Clubs, leadership classes, inclusive Student Councils, National Junior Honor Society, or similar types of inclusive student groups. The clubs are supported by an adult liaison and offer leadership opportunities or training for students with and without intellectual disabilities.
- **Special Olympics Unified Sports®:** a fully inclusive sports or fitness program that combines an approximately equal number of students with and without intellectual disabilities. Examples include Unified Sports, Unified PE or fitness, and Unified intramurals. These activities occur throughout the school year with the support of an adult coach and may include opportunities for competition.

# DEFINITION OF A SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOL

**“I really didn’t know what Unified Champion Schools was when I became my school liaison, but once I fully understood the goals and the initiatives, I was all in. From the time we started, the change in our school has been incredible. Our entire culture is all about inclusion.”**

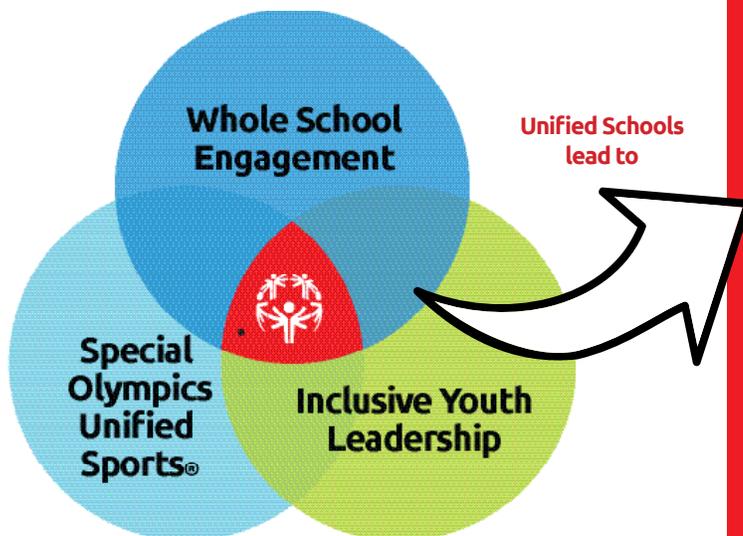
**- Unified Champion School Educator**

A Special Olympics Unified Champion School has an inclusive school climate and exudes a sense of collaboration, engagement and respect for all members of the student body and staff. A Unified Champion School is one that has demonstrated commitment to inclusion by adopting the three core components: Special Olympics Unified Sports, inclusive youth leadership and whole school engagement.

While the components are listed individually, they should be implemented in coordination with each other and supported by a leadership team composed of representatives from all areas of the school, including students, teachers, administrators and parents. Research has proven that when all three components are incorporated, there is a deeper impact on the individual participants and the overall culture and climate of the school.

As the graphic below illustrates, incorporating aspects of the three Unified Champion Schools components provides unique and engaging learning activities for students, while enhancing current social inclusion efforts. While every activity might not incorporate all three components, school staff should strive for each activity to integrate at least two of the components. Just as interdisciplinary teaching engages multiple disciplines within a unit of study, the focus is to combine aspects of the three components to increase student understanding. Throughout the process of implementing the activities, it is important to offer multiple opportunities for all students to be engaged in a variety of ways.

*The figure below is an example of the three components of a Unified Champion Schools strategy in action.*



As part of the exploratory program, students with and without intellectual disabilities organize a Unified walking club in a whole school engagement activity focused on healthy living. They make accommodations to ensure all students have an equitable opportunity to participate.

The club meets weekly and asks members to get friends and family members to make pledges to walk a set number of miles each week, and they challenge another middle school in the district to participate as added incentive.

The students expand the focus on healthy activities to include a neighboring elementary school where the middle level school students engage the younger students as walkers in a whole school engagement activity at the elementary school. They also design and teach inclusive activities during physical education classes at the elementary school, incorporating games that enhance physical activity as part of a service-learning project.



# PICTURE OF AN INCLUSIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL

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There it stands, Success for All Middle School! As you enter the campus you can tell there is something special about this school. The sign outside welcomes everyone and invites the community to an upcoming Unified event—**“Join Us for Our Unified Sports Festival This Saturday.”**

As you walk through the front door of the school, the positive atmosphere speaks volumes. Students and adults are greeting each other and chatting, welcoming visitors to the school with a smile. The walls and bulletin boards are filled with diverse student work and posters highlighting inclusive club activities and inclusive exploratory programs. A banner stating, “Special Olympics Unified Champion School,” has a special place in the entry hall.

All visitors are escorted around the school by an inclusive pair of school ambassadors—one student with and one

without an intellectual disability. The Ambassador Program is a program started by the Inclusive Leadership Team. The obviously proud students eagerly walk you through the hallways and explain how the interdisciplinary teams have different social inclusion celebrations.

It becomes obvious that one team is having a door-decorating contest. Groups of students have taken over their hallway to create doors that support the school’s R-word campaign. Watching them work, you can see how students with and without intellectual disabilities work together to share ideas as they complete their door.

With great pride, our guides explain that each team focuses on specific inclusion activities throughout the year and that the Unified Club has become the most popular exploratory activity in the school. There is a club for each interdisciplinary team so that everyone has the opportunity to be actively engaged.

The students share that last year the Unified Club for eighth grade teams organized pep rallies for every intramural and interscholastic competition with a Fans in the Stands cheering section at all Unified games. The different teams also created a Wall of Fame to recognize Special Olympics athletes participating in regional or state competitions.

The members of the Unified Club for the seventh grade teams focused on making the lunchroom a welcoming place by ensuring the walls were filled with a diverse collection of art and announcements of inclusive events. They organized activities to get students interacting, and arranged for student volunteers to welcome students and visitors as they entered the cafeteria. They also took charge of seating options for their teams to make sure that everyone had a place to sit and someone with whom to talk.

The sixth grade team worked on a presentation to their feeder elementary schools as part of a service-learning project. Designed to support fifth graders transitioning from elementary school, the presentation addressed social inclusion opportunities that would be available to them in middle school. As student opportunities for inclusive engagement are not limited to the Unified Club, the Student Council assisted with these presentations. Additionally, council members petitioned the principal and their teacher sponsor for a revision of the selection process and membership guidelines to ensure that the Student Council was inclusive, and accurately reflective of the entire student body.

As you continue your tour through Success for All Middle School, you peek into an advisor-advisee class and notice that the teacher is using a lesson from Special Olympics Activities and Lessons. Students are reacting to a quote from Harry Potter. In talking with the teacher, you learn that the students will then react to a film clip from the movie, "The Ringer." She says that social inclusion has become an ongoing topic for discussion, and the students are gaining a greater understanding about the importance of students being engaged in the school.

As you walk by the gymnasium, you notice an inclusive physical education class where students are participating on Unified teams. Your tour guides enthusiastically tell you about Unified Sports and explain that they both play on a team. In addition to the ongoing bocce tournaments that take place during lunch, there are both Unified basketball and soccer teams.

Because of the success and popularity of Unified Sports, the students and coaches plan to offer additional sports next year. Your school guides explain how the members of the Unified Club were instrumental in getting Unified Sports started at the school and how they continually work to engage more students on the teams.

Before you leave the school, the principal invites you to attend the Inclusive Leadership Team meeting. As you sit in the meeting and listen to discussions about future assemblies, ways to ensure that new students are paired up with other students who serve as their peer buddies, and specifics about this year's R-word campaign, it becomes obvious that everyone is committed to making Success for All Middle School a truly inclusive school. It is also clear that the students are engaged in the Leadership Team, leading discussions and making suggestions. The principal also explains how each interdisciplinary team has its own inclusive leadership team comprised of both students and adults to address the specific needs on that team.

While the Leadership Team is pleased with the direction their school is taking, they continue to identify ways to improve the school climate. Last year the Leadership Team completed the Characteristics of Socially Inclusive Schools Assessment and Social Inclusion Scale to gain a better understanding of the school climate in terms of its level of inclusion. They used this information to engage others to find ways to make the school more socially inclusive. They were so pleased with the guidance from the first two assessments, the Leadership Team decided to use the Social Inclusion Rubric in their process of addressing continuous improvement because it provides clear pictures of what the school looks like as they move along the continuum.

**As you exit Success for All Middle School, you leave with a smile on your face and many stories to share with others. It is clear that this is a school that fully embraces social inclusion and is creating a school environment where all students are engaged and successful. It is truly a Unified Champion School!**



# EXAMPLES OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS

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## Unified Champion Schools Success Stories

**“I loved being able to show them that some people may be different, but we’re all different in our own ways, and that we can all come together and still be friends, and be friends through differences.”**

**– Unified Champion School Student Without ID**

You have read about the three components that make up a Unified Champion School. An important aspect of the strategy is that the components can be configured in a variety of ways, reflecting the characteristics of the school and specific needs and ideas of the students. In other areas of the Playbook, possible activities are identified to assist with the initial implementation of supporting strategies.

However, implementation of the Unified Champion Schools strategy can vary from school to school, and it will likely expand and change over time as a school strives to meet its strategic goals of social inclusion. The longer the students and adults work to create a tolerant, supportive and respectful school climate, the more ideas they will identify to make their school more inclusive. So, a hundred or a thousand schools can be designated Unified Champion Schools, but each can look slightly different as staff and students work to meet the specific needs of the school and the students.

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

# Mesa Middle School

Castle Rock, Colorado



Unified Champion Schools at Mesa Middle School was first introduced in October 2011. At the time, we were the second middle school in Colorado (first in our district), to become a part of this incredible program. Since the start of Unified Champion Schools implementation, the climate and culture of our school and community have greatly changed to be an inclusive environment for all students with intellectual disabilities.

Our Unify Club meets once a month to plan activities and events for our Special Olympics athletes. Our club includes a group of dedicated students who all work for the same goal: to make a difference in our school and the lives of students with special needs.

Currently, every middle and high school in Douglas County School District has Unified soccer, basketball and track teams. We compete against other schools, just like the other sports offered in our schools. The enthusiasm expressed by the crowds at these events exceeds all expectations. Over the last five years, Mesa has participated in the nationwide "Spread the Word: Inclusion" campaign in March. The students at Mesa are encouraged to speak up about the R-word, learn the harmful effects of using this derogatory word, and pledge to complete acts of inclusion. All students are encouraged to speak up, ask questions and learn. It's amazing to see all the students at Mesa learning about the harmful effects of exclusion and pledge to be more inclusive.

Every February, Mesa students and staff join forces with the local police department in the Polar Plunge to raise awareness and money for Special Olympics. The Polar Plunge is an event through which participants run into the freezing cold reservoir. This fundraiser is our way to give back to the organization that supports our school and Unified Champion School programs across our state. Over the past five years, Mesa's Unified Champion Schools program has raised more than \$18,000 for Special Olympics Colorado.

Once a year, the local police department comes to the school for a big game of basketball. The students pack the gym and cheer on our athletes as they play the Castle Rock Police Department. We have been undefeated every year. The support in our community for our program has been amazing.

Both athletes and partners for Mesa have an active role on Colorado's Youth Activation Committee through Special Olympics. The committee is made up of students across our state who work together to promote inclusive communities. Students in our Unified Champion Schools program have represented Colorado at both the state and national levels. We take pride in the students who represent our school and state!

Since the beginning, social inclusion has grown districtwide in Douglas County School District. The program is filled with caring, accepting students who strive to include all students with or without intellectual disabilities.

# Taveras Middle School

Taveras, Florida



Taveras Middle School has served as a model Unified Champion School since originally signing on four years ago. Since initial implementation of the strategy at the school, Taveras has offered a positive example throughout the state as it has cultivated a culture of acceptance and inclusion. Taveras is one of the 115 schools in Florida that currently implement all three core components of the Unified Champion Schools strategy. Unified Sports, whole school engagement and inclusive youth leadership serve as core principles to the overall success of Taveras Middle School -not only school-wide, but outside the confines of school grounds as well.

The Taveras Middle School Unified Champion Schools program actively promotes social inclusion for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The major event includes a full day disAbility awareness day for the entire sixth grade class. The students watch a wheelchair basketball game, listen to speakers with various disabilities, and learn that all people should be treated fairly and equally. The Unified Champion Schools chapter goes on annual field trips to increase the bonds of friendship for the Unified Sports teams and other participants in the school's Fans in the Stands group.

Another annual event is the Spread the Word: Inclusion campaign. Students sign a poster in a pledge to stop saying the R-word, they wear Spread the Word T-shirts, and they make public service announcements about the importance of using inclusive language.

Taveras Middle currently offers Unified basketball, Unified soccer and Unified bocce.

# East Garner Magnet Middle School

Garner, North Carolina



East Garner Magnet Middle School is in their third year as a Special Olympics Unified Champion School, and they strongly believe it is important that all students have the opportunity to participate in Unified Sports. The school's Unified Champion Schools activities make up a semester-long elective class that takes place during the school day to battle the issue of after-school transportation and, thus, increase participation. Students with and without intellectual disabilities attend the class together after going through an application process for selection.

At the start of the 2017 school year, all students in the class were placed into a Unified pair consisting of one student with an intellectual disability and one student without an intellectual disability. The class focused on healthy living and healthy lifestyles, giving the students an opportunity to not only play Unified, but also learn healthy living habits. The Unified pairs took a fitness test and made goals for living healthier lifestyles. Visiting the Poe Center for Health Education in Raleigh, NC, students participated in an educational program on healthy food choices. This programming was beneficial to all members of the Unified Champion Schools class.

After learning how to maintain a healthy lifestyle, students were ready to Play Unified! The class started with Unified kickball; and students initially played in their Unified pairs, supporting each other throughout the game. As students became more comfortable with the game, they were able to play by themselves with only minimal support from their Unified partner. The kickball season culminated with a tournament at a local university against several other middle

schools. It was a great experience for students with and without intellectual disabilities to be able to visit a university and play kickball on campus.

In 2016, East Garner Magnet Middle School was excited to host a delegation of youth leaders from Special Olympics China who visited the school. The Unified Champion School class was able to put their inclusive youth leadership skills into action while developing ways to show the visitors how they #PlayUnified.

In addition to these highlighted activities, students in the class have also led a Spread the Word campaign each year that they have been a Unified Champion School.

Teachers at East Garner Magnet Middle School say the strategy is rewarding for all students who participate.

**“For our students with special needs, they feel a part of the East Garner community. They have friends who talk to them in the hallways and sit with them at school-wide events. The peers without intellectual disabilities gain an understanding and empathy for the students with disabilities. A few of these students have expressed an interest in becoming special education teachers. We, at East Garner Magnet Middle School, are committed to keeping this wonderful program at our school for years to come.”**

—Special Education Teacher, East Garner Magnet Middle School

# Burnet Middle School

Union, New Jersey



**“Becoming a Unified Champion School has changed the lives of my students, school and community.”**

—Diana Pielech, Special Education Teacher and Unified Sports Coach, Burnet Middle School

It’s easy to feel lost in a big school, especially for a middle school student. Students at Burnet Middle School have the secret to making a big school into a warm and welcoming school—become a Unified Champion School. With more than 1,000 students and 90 educators, Burnet is one of the largest middle schools with the most diverse student body in the entire state of New Jersey. Among these students is a group of about 20 students with different abilities in Mrs. Pielech’s Multiple Disabilities class.

To ensure that her students were involved and part of the school community rather than viewed as “those kids” in “that class,” Ms. Pielech decided to change the Special Olympics Club she inherited from simply a volunteer/fundraising club to a Unified Club as part of the Unified Champion Schools strategy. To garner the support and resources needed to implement the three Unified Champion Schools components, she brought together her principal, Special Services team, Guidance, Physical Education department, and athletic director to serve as the Unified Champion Schools Leadership Team.

In four years the Unified Club has grown from 20 general education students to 150, with more who are interested in joining. The Unified Champion Schools program at Burnet now includes daily homeroom meetings where groups of 25 general education students rotate into the special education classroom to socialize, plan activities, and develop their skills as inclusive leaders and ambassadors for inclusion in their school. Unified Club members also meet weekly after school for social and Unified Sports activities including basketball, WII sports, bowling, football, volleyball and yoga; and they meet once a month in their Unified PE class.

The club’s Leadership Team organizes the social and Unified Sports activities, and attends two annual youth summits sponsored by Special Olympics New Jersey. Other students are engaged in helping and participating. Throughout the year, the students have fun, but also volunteer and fundraise for important causes. “Participating in the Unified Champion Schools programs like the Rutgers Unified Game Day and youth summits provided our students with opportunities to see that there is more to life. It allows them to be a part of something bigger,” Pielech says. “These are life-changing experiences for both students with and without disabilities. Watching our students prepare for the Youth Summit and then share our story with other schools was extremely rewarding. It gave my students confidence to be proud of all they had accomplished.”

# LET'S GET STARTED



A school climate for nurturing and valuing youth leadership is supported by adult allies who believe in the power of youth and hold positive visions of the future. They support difficult conversations while ensuring a safe, judgment-free haven for this exploration to occur. (Special Olympics Project UNIFY, 2013)

# It All Starts with Your Leadership Team

Middle level educators have long known the power of working in teams; in fact, interdisciplinary teams are a signature component at the heart of high-performing middle level schools. Unified Champion Schools research has reinforced the power of the team, identifying that schools with inclusive leadership teams more actively implement the Unified Champion Schools strategy.

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

- Were able to **implement more robust programming** than those without a leadership team.
- Reported **more involvement of community** members.
- Resulted in increased opportunities for **general and special education teachers to work together**.
- Tended to be more **confident in the sustainability** of their program than schools without a leadership team.

**An inclusive Unified Champion School leadership team will help ensure efforts are thoughtfully planned, guided by shared goals, and collaboratively implemented to support implementation at the school.** The leadership team facilitates social inclusion work within an inclusive, intergenerational leadership framework where adults and youth with and without intellectual disabilities co-create school-wide change.

**Because young adolescents and adults see and experience the school from different perspectives, the most effective changes will come when students and adults are intentionally engaged.**

Words of wisdom often shared by youth leaders engaged in Special Olympics are, **“Nothing about us without us.”**

The Unified Champion School Leadership Team should be intergenerational in nature (with youth and adults working together) and comprised of diverse leaders including students with and without disabilities, parents, teachers, counselors/social workers and administrators.

The leadership team will be responsible for:

- **Establishing the vision and overarching goals for the school.**
- **Guiding early stages of implementation.**
- **Ensuring fidelity to quality through consistent monitoring and nurturing, with an eye toward continuous improvement.**

Sometimes this process takes a while, and schools are encouraged to spend the time necessary to build a strong foundation.



## Social Inclusion In Action

Identify the importance of all students serving in leadership capacities in which they demonstrate their skills and are recognized for unique contributions.



## An Introduction to Intergenerational Work



Intergenerational work is a change strategy focused on the belief that different generations bring different and complementary critical perspectives, skills and relationships to the work. It is the belief that to achieve common goals we all need to work together.

The goal of the intergenerational approach to leadership is for young people and adults to share in and benefit from each other's experiences and perspectives, and be open to learning from each other. It is especially important for adults to provide space for young people to lead, as at this age, students are frequently just beginning to perceive themselves as leaders, and express their need for freedom in certain areas of decision making.

**According to *This We Believe in Action: Implementing Successful Middle Schools* (2012):**

Developmentally responsive middle grades educators take the concept of hands-on activities further by promoting what might be termed "hands-joined" activities, those that teachers and students develop together. Such activities foster ownership and lead to levels of understanding unlikely to be achieved when students are simply completing teacher-made assignments.

**Keys to Intergenerational Work: The Power of an Inclusive Team**

- A goal is collaboratively identified that neither adults nor young people can achieve on their own.
- Nurturing the development of effective, empowered young adolescents is a strategy for achieving goals.
- Effective, empowered adults share decision-making authority, and they support and create space for young adolescents to lead because it is a learning opportunity and a good strategy for achieving goals, not because it is a nice thing to do.
- Youth and adults form a team with differing and complementary skills, networks, perspectives and opportunities to lead.

# Adults as Allies for Young Adolescents

Middle level schools are great places for young adolescents to learn to be leaders and to develop into socially responsible individuals. Adults in schools have responsibilities to serve as allies supporting these youth as role models, encouraging them to make important changes and to celebrate their contributions.

**Students are not simply the recipients of programming, but rather the architects of lasting change and community building; adults serve as allies to youth, rather than managers of youth.**

## Adult allies modeling the way:

- Articulate and believe in the value of youth.
- Affirm their work with young people as an extension of their personal values.
- Understand their personal leadership styles as they work with youth to model the attitudes, skills and effort required for effective leadership.
- Create and provide opportunities to empower and engage youth, based on individual abilities.
- Make a connection with youth that extends beyond the parameters of the school day or the school walls.

## Adult allies changing the process:

- Ask probing questions, rather than provide answers, that allow young people to explore their assumptions and generate their own ideas.
- Utilize a variety of group protocols for sharing power, holding equitable conversations and relationships, and modeling norms for how groups work together equitably.
- Understand how change happens, and support others in creating and adapting to change.
- Recognize risk, then support and guide others through adversity.
- Set the tone for pushing beyond perceived limits.

## Adult allies encouraging the heart:

- Support peer-to-peer acknowledgement and celebrations among all young people for individual and group milestones.
- Facilitate quality reflection, free of judgment, and focused on learning in a safe environment.
- Create continuing and new opportunities for action and reflection.
- Take time to celebrate success in both meaningful and fun ways.

## Adult allies inspiring a shared vision:

- Believe in and support difficult conversations about equity and justice, ensuring a safe place for exploration of issues.
- Build meaningful relationships with others to advance accessibility, opportunity and empowerment for the youth community.
- Ask questions to seek clarity before making judgments.
- Understand how youth communicate and collaborate with each other.
- Help youth identify how authenticity, body language, tone and other elements play into effective communication.

## Adult allies inspiring others to act:

- Build and sustain strong relationships with adult peers and students based on trust and mutual respect.
- Identify and promote the gifts, skills and assets of each young person.
- Facilitate a sense of the collective in goal setting, skill-building, and accountability that includes adult peers and youth of all abilities.
- Understand the value of patience, and adjust time expectations to allow for students of all learning styles to fully engage.
- Become comfortable in the occasional role of effective follower of both other adults and young people, and help to develop those skills in youth.
- Understand the value and impact of being the member of a team with adult peers and/or with young people of all abilities.
- Ask/invite other adults to participate and support young people.
- Assess their own professional development needs to be best prepared for encouraging and supporting inclusive youth leadership.

# Getting Your Leadership Team Started

1. Recruit team members.
2. Build the team's capacity.
3. Analyze the landscape.
4. Find the starting point.
5. Establish a plan and take action.
6. Conduct monitoring and continuous improvement.



## Social Inclusion In Action

A first step for those who have never been empowered is to know that someone else is advocating for them or alongside them for a particular cause. However, the goal is for the individual to soon be able to advocate for themselves and then for others.





## Reaching the Atypical Youth Leader

**Intentionally recruit students who may not immediately come to mind as leaders, such as students with disabilities, or disengaged learners. This is a critical step in assembling an effective leadership team that understands the school experience from multiple perspectives.**

Youth and adults working together using a combination of strategies is often most effective. For example:

- Strive to include a range of perspectives on the team.
- Give a short presentation about social inclusion to each grade level to spark interest.
- Ask teachers to recommend students for the team.
- Invite students to nominate themselves or others.
- Ask someone who already has a relationship with the individual to extend a personal invitation.



### Youth Leadership Tip

It is important to remember to adequately prepare youth for an active role on the Leadership Team.

Be sure to intentionally develop their leadership skills through:

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

# Getting Started *continued*

As with any new endeavor, it is best to start with a group of excited, engaged individuals. If you are at this point, you have already committed to becoming a more socially inclusive middle school. Now, it's time to get others to join in your school's efforts.

## 1. RECRUIT TEAM MEMBERS

**The Unified Champion School Leadership Team should strive to include the following members:**

- Students with and without intellectual disabilities (2-4 students depending on the size of the school).
- Students from different social and academic groups including those who may not typically be selected to be a leader.
- Teachers (both special and general education).
- Parents of students with and without intellectual disabilities, who preferably are not also a teacher.
- At least one administrator or staff member with the ability to commit time and resources to the work.

If it is decided that the interdisciplinary teams will have leadership teams, the numbers and structure of the team might vary.

## 2. BUILD THE TEAM'S CAPACITY

**The first thing this group needs to do is establish rules guiding how team members will interact, ensuring that the team models the kind of inclusion they are promoting throughout the school. Make a plan and take the time you need to ensure that everyone understands why the team has been created, why it is intergenerational, and what each member can contribute.**

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

- Why are we a team of youth and adults and not just a team of adults or a team of students?
- How does the perspective of young people help us identify and achieve our goals?
- How does the perspective of adults help us identify and achieve our goals?
- What are adults already investing to support young adolescents and adults working together, and what are the adults in the school willing to invest (time and effort) to work effectively with young people?
- What is the level of buy-in from staff and students?
- What are we willing to change? What aren't we willing to change?
- What resources need to be shifted?
- Who is willing to change and who isn't?
- How do adults integrate and support youth across the full range of work rather than in isolated programs or committee settings?

## 3. ANALYZE THE LANDSCAPE

**A great way to start thinking about your work together is to explore the context in which you are working, and the degree of support for the changes ahead. As a team, it can be helpful to brainstorm on the support that already exists for this work.**

- Who is already a supporter?
- Who is on the fence?
- Who doesn't know anything about your work?
- Who may be opposed?

Additionally, it is a good idea to identify which resources are available that could support your work. How will you get the supplies you might need? Where will you meet? There are all sorts of resources you will use as you work together, and this brainstorming will help you to keep them front and center while also identifying additional potential partners in the work.

## 4. FIND YOUR STARTING POINT

**Before you can begin preparing for implementation of the Unified Champion Schools strategy in your school, it is important for the Leadership Team to take time to consider how socially inclusive the school is currently. This will not only help the team prioritize goals and first steps, but also will serve as a baseline for measuring progress.**

**A good way for the Unified Champion School Leadership Team to better understand the current state of social inclusion in their school is to conduct a self-assessment.**

**It is important to have baseline data to help establish a starting point and to assess progress. Just as it is important to assess student progress in their learning, gathering relevant data is important for any new initiative in school, business or personal improvement.**

This playbook offers two ways to gather baseline data:

- Leadership Team completes the Characteristics of Socially Inclusive Schools (CSIS) assessment.
- and/or
- Survey the school community using the Social Inclusion Scale.

Both of these assessments were developed in collaboration with the National School Climate Center, and they are provided for your use. They can be found at the end of this document in the Social Inclusion Assessments section, and they can be copied for use in your school.

## 5. ESTABLISH A PLAN AND TAKE ACTION

Work as a team to complete a strategic plan based on your analysis of the degree of social inclusion in your school. This plan will help identify priorities, strategies and outcomes that will help guide your work. Identify your goals and make sure they align with one another. Develop action steps that will lead toward the intended outcomes and be sure to make your goals achievable. A framework for creating a Unified Champion Schools Strategic Plan can be found on page 113.

**There are basic elements that are part of the strategic planning process, and addressing these can result in more effective implementation.**

- Develop the vision and goals for social inclusion efforts, ensuring that they align with the school's priorities.
- Conduct an analysis to get a picture of where your school is now; where you want to be; and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) that exist, which will impact your work.
- Create a plan for how progress will be measured, monitored and used to support continuous improvement.
- Complete an "Inputs, Outcomes and Impacts" chart located in the "Action Planning" section at the end of the Playbook on page 115. This may help you to advance your work with intentionality. The chart pulls together the overall plan by asking the team to identify the priorities and current status; inputs (who will be engaged in the effort); outputs (activities and intended audience); the short-, medium-, and long-term impacts of those actions; and any assumptions or external factors that may affect the work.
- Create a plan that clearly outlines the actions that will be taken to foster a socially inclusive school. For each goal, the team should identify the major tasks that will need to be completed to achieve that goal, who will facilitate those actions, when each step will be completed, and who else might be engaged in the process.

Taking action toward creating a socially inclusive school is the core work of the Leadership Team. Identify what your school needs to become socially inclusive, engage others to implement the identified needs, and monitor your progress. It is important to remember that some actions can be large, but smaller, more frequent actions are equally important because they are invaluable in helping to build toward your school's ultimate success. Don't forget to celebrate large and small successes along the way!

## 6. CONDUCT PROGRESS MONITORING AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

As the Leadership Team engages others and facilitates implementation of the three core components of Unified Champion Schools (whole school engagement, inclusive youth leadership, Unified Sports), great things are sure to begin happening in your school. It can be helpful to continually collect data to measure progress and identify areas for continuous improvement that informs and enhances your efforts. The Social Inclusion Rubric found on page 103 can help you in these efforts.



# Characteristics of Socially Inclusive Schools

## Assessment

**The CSIS assessment is designed to help determine the degree of inclusiveness in the school and set a baseline for future work. It would be helpful to begin by having each member of the leadership team individually complete the assessment (see Social Inclusion Assessments section on page 85). Then, as a group, discuss each item and come to consensus about the current status of that item in the school before moving on to the next item.**

If significant differences exist in the perspectives of various members of the team, take time to capture each perspective before continuing. It is very important to honor and seriously discuss different perspectives because they can provide important insights into areas that may need to be addressed. Do not value one person's opinion as more important than another's—especially because of age or position.

If you cannot come to agreement on certain items, it is possible to record more than one answer in the initial self-assessment, making note of significant variations in perspective. This will provide additional information about how cohesive social inclusion efforts are perceived or implemented in the school. For example, if students indicate that their peers do not have inclusive friendships while teachers perceive that students develop inclusive peer relationships, it may be that teachers have nurtured social inclusion in a classroom, but it hasn't carried over into the hallways and informal settings in the school.

## SOCIAL INCLUSION SCALE

The Leadership Team may not be the only group you'll want to include in the data collection process. It is helpful to also gather information from a diverse representation of the wider student body, parents, teachers, counselors, staff and administrators. The team may decide to use the Social Inclusion Scale, which can be found in the Social Inclusion Assessments section on page 99.

There are several ways to collect survey data:

- Send the survey electronically or by mail.
- Have students take the survey home.
- Survey attendees at an open house, during parent conferences, or at other school events.

However you decide to conduct the survey, be careful to include a broad cross-section of the school community to capture as many perspectives as possible representing different stakeholder groups (e.g., parents/guardians of students with or without intellectual disabilities; students with or without intellectual disabilities; students from different grade levels; special or regular education teachers). You do not have to gather data from every member of the school community, but it is essential to gather a random sample of those stakeholders to ensure you obtain a picture that is truly reflective of your school.

After all data have been compiled from the returned surveys, take time to cross-check the perceptions of the team members with those of the wider school community. This, too, can provide information that will be helpful as you plan your implementation strategies.



# Social Inclusion Rubric

The Social Inclusion Rubric will provide a picture of the school's level of social inclusiveness as efforts are made to become a Unified Champion School or to expand and enhance implementation of the three components in an existing, designated school. This information then can be used to monitor progress, inform revisions to the strategic plan, discover new and exciting strategies to develop, and provide a picture of next steps.

The advantage of using this type of rubric is that it provides snapshots of what social inclusion looks like across the school. These pictures can be very helpful in identifying the current status of implementation. As your team evaluates the descriptors for each of the levels, you might find that your school has made more progress in one area than another. This can help you target your strategic plan while providing highlights of what to strive for next along the continuum of implementation.



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## Lessons From The Field

### *Advice from One School to The Other*

The following are suggested steps for implementing the Unified Champion Schools strategy based on the experiences of Diana Pielech, special education teacher and Unified Sports coach at Burnet Middle School in New Jersey.



Implementing the Unified Champion Schools strategy at your middle level school will bring many positive changes to your school; but like any new program, it will not be the easiest task to accomplish. Many hindering factors, such as board of education approval, administrative support, and budget restrictions, can be obstacles that need to be overcome as the strategy gets established. Before starting a Unified Champion Schools program, the teacher must first meet with the administration to have support from the school staff, special education supervisor and, eventually, the athletic director. Without these departments working together, the task cannot be accomplished. As a teacher, you must keep in mind that many people do not have the time to help lead the way, so you must continue to research ways in which you can expand the strategy while following school procedures and school law.

### **Where can you start?**

#### **STEP 1: START WITH THE UNIFIED CLUB.**

“The club” is a term that is familiar to your principal and supervisor, and it is the best way to introduce Unified Champion Schools into your school and community. Starting a Unified Club means meeting with your principal to get your club approved along with a club stipend if the board of education provides such funding.

**What is the club?** The club means you are bringing together your general education students and special education students to build relationships and spread awareness that it is OK to be different. When starting my club, my main goal was inclusion. I wanted all my students to feel as if they were a part of our school community. I started holding meetings once a month after school, and before I knew it had more than 100 kids who wanted to hang out with my students during homeroom and eat with them at lunch. Creating a schedule for students to rotate into the classroom allows for your homeroom to be full and for the students to really start to build friendships.

## **STEP 2: TAKE UNIFIED TRIPS.**

Most multiple disabled classes already take field trips into the communities. Start off with scheduling two or three trips a year like bowling and miniature golf, which will allow you to introduce the idea of Unified Partners through sports. Be aware of your district's board of education approval process for field trips, transportation access and budget restrictions. If you receive a Unified Champion Schools grant through Special Olympics, this can help pay for field trip opportunities and expenses such as transportation; however, your district will need to apply for reimbursement.

Familiarize yourself with how long it takes to get approval and do not try to rush a trip. It is better to say, "no" to a trip in the beginning than to proceed without proper approval and have something go wrong. If your school, administration or board of education has doubts, they will be unsupportive of what you are trying to accomplish. Make sure you have the correct permission slips and approval from nurses so that all medical needs are met for both your special education and general education students.

## **STEP 3: GAIN COMMUNITY AWARENESS.**

Every year, schools in our district work closely with Special Olympics. Everything that we do must be approved by the board of education. The grant will allow you to financially support your Unified Sports® programs and activities; and allows the school district to promote inclusion of students with and without disabilities through physical education, peer activities and Unified Sports. The long-term goal is for districts to create a lifelong plan in which they can implement teams, practices and coaches that support these Unified events. As the lead implementer of the grant, make a presentation to your board of education, contact your community members, and make parents aware of the programs you are putting in place.

## **STEP 4: SUPPORT YOUTH LEADERSHIP.**

Once your club is in place, you will have a good idea of the students who are willing to step up and be leaders. You will want to teach leadership skills to all students and engage students in inclusive leadership positions to help expand development of leadership skills for all students.

In meetings after school, allow students to share ideas of promoting awareness. Each year, you can develop a Spirit Week assembly or culminating event that allows the whole school to engage in the message of inclusion. By the third year of implementing the Unified Champion Schools strategy, our students were making their own videos and running the assembly themselves.

Additionally, students at my school created lesson plans for homeroom teachers to teach mini-lessons about different disabilities. They made posters and created morning announcements for their themed Spirit Week days, such as Camo Day, which was designed to illustrate how we can all blend together in spreading awareness and that it is OK to be different. Special Olympics provides guest speakers and athletes who can speak at your school to help kick off Spirit Week and spread awareness.

Students will step up when given the opportunity to make a difference. Allow all your students to have input and give their ideas. Take pictures, invite the media, get the school photography club involved, invite the ROTC, get many school clubs involved in your plan so that everyone can have a part in this Unified program.

## **STEP 5: IMPLEMENT UNIFIED TEAMS.**

This is the most difficult step because all schools have different regulations, rules and procedures. You need everyone to be involved for this to officially become a success. Your athletic director and special education supervisor need to be completely on board for this next step to fully take off. Student involvement is the easy part; parent involvement becomes easier because they want to be a part of providing more for their kids after school. Coaching stipends are not an obstacle because a Unified Champion Schools grant can provide support in the beginning. However, practice space, transportation, IEP after-school supports (i.e., para or nurse), district-approved sport physicals, and board of education approval can be obstacles. As the leader of this program, try to have an organized plan. Do not rely on your athletic director to do this for you; they do not have time.

Create a practice schedule, identify the cost for coaches, plan transportation of students, and print copies of the Special Olympics physical along with your district's required physical to provide for the students' doctors. Create a plan that you can submit to your board of education at least one year before your program will start. Most schools have the money to support you, but need time to plan and adjust their budgets to accommodate your requests.

The more organized you can be when presenting new ideas to your principals, supervisors and athletic directors, the easier the process is for everyone. I have found that the support is there for you; however, no one wants to be involved with the unknown. Do not be afraid to reach out to other schools in your area, attend youth summits for ideas, or even attend a board of education meeting to get clarification on school policies and procedures. The middle school program will be the feeder program to the high school, so getting the program set allows for the high school to expand their Unified Champion Schools program even further.

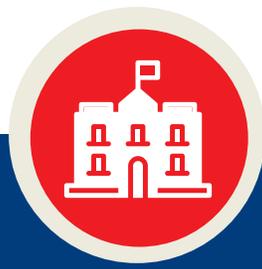
As an educator, it has been inspiring to see my students with and without disabilities step up and take on leadership roles in our community when it comes to promoting awareness of Unified Sports programs. Watching our "bad" students attend club every day and then stand up in front of all their peers to help spread a message of inclusion has to be one of the most rewarding experiences for any teacher.

This strategy includes everyone and empowers all students to become agents of change. Being a Unified Champion School also has provided my special education students with the supports and resources necessary for them to be a part of their school and their community; to be a part of a club after school, film videos to spread awareness, and become leaders among their peers. This strategy helps our students educate themselves both inside and outside of the classroom. The Unified Champion Schools initiatives help all of our students understand the message of inclusion and the positive impact it has on everyone who becomes involved.



# WHOLE SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE





# An Introduction to Whole School Engagement

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools provide opportunities for all students to learn about and practice social inclusion through sustained engagement, whether during an assembly, as part of a sports experience, or through planned activities that reach the interdisciplinary team or whole school. Through whole school engagement opportunities integrated with inclusive youth leadership and Special Olympics Unified Sports® components, the school becomes a powerful community that represents new ways of thinking and acting.

While many possibilities exist for promoting social inclusion through school assemblies and planned activities, the cafeteria, hallways and classrooms also provide opportunities to nurture positive peer relationships with students of all abilities. The expectation is that respect, acceptance and engagement are norms for the entire school environment. The result is a middle level school where all students feel they play a meaningful part in school events, extracurricular activities, sports, and informal interactions that occur in the cafeteria or hallways.



## **Social Inclusion In Action**

Identify the importance of all students serving in leadership capacities in which they demonstrate their skills and are recognized for unique contributions.

# GOALS OF WHOLE SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

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

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

- Engages the entire school community in building awareness and understanding of the benefits that can be experienced when each individual is recognized, honored and supported.
- Creates a socially inclusive school climate and expands ownership of the efforts beyond a passionate few to the larger community, creating a ripple effect of actions and advocacy.
- Enhances the school climate by nurturing development, learning and achievement through engaging environments where all feel connected, safe and successful.
- Creates communities of acceptance where students with disabilities feel welcomed and valued as meaningful participants in school activities, classroom learning and leadership opportunities.
- Models to the larger community that inclusivity can and does have positive outcomes for all members of the school or community.

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

# Implementing Whole School Engagement

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

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

## Topics to discuss with the Unified Champion School Leadership Team

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

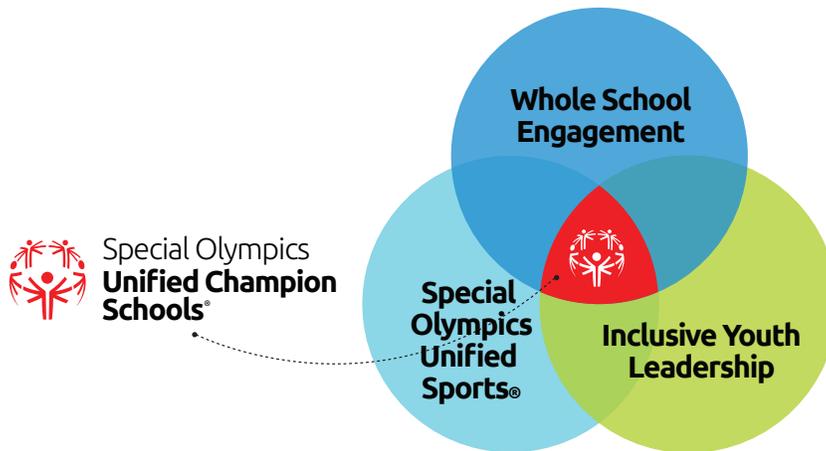
How did it feel when other students watched your games?

“

It felt good... to be noticed

- Unified Champion School Student With ID ”

# Integration of the Three Components through the Lens of Whole School Engagement



While each component is introduced separately, the greatest value comes when the separate components are integrated into various activities or learning opportunities. As reflected in *This We Believe*, an integrated curriculum is an important basis of middle level education, and emphasizes the importance of youth engagement. “Curriculum is integrative when it helps students make sense of their lives and the world around them, and when students are empowered to share in making significant, meaningful decisions about their learning” (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010). The following are examples of how the three components can be integrated with an emphasis on Whole School Engagement.

Example Activity	Whole School Engagement	Inclusive Youth Leadership	Unified Sports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fans in the Stands attend and cheer for all athletes during every Unified Basketball game.</li> </ul>	X	X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Unified PE class hosts a Unified Sports Festival to promote wellness and the importance of physical activity for all students.</li> </ul>	X	X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Unified Sports teams provide demonstrations during assemblies, lunch or exploratory periods.</li> </ul>	X		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pep rallies are held for all intramural and interscholastic Unified Sports teams.</li> </ul>	X		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The National Junior Honor Society creates a school-wide campaign with posters, a video, and small group presentations to increase awareness of social inclusion and foster respect among all students.</li> </ul>	X	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The seventh grade team works on an R-word door decorating contest, engaging students with and without intellectual disabilities in planning and implementation.</li> </ul>	X	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Unified Club works with the school PBIS leadership committee to incorporate social inclusion as part of the school-wide expectations for student behavior.</li> </ul>	X	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The social studies class incorporates lessons on social inclusion into their team’s interdisciplinary unit on social justice and includes an article in the school’s newsletter.</li> </ul>	X	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The inclusive Student Council or National Junior Honor Society coordinates a Spread the Word campaign to raise consciousness of the school and community about the hurtful effects of exclusive language, and to promote acts of inclusion.</li> </ul>	X	X	



## Enhancing Whole School Engagement Experiences



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



## Getting Started with Whole School Engagement

An important feature of creating a socially inclusive school is engaging the entire school community. Whole School Engagement activities advance social inclusion knowledge and skills, and positively impact the school climate. An inclusive school climate that fosters understanding and respect for all can influence how students think and act, both within and beyond the school.

School-wide opportunities that are focused on social inclusion raise awareness and create an educational environment where respect and acceptance are the norm and all students feel included and engaged. This welcoming community cultivates a positive school climate and enhances other school-wide efforts such as PBIS. Whole school activities offer a platform for young adolescents to positively impact their school community by promoting social inclusion. While these activities can vary from school to school, some examples include:

- **Spread the Word campaigns.**
- **Fans in the Stands.**
- **Unified Sports field days.**
- **The play, *It's Our School, Too!***
- **Discussions in advisor-advisee (e.g., Special Olympics Activities and Lessons).**

As schools continue with the Unified Champion Schools strategy, students and adults within the school can identify activities unique to their school or community. Implementation of whole school activities and events provides opportunities for integrating Unified Sports or inclusive youth leadership efforts. This integration enhances the spread of social inclusion throughout the school.



### Have a “Mix it Up” day on campus:

On a specific day, randomly assign students to sit at different tables for lunch—it is a great chance for students to start conversations and talk with new people. This will allow students to step out of their comfort zone and make new friends.



## Examples of Whole School Engagement Activities SPREAD THE WORD

# SPREAD THE WORD INCLUSION



Some Unified Champion Schools choose to implement a Spread the Word campaign. In 2019, Spread the Word to End the Word became Spread the Word (STW), with a focus not just on the elimination of a word but on the creation of a new reality: inclusion for all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The global engagement campaign remains committed to empowering grassroots leaders to change their communities, schools, and workplaces, now through a call to their peers to take action for inclusion. With this change, Spread the Word will give school leaders around the world the tools needed to create socially inclusive places to learn, work, and live.

The following are a few ideas for promoting and growing a Spread the Word Campaign in a middle level school:

- Host a rally modeled after pep rallies.
- Hang informational posters around the school.
- Create and distribute STW stickers.
- Sell STW T-shirts.
- Make announcements on the school's "morning news," website or e-newsletter.
- Provide opportunities for students to sign a pledge of inclusion—posters or banners for physical signatures or perhaps computers for online pledging.
- Reach out through social networks (if allowed by school policy).
- Use other types of communication—email, texts, phone calls—to make sure you reach everyone you want to reach.

“I personally think that we should add more weeks of respect into the year.”

- Unified Champion School Student With ID



## Examples of Whole School Engagement Activities

### FANS IN THE STANDS

Fans in the Stands is a program that supports unity and taps into core values of acceptance, empowerment, respect, inclusion, dignity, courage, strength, pride, confidence and fun. It helps ensure that individual students and Unified teams have cheering fans whenever and wherever they compete. Everyone loves to have people cheer them on, and middle level students are no different. Fans in the Stands lets students with intellectual disabilities know that their sports competitions are as important as anyone else's, and it makes the whole school aware of the abilities of athletes with intellectual disabilities.

Students are already accustomed to cheering on their school athletes, so being Fans in the Stands for all students is an easy next step. The following are a few ideas that will inform and engage students, and they can fit well into almost any school environment.

- Set up a station in the cafeteria where students can sign up to be Fans in the Stands.
- Create a promotional announcement for the school's "morning news."
- Organize a poster or T-shirt design contest, with judging done by Unified teams.
- Distribute Fans in the Stands stickers during lunch, at school sports events, or at other appropriate times.
- Bring students, faculty and staff together for a Fans in the Stands pep rally—or include a Fans in the Stands component as part of a regular school-wide pep rally.

*HINT: Similar ideas will work equally well for efforts such as the R-word Campaign.*



### Example: Fans in the Stands

"At our school, some members of the Unified Club were also part of the school's Unified Sports team, so for one club activity they decided to cheer on the players. As Fans in the Stands, they made posters and shirts to encourage the team. The Unified Sports players were so happy to see that their friends from the Unified Club had shown up to cheer them on. After the game, all members of the Unified Club and the Unified Sports team had a pizza party where they were able to share stories about the game and the great plays that were made. This is an effective way for all of the friends to bond over sports and encourage each other to do their best."

- Unified Champion School Student Without ID



## Plays and Film Clips

***Movies that Move*** offers a collection of clips from films and TV shows to spark classroom discussion. The themes include different abilities; the power of words; acceptance; and youth leadership, and are perfect for advisory discussions. Based on a partnership with Film Clips for Character Education, *Movies that Move* is designed to promote inclusion and critical thinking. With titles ranging from Henry Potter to the Lord of the Rings, discussions are engaging for young adolescents.

***It's Our School, Too!*** is a play written for a cast of 10-20 youth with and without intellectual disabilities. The short scenes are based on true stories from students about the things that happen every day in our schools. The play can be performed on a blank stage, using just chairs, or you may create an elaborate set. There are three sections of the play (Opening, the R-word and Closing) where you can choose either to use the line suggestions in the script or create new lines that relate more to the students.

The play is a powerful vehicle for portraying and generating discussions on issues of exclusion and inclusion in schools today. It would be a great presentation for the entire school, and could be perfect for classroom or advisory discussions. To access the script for this play, refer to the Resources section at the back of the Playbook.

“ We have so many friends who are part of the Unified Basketball team that we wanted to go out and cheer for them. ”

- Susan, Unified Club Member



## Examples of Whole School Engagement Activities RALLIES AND UNIFIED SPORTS DAYS



**Rallies and Assemblies** are perfect ways to bring students together in a large setting to learn about social inclusion; inform and excite students about new initiatives (e.g., R-word Campaign); and celebrate achievements. Students love to gather in large numbers to express their enthusiasm for something they care about, whether it's a team or a cause. Respect Rallies give students of all abilities the opportunity to come together and voice their collective support for acceptance and inclusion. Youth passion about a topic and organization become the basis for an informative and encouraging activity, and present a wonderful teaching opportunity.

**Unified Sports Days or Festivals** provide an opportunity for the school's various Unified teams to compete and teach others. Interdisciplinary teams can have bocce tournaments, play Unified soccer, or have specific skills stations, while the Walking Club can increase its total number of steps. These are ideal ways to support individual fitness while having fun. Be sure to see additional information in the Resources section for this type of event.

“ That was very exciting. All of my friends were cheering for me and I felt happy. ”

- Unified Champion School Student With ID,  
Talking about a Unified Pep Rally



## Getting Started Checklists and a Plan

In the Resources section at the end of the Playbook, you will find tips and “Getting Started Checklists” for the whole school engagement activities discussed earlier. These activities can be customized and expanded to best address your identified needs and fit into the structure of your school. As you continue with Unified Champion Schools, new activities can be implemented to meet the needs of students and the school.

After reviewing all of your options, create a Whole School Engagement plan so you identify specifics on what you are going to do, when it will be done, and by whom. Adults and youth should be working together on the steps in each checklist plan for engaging the entire school. The template for the “Whole School Engagement Action Plan” can be found in the Resources section at the back of the Playbook.





# INCLUSIVE YOUTH LEADERSHIP IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE





# An Introduction to Inclusive Youth Leadership

Adults sometimes doubt the readiness of young adolescents to be leaders—or perhaps they are apprehensive about what will happen if they share the mantle of leadership with students. That concern ignores one of the key attributes of effective middle level schools according to AMLE’s *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*—effective middle schools empower students and provide them with the knowledge and skills to take control of their lives. ...When students have the opportunity to lead, they become architects of their futures and change agents in their schools and communities. (Edwards, 2015)

Inclusive youth leadership helps shift cultural norms and inform policies and practices within a school. The benefits and focus of youth leadership are no different from developing leadership skills in adults. We invest in teachers not merely because it is good for them individually, but because it impacts students and our schools more broadly. The same is true for why we engage students in inclusive youth leadership.

While educators should help students practice making decisions at all levels, it is critical in the middle school years to start making some decisions with consequences. If we ever plan to ask students to lead, we must prepare them. If we don’t help them practice decision making, we are setting them up to fail when we do so. (Edwards, 2015)



## **Social Inclusion In Action**

Identify the importance of all students serving in leadership capacities in which they demonstrate their skills and are recognized for unique contributions.

# GOALS OF INCLUSIVE YOUTH LEADERSHIP

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

## Inclusive Youth Leadership is a critical component because it:

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

**When young adolescents from Unified Champion Schools learn to be leaders and experience being change agents, they make their schools more welcoming places, help to initiate unifying sports opportunities, or work to nurture positive inclusive peer relationships. These efforts help to enhance the school’s climate.**

**In Unified Champion Schools, youth leadership takes many forms and happens in many different ways. The common thread is that they all include students of all abilities. Participants come together to plan and conduct sports, games, community service and school events, and, of course, to have fun.**

**By doing such typical student activities inclusively, they learn a lot about each other, break down barriers, and serve as role models.**

# Inclusive youth leadership is a unique and important component because it:

✔ Supports all young adolescents so that they may contribute meaningfully to the school community.

✔ Brings together students with and without intellectual disabilities as leaders on their interdisciplinary team or in their school, creating a socially inclusive environment in which lasting friendships can form.

✔ Offers opportunities for all students to become leaders, developing understandings that students of all abilities can lead, and expanding student investment in creating a socially inclusive school.

Opportunities to nurture youth leadership abound in any middle school, and ensuring leadership roles are inclusive and accessible to all students will enrich those experiences. Engaging students with a variety of skills, abilities and perspectives will enhance efforts to create and sustain change.

**Five areas that affect students' social and psychological development are self-esteem, achievement motivation, social skills, coping skills and aspirations—each of which are aspects of leadership.**

#### Strategies for enhancing students' social skills:

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



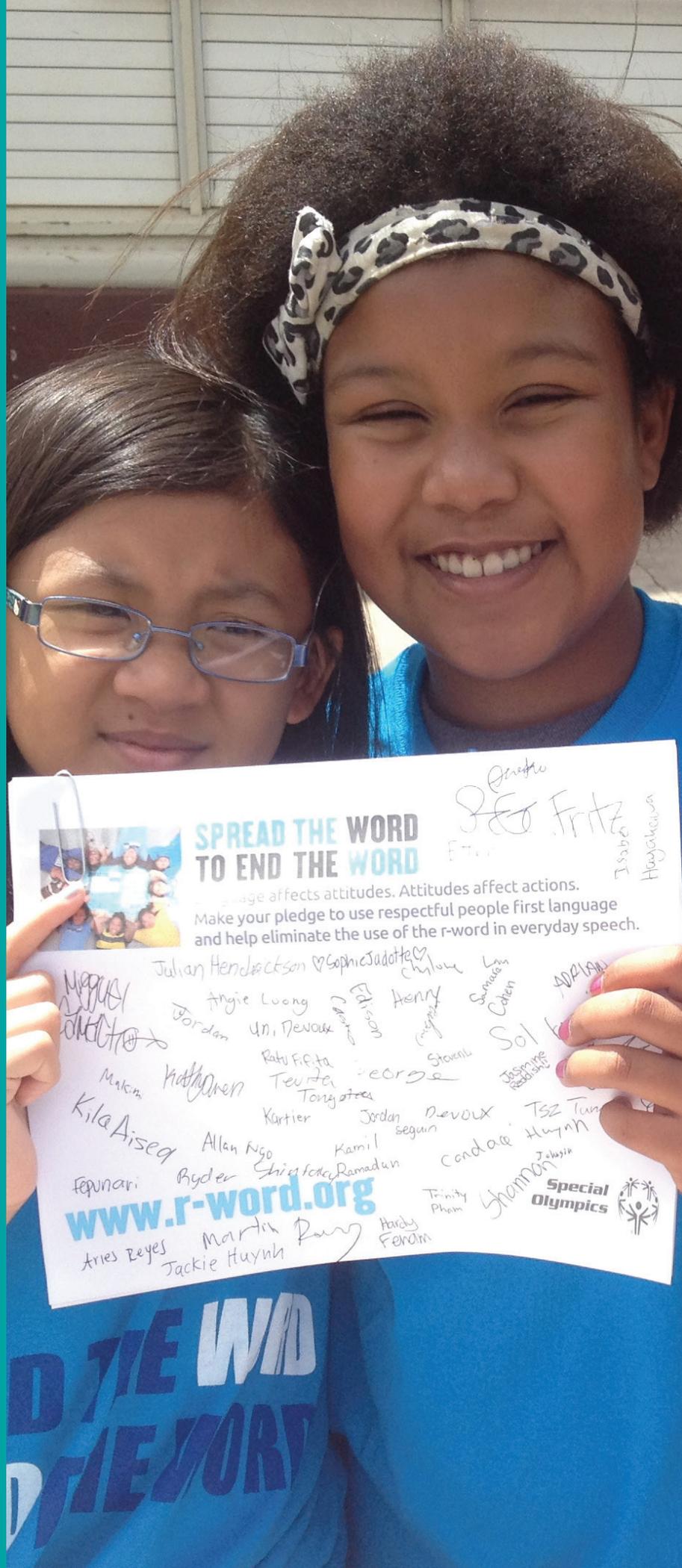
#### Youth Leadership Tip

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

Both youth and adults share responsibility and accountability for the work and achieving goals.

According to Anderson Williams:

Providing all students with leadership opportunities helps them grow into responsible adults. If we want students to work in partnership with adults, we must give them the opportunities to develop leadership skills—skills that allow them to manage time, work as a team, set goals, solve problems, facilitate meetings, defend positions, and make effective presentations. In other words, we must help them develop effective life skills. (Edwards, 2015)



### SPREAD THE WORD TO END THE R-WORD

Language affects attitudes. Attitudes affect actions.  
Make your pledge to use respectful people first language  
and help eliminate the use of the r-word in everyday speech.

- Julian Hendrickson
- Angie Luong
- Jordan
- Uri Devoux
- Ratu Fifita
- Teuifa
- Tongatrea
- Kartier
- Jordan Devoux
- segun
- Allan Ngo
- Byder
- Shirley Ramadan
- Kamil
- Hardy Ferdin
- Henry
- Shawn
- George
- Devoux
- condae
- Trinity Pham
- Shannon
- Samuel Cohen
- Jasmine
- TSZ Tun
- Huyhn
- Jelaysia
- Isabelle
- Huyahewa
- ADZLAN
- Special Olympics

[www.r-word.org](http://www.r-word.org)



Inclusive youth leadership offers opportunities for young people of all abilities to be leaders in their schools and communities by promoting equity and acceptance. Leadership activities help students find their voices by teaching them to become change agents striving for respect and inclusion. Social inclusion is best fostered when activities for classrooms, for the whole school, and within extracurricular and community contexts are designed and implemented by a diverse group of students within a school.

Youth leadership at the middle level occurs in many ways. Possibilities might include a student-led effort to form a Unified Sports team; initiating a Unified Club or exploratory course comprised of students with and without intellectual disabilities; working to intentionally include a diverse group of students within existing clubs; or engaging non-traditional leaders in school and classroom decision-making.



### **Social Action**

People who have never felt empowered often fear change because they feel they have no control of the situation. Ensuring transparency around the changes and engaging students with the changes make transitions smoother.

# Integration of the Three Components through the Lens of Inclusive Youth Leadership



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

Example Activity	Whole School Engagement	Inclusive Youth Leadership	Unified Sports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students advocate and obtain administrative support for starting a Unified soccer team. They help organize practices and games.</li> </ul>		X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students work with adults in the school to hold a Unified Sports Day.</li> </ul>	X	X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students form an inclusive cheerleading squad for the Unified basketball teams.</li> </ul>		X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students and their teachers work together to initiate a Unified Club for their Interdisciplinary team on promoting social inclusion.</li> </ul>	X	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students in the Student Council or National Junior Honor Society work with faculty to revise guidelines to ensure students with and without disabilities have equitable opportunities to be members.</li> </ul>		X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students work with the teachers on their Interdisciplinary team to establish an inclusive Student Advisory Committee to provide input on team activities to ensure all are engaged.</li> </ul>	X	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As part of a social justice instructional unit, each home room class decorates their classroom door, sharing their vision of a socially inclusive school.</li> </ul>	X	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The language arts classes collaborate to revise the script for the play, <i>It's Our School, Too!</i> to reflect current issues in middle schools, and the exploratory drama class puts on a performance for the entire school.</li> </ul>	X	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students start a mentoring program pairing middle school students with and without intellectual disabilities with elementary school students to assist students with successful transition to middle school.</li> </ul>	X	X	



## Implementing Inclusive Youth Leadership



The first step to starting inclusive youth leadership in your school is typically to have a planning meeting with your school's Unified Champion School Leadership Team.

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

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

### Topics to Discuss with the Unified Champion School Leadership Team

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



## Enhancing Inclusive Youth Leadership Experiences

- Ensure adults are adequately prepared to foster inclusive youth leadership.
- Be intentional about developing the leadership skills of all students.
- Co-create the values, norms and processes that groups will use to guide their work.
- Be explicit about what inclusive youth leadership means, including the commitment to inclusiveness and expectations for all stakeholders (youth and adults).
- Help students learn to model social inclusion throughout their daily interactions at school.
- Be sure to cultivate youth leadership beyond the typical leader, spreading leadership opportunities to a wide range of students.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for students and adults to reflect on and refine their leadership skills.
- Guide students in providing frequent communications with staff, administrators and other students to keep them informed of their progress and activities and increase the number of people within the school who are committed to the work of social inclusion.
- Share photos, videos and stories of social inclusion activities and events using the school's website or social media.





## Examples of Inclusive Youth Leadership Activities

Youth leadership is one of the essential pillars of Unified Champion Schools. No one understands the thoughts, emotions, attitudes and ideals of young people better than other young people. When young adolescents care about something, and perceive a reality that needs to be changed, they bring unparalleled energy and creativity to achieving their goals. They want to lead; they just need the opportunity.



## Unified Clubs/Leadership Classes

Unified Clubs are focused on the basics of Unified Champion Schools and are officially recognized by the school's administration. Students of all abilities work together on activities to make their school more accepting and respectful while the students enjoy new friendships. The members of the clubs can be responsible for organizing whole school events such as the R-word Campaign, making the cafeteria a place of acceptance and engagement, organizing Fans in the Stands, or implementing many other projects. The clubs provide the opportunities for youth to identify needs in their school—from their perspectives—and do something about it.

Some middle level schools have leadership classes that offer many of the same opportunities that other schools offer through a club. Both avenues can be successful.

“ Just that you could be yourself,  
and no one would really judge  
you like they do in regular school. ”

- Unified Champion School Student Without ID



## Making Existing Clubs Inclusive

“I have learned that you got to always have faith in people to change. You got to always help them be a better person and always encourage them to be kind and caring.”

– Unified Champion School Student With ID

In many schools it would be effective and beneficial to transform existing student groups and clubs, such as Student Councils or National Junior Honor Societies, into inclusive clubs that support the basics of Unified Champion Schools. In fact, it is vital to focus on opening up student leadership to students of all abilities.

- Identify existing school clubs that are working toward—or are at least open to—inclusion of students of all abilities.
- Connect with the student leaders, teachers and advisors, and members of the clubs to talk to them about the value of social inclusion.
- Talk with your teachers to help identify students who might want to be involved with the clubs.
- Provide information to help the clubs become inclusive.

Example: Student Council Becomes Inclusive

**“I promised to make the school more accepting of everyone...I think I accomplished that!”**

Peter, Student Council President

A middle school student decided to run for president of his school’s Student Council. He wanted to promote acceptance, so he decided to make his vice president running mate a student with an intellectual disability. He felt it was important to prove to the school that regardless of your ability, you can make a difference and be a leader within the school community. This student ultimately won the school presidency and worked to include all students on the Student Council.

This Student Council had previously been exclusive and only had students without disabilities represented, but the new president wanted the whole student body involved. The new inclusive Student Council was able to set an example for all other clubs on campus, and eventually brought inclusive leadership to all aspect of student life.



## Youth Leadership Tip

Youth leadership doesn’t always have to be in the form of an ongoing program.

It can also be a more limited experience. For an example, refer to the article, “Middle School Gossip,” from the AMLE Newsletter <https://www.amle.org/BrowsebyTopic/WhatsNew/WNDet/TabId/270/ArtMID/888/ArticleID/822/Middle-School-Gossip.aspx>



## Youth Advisory Committee

**When starting a Unified Club, it is recommended to identify a core group of 3-5 interested students to serve as an advisory committee during the initial set-up stages of the club. This provides focus on establishing the club while providing leadership after the club is established.**

**The club advisor should work with the advisory committee to accomplish the steps necessary to establish the club. However, students should provide the primary leadership.**

*Additional information on the Student Advisory Committee can be found in the "Resources" section at the back of the Playbook.*



“ I think I learned how to get along with different students better, students that aren't like me. So some students that aren't in sports or aren't in clubs, I feel like I've gotten to understand them better. ”

- Susan, Unified Club Member



## Getting Started Checklists and a Plan

In the “Resources” section at the end of the Playbook, you will find tips and “Getting Started Checklists” for Inclusive Youth Leadership. These activities can be customized and expanded to best address the needs of your students and fit into the structure of your school. As you continue with Unified Champion Schools, new activities can be implemented to meet the needs of students and the school.

After considering how you want to enhance inclusive youth leadership in your school, create an inclusive youth leadership plan so that you identify specifics on what you are going to do, when it will be done, and by whom. Adults and youth should be working together on the steps in each checklist plan for engaging the entire school. The template for the “Inclusive Youth Leadership Action Plan” can be found in the “Resources” section at the back of the Playbook.

“ [The Unified Champion Schools program] allows you to be friends with those kids outside of school, too. I’ve hung out with a lot of them outside of school, and I think that’s great, for us and for them, just to be able to not just have an in-school thing and not just have people be like, ‘Oh. It’s a task. I have to hang out with them.’ No, it’s an actual fun thing to do... Yeah because it builds friendships and builds people that you actually want to be around.”

– Unified Champion School Student Without ID



WASHINGTON MIDDLE

INTER-SCHOOL  
SKILL-STARS  
HAWAII

SPREAD THE WORD  
TO END THE WORD

SPREAD THE WORD  
TO END THE WORD

SPREAD THE WORD  
TO END THE WORD



**UNIFIED SPORTS<sup>®</sup>  
IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE**



# An Introduction to Special Olympics Unified Sports®

Special Olympics Unified Sports® is a component of the Unified Champion Schools strategy that engages students with and without intellectual disabilities on the same sports team. Unified Sports provides valuable social inclusion opportunities for all teammates to build friendships on and off the playing field. Through modeling genuine inclusion for the entire school community, all teammates are challenged to improve their sports skills and fitness. In the process, young adolescents with and without intellectual disabilities increase their positive attitudes and perceptions toward their peers and establish friendships.

## **Unified Sports is a unique and important component because it:**

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

Through Unified Sports, students come together in settings where all teammates are challenged to improve their skills and gain a better understanding of one another's abilities through a spirit of equality and team unity. Unified Sports leads to new friendships, improved self-esteem, positive changes in attitudes and behaviors, improved sports skills, and a deeper connection to the school (Nanavati & Haas, 2015; Ozer et al., 2012; Siperstein, Hardman, Wappett, & Clary, 2001).

“ Unified Sports? It always encourages kids to help be more involved in school, and it makes them feel proud of themselves, and getting more self-confidence in them. ”

- Unified Champion School Student Without ID



## What distinguishes each of the Unified Sports Models from another?



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

### Competitive

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

### Player Development

- Similar to traditional Unified Sports, but teammates of higher abilities serve as mentors, assisting teammates of lower abilities in developing sport-specific skills and tactics.
- All teammates should be of similar age.
- There is a non-competitive, less structured, cooperative team environment.

### Recreation

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

# GOALS OF UNIFIED SPORTS

- **Friendship and socialization**

Participation in Unified Sports provides a forum for positive social interaction between teammates, and often leads to long-lasting friendships.

- **Meaningful inclusion**

All teammates play important, meaningful and valued roles on the team.

- **Sport skill development**

Students develop sports skills to enable them to compete with greater proficiency and develop physical fitness.

- **Competition experience**

Students with and without intellectual disabilities benefit from physical and mental challenges by participating in a variety of competitive and non-competitive environments.

## Principle of Meaningful Involvement

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

### Indicators of Meaningful Involvement

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

### Meaningful involvement is not achieved when some team members:

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



### **Inclusion Tip**

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





Track & Field



Basketball



Bocce



Skiing



Bowling

## Types of Unified Sports

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



Softball



Flag Football



Soccer



Floor Hockey



Handball



Golf

# Integration of the Three Components through the Lens of Unified Sports®



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

Example Activity	Whole School Engagement	Inclusive Youth Leadership	Unified Sports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Unified Bocce team hosts a series of instructional sessions during the lunch period to offer students an opportunity to learn how to play.</li> </ul>	X		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After the intramural flag football season ends, the Unified Club helps with a celebration and awards assembly to honor everyone who played or supported the teams.</li> </ul>	X	X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students with and without intellectual disabilities on the Unified Sports intramural basketball team organize and speak at an assembly about student collaboration to enhance each other's skills.</li> </ul>	X	X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Middle school students lead an after-school program to develop soccer skills in elementary students with and without intellectual disabilities.</li> </ul>		X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Student Council or National Junior Honor Society organizes Fans in the Stands to engage the whole student body in supporting the Unified Sports teams.</li> </ul>	X	X	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The physical education teacher works with the students on their interdisciplinary team to host a Unified Sports Day focused on one of the sports they have studied.</li> </ul>	X	X	X

# Implementing Unified Sports

To initiate a Unified Sports opportunity in your school, you'll typically want to start with a planning meeting with your school's Unified Champion School Leadership Team and / or your Unified Club. You may also want to invite a Special Olympics staff member to the meeting. As you work through the implementation of Unified Sports in your school, be sure students are engaged as co-leaders throughout the process. Remember to always be on the lookout for opportunities to hand over decision-making and leadership to young people. Each step in answering the questions and completing the checklists found below will be completed by youth, youth and adults working together, or adults as appropriate for your particular school environment.

## Topics to discuss with the Unified Champion School Leadership Team:

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

## Enhancing Unified Sports:

Social inclusion efforts like Unified Sports will have a greater impact and be more sustainable when they are connected to other initiatives and goals of the school. For example, the school may decide to include indicators of social inclusion from the "Social Inclusion Rubric" (found under "Assessments" in the "Resources" section of the Playbook) when assessing progress on the school improvement plan. Other strategies for enhancing the impact of the Unified Sports experience and increasing positive impacts throughout the school include:

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



## Unified Sports Sustainability Tips

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



### Unified Sports Coach's Guidelines

- Have the necessary knowledge.
  - Complete Unified Sports Coach's training at <https://nfhslearn.com/courses/36000/coaching-unified-sports>.
- Select team members at the appropriate age and ability level to ensure full participation.
  - Be a non-playing coach
  - Commit to regular practice sessions.
  - Coach everyone using individualized approaches.



## Getting Started Checklists and a Plan

As with whole school engagement and inclusive youth leadership, Unified Sports enhances a socially inclusive environment, and there are several ways to engage young adolescents in leadership roles. There are distinctive differences between the three Unified Sports models, and implementation will vary depending on the particular sport, school structure and model selected.

The checklists in the “Resources” section serve as a good starting point for creating Unified Sports opportunities. Whether your school is rural, urban or somewhere in between, the ideas can be adjusted to suit the needs and interests of your students. As you continue with Unified Champion Schools, new activities can be implemented to meet the needs of students and the school.

After reviewing all of your options, create a Unified Sports plan that identifies specifics on what you are going to do, when it will be done and by whom. Adults and youth should be working together on the steps in each checklist plan for engaging the entire team or school. The template for the “Unified Sports Action” Plan can be found in the “Resources” section at the back of the Playbook.





# Resource Links

Please find below a list of resources to assist in implementation of the Unified Champion Schools strategy. These resources can also be found at [resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/](https://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/)

## Students

**It's Our School Too!**: Script for *It's Our School, Too!* play for inclusive school performance.

**Tips for a Meaningful Mentor/Mentee Relationship**: Some key tips for mentoring.

**Tips for Shared Learning Among Youth and Adults**: Suggestions for ways that adults and youth can work together to create social change.

**Types and Sources of Power**: A resource that could be helpful when providing inclusive youth leadership.

## Educators

**Inclusive Youth Leadership Guidelines**: This will provide more information on how adults can effectively nurture inclusive youth leadership.

**It's Our School Too!**: Script for *It's Our School, Too!* play for inclusive school performance.

**Mini-Lesson: Taking Action to Become a Socially Inclusive School**: The series of mini-lessons can be used school-wide within a PBIS framework.

**Mini-Lesson: Tolerance and Acceptance**: The series of mini-lessons can be used school-wide within a PBIS framework.

**Mini-Lesson: Understanding Disability**: The series of mini-lessons can be used school-wide within a PBIS framework.

**Mini-Lesson: Visions of a Socially Inclusive Community**: The series of mini-lessons can be used school-wide within a PBIS framework.

**Special Olympics Unified Physical Education Resources**: This contains information that can be used in a physical education curriculum.

**Special Olympics Unified Sports in Schools**: This provides an overview of the ways that Unified Sports can be incorporated into Unified Champion Schools.

**Tips for a Meaningful Mentor/Mentee Relationship**: Some key tips for mentoring.

**Tips for Shared Learning Among Youth and Adults**: Suggestions for ways that adults and youth can work together to create social change.

**Types and Sources of Power**: A resource that could be helpful when providing inclusive youth leadership.

## Special Olympics Resources

**Special Olympics Unified Schools List of Resources on the web** Youth and School resources

## Special Olympics State Programs

**NFHS Coaching Unified Sports Online Course**: Find a free 90-minute online coaching course here.

**Special Olympics Unified Sports in Schools**: This provides an overview of the ways that Unified Sports can be incorporated into Unified Champion Schools.

## Contacts

### Special Olympics State Programs

Your number one ally in implementing strategies and activities from the Unified Champion Schools Middle Level Playbook is your State Special Olympics Program.

On this webpage, <http://www.specialolympics.org/north-america/>, all North American Special Olympics Programs are listed for your convenience. Please follow the corresponding link to your state/area to contact the appropriate staff member.

# Position Paper

## Middle Level Schools and Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools

The following are excerpts from a paper written for the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE). A revised version, "Social Inclusion, It's Our Middle School, Too," appeared in the February 2013 issue of AMLE's Middle Ground Magazine and can be found at <http://www.amle.org/portals/0/pdf/mg/Feb2013.pdf>. State Special Olympics Programs have permission to reproduce it and the paper, "Social Revolution Through Sports," in their newsletters with appropriate citation.

## Characteristics of the Young Adolescent

Early adolescence is the period of human growth and development between childhood and adolescence (simply translated those years between elementary and high school). During this stage of the life cycle, young adolescents (10- to 15-year-olds) experience rapid and significant developmental change—physically, emotionally, intellectually and socially. The experiences that young adolescents have through curricular and extracurricular programs or social situations need to support the specific needs of this age group.

According to *This We Believe*, the Association for Middle Level Education's foundational document, "in order to become a fully functioning, self-actualized person," each young adolescent should:

- **Respect and value the diverse ways** people look, speak, think, and act.
- Develop the **interpersonal and social skills** needed to learn, work, and play with others **harmoniously and confidently**.
- Assume responsibility for his or her own actions and be cognizant of and ready to **accept obligations for the welfare of others**.

How can we expect students to develop these skills and put them into actions if opportunities are not provided within schools for students to interact with, support, and grow to know and appreciate fellow students of diverse abilities, characteristics, and backgrounds? *This We Believe* further affirms that an education for young adolescents must be:

- **Developmentally responsive**
- **Challenging**
- **Empowering**
- **Equitable**

**The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform identifies the following basic tenets for middle schools to be recognized as Schools to Watch:**

- **Academic Excellence**
- **Developmentally Responsive**
- **Socially Equitable**

Each of these attributes also reflects the essential nature of an inclusive school, thus suggesting that an effective middle grades school also must be an inclusive school. According to the Inclusive Schools Network, inclusive schools are built on a strong philosophical belief that all children can learn and be successful within a shared learning environment. An inclusive school climate fosters acceptance, respect and human dignity for all students; and it is the foundation upon which the school staff educates, motivates and activates students. It is a place where all students, both with and without intellectual disabilities, are supported and encouraged to be "agents of change." Inclusive education should be a universal commitment and a core value that ensures equitable access and success for all students and adults.

One of *This We Believe*'s sixteen characteristics of a successful middle grades school is, "The school environment is inviting, safe, inclusive, and supportive of all.... In such a school, human relationships are paramount." It is further states that "Everyone in an inviting school works proactively to eliminate harassment, verbal abuse, bullying, and name-calling. Students and teachers understand that they are part of a community in which differences are respected and celebrated.... Every student—no matter what creed, color, or uniqueness—is a genuine and **contributing member of the school community.**"

Since the middle school movement started in the 1960s, there has been a strong emphasis on schools that support all students and address the unique characteristics of young adolescents. Many of those characteristics, identified by Dr. Peter Scales at the Search Institute, point to the need for an inclusive school environment and the understanding and supportive actions of adults to ensure and sustain a supportive school experience for all students. The following are a few of these researched characteristics that highlight the vulnerability and needs of developing young adolescents to be educated in

a supportive environment—one that respects the needs and gifts of all students and provides positive opportunities for students to interact in social situations.

#### **In the area of moral development, young adolescents:**

- Are in transition from moral reasoning that focuses on ‘what’s in it for me’ to consideration of the feelings and rights of others.
- Are generally idealistic, desiring to make the world a better place and to make a meaningful contribution to a cause or issue larger than themselves.
- Are capable of, and value, direct experience in participatory democracy.
- Are likely to believe in and espouse values such as honesty, responsibility and cultural acceptance, while at the same time learning that they and the people they admire also can be...intolerant.

In the area of psychological development, young adolescents:

- Tend to be self-conscious and highly sensitive to personal criticism.
- Desire recognition for their positive efforts and achievements.
- Are psychologically vulnerable because at no other stage in development are they more likely to encounter and be aware of so many differences between themselves and others.

#### **In the area of social-emotional development, young adolescents:**

- Have a strong need for approval and may be easily discouraged.
- Are increasingly concerned about peer acceptance.
- Have a strong need to belong to a group, with approval of peers becoming as important as adult approval, and on some matters even more important.
- In their search for group membership, may experience significant embarrassment, ridicule or rejection from those in other cliques from which they are excluded.

In the area of physical development, young adolescents:

- Have accelerated and uneven growth.
- May experience coordination issues since bones grow faster than muscles.
- Are often physically vulnerable due to poor physical fitness and poor health habits.

These characteristics reinforce the needs of all middle level students to be part of a democratic learning environment where students interact, are respected and work for the good of the whole as well as the individual. . It is clear that once an inclusive environment is created, it is beneficial to all.

## **Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools and Middle Level Schools**

The middle school years are critical times of development for young adolescents; in fact, youth go through more developmental changes during these years than any other time except the first two years of life. The various characteristics of young adolescents point to the needs of all students to be part of a supportive environment in which they interact, are respected, and are recognized as important members of the school community.

Because the Unified Champion Schools strategy addresses the developmental characteristics and needs of young adolescents, it is an important strategy to be implemented in middle level schools. While inclusive high schools are critically important for students, social acceptance and integration programs need to be started earlier in a child’s school experience. Further, transitioning from one school level to the next is always difficult for students, but that transition can be made easier if students are moving from a socially inclusive middle school to a socially inclusive high school. Therefore, it can be helpful to think about a system of inclusive schools in which inclusive middle level schools “feed” into inclusive high schools. Just as a student’s academic learning increases and expands as he or she moves along the learning continuum, social engagement and acceptance increases and matures with increasing opportunities for understanding and application.

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools and socially inclusive schools directly align with the basic precepts of middle level education and the needs of young adolescents. There are three major documents that identify the characteristics of effective, middle level schools: Association for Middle Level Education’s *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents* (<http://www.amle.org/AboutAMLE/ThisWeBelieve/tabid/121/Default.aspx#122516-the-16-characteristics>), National Association of Secondary School Principal’s “Breaking Ranks in the Middle” (<http://www.nassp.org/Portals/3/content/53576.pdf>), and the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform’s “Schools-to-Watch Criteria” (<http://www.middlegradesforum.org/index.php/schools-to-watch>). The following charts summarize how relevant characteristics of effective middle level schools align with the seven elements of Unified Champion Schools: Youth Leadership, Creating and Sustaining Relationships, Unifying Programming, School/Community Collaborations, Communication, Professional Development and Continuous Improvement. Of the nine categories of effective middle level schools, the following five are directly or indirectly related to social inclusion (the other characteristics of effective middle level schools relate more directly to academic learning).

<b>Characteristics of Middle Level Schools</b>	<b>Middle Level Concepts</b>	<b>Unified Champion Schools Elements</b>
<p><b>Organizational structures promote academic growth &amp; personal development</b></p>	<p>The school establishes structures and practices to <b>banish anonymity and individualize the learning experience for each student.</b></p> <p>The school implements scheduling and student <b>grouping practices that are flexible, meet each student’s needs,</b> and ensure successful academic growth and <b>personal development.</b></p> <p>The school offers <b>alternatives to tracking and ability grouping</b> while maintaining the flexibility to appropriately <b>support and challenge each student.</b></p> <p>The school <b>fosters collaboration</b> to improve student performance through such structures as teacher teams and regularly scheduled common planning time.</p> <p>The school ensures a smooth academic and <b>social transition for each student</b> from grade to grade and school to school.</p> <p>Organizational structures foster purposeful learning and <b>meaningful relationships.</b></p> <p>Every student’s academic and <b>personal development</b> is guided by an adult advocate.</p>	<p><b>Unifying Programming</b></p> <p>Access and opportunities are regularly provided for students with and without intellectual disabilities to participate together in sports and engagement activities.</p> <p>Academic and non-academic activities are connected.</p> <p>Various school and community programs are coordinated for consistency in developing each student’s potential.</p> <p>School leaders can articulate and point to programs that build inclusiveness in their school or district.</p> <p>School leaders create an inclusive culture, showcasing the work and achievements of all, creating unified programs and eliminating boundaries between students.</p> <p>Student clubs and activities consistently work toward being inclusive and welcoming for all students.</p>

Characteristics of Middle Level Schools	Middle Level Concepts	Unified Champion Schools Elements
<p><b>Safe, healthy, personalized environment</b></p>	<p>The school establishes structures and practices to <b>banish anonymity</b> and individualize the learning experience for each student.</p> <p>The school creates a <b>safe, caring environment</b> characterized by interactions between adults and students that convey high expectations, <b>support and mutual respect</b>.</p> <p>The school <b>coordinates with community agencies</b> in the delivery of social, physical and mental health services <b>to meet the needs of students</b> and their families.</p> <p>The school <b>values diversity and fosters an array of viewpoints, perspectives and experiences</b>.</p> <p>Every student’s academic and <b>personal development is guided by an adult advocate</b>.</p> <p>The school environment is <b>inviting, safe, inclusive and supportive of all</b>.</p> <p>School-wide programs, policies and curricula <b>promote health and wellness</b>.</p> <p>The school provides access to comprehensive services to <b>foster healthy physical, social, emotional and intellectual development</b>.</p> <p>The school provides age-appropriate, co-curricular activities to <b>foster social skills and character, and to develop interests beyond the classroom</b>.</p> <p>The school community <b>knows every student well</b>.</p>	<p><b>Creating and sustaining relationships</b></p> <p>School staff provide regular and frequent activities in which adults and youth work together to solve problems and learn together, promoting a collaborative climate.</p> <p>School staff provide high-quality opportunities for students with and without intellectual disabilities to work together for the benefit of all.</p> <p>School staff ensure that all students in the school receive instruction that meets their individual skill levels, learning styles and engagement levels.</p> <p>School staff eliminate physical barriers and creates an environment that is physically accessible, safe and supportive for all.</p> <p>A climate of trust and respect, which honors the diverse talents, perspectives and assets of all students, is pervasive throughout the school and district.</p>

<b>Characteristics of Middle Level Schools</b>	<b>Middle Level Concepts</b>	<b>Unified Champion Schools Elements</b>
<p><b>Prepared knowledgeable teachers &amp; principals</b></p>	<p><b>Each educator possesses</b> pedagogical expertise, a broad academic foundation, in-depth content knowledge in the subjects taught, and an <b>understanding of the developmental needs of his or her students.</b></p> <p>The <b>school fosters collaboration</b> to improve student performance through structures, such as teacher teams and regularly scheduled common planning time.</p> <p>Educators <b>value young adolescents</b> and are prepared to teach them.</p> <p>Leaders are <b>committed to, and knowledgeable about, this age group</b>, educational research and best practices.</p> <p>Leaders demonstrate <b>courage and collaboration.</b></p> <p>Organizational structures <b>foster</b> purposeful learning and <b>meaningful relationships.</b></p> <p><b>Teachers continually adapt</b> curriculum, instruction, assessment and scheduling <b>to meet their students' diverse and changing needs.</b></p>	<p><b>Continuous Improvement</b></p> <p>School and district leaders make necessary changes to adapt school climate to changing needs of student populations.</p> <p>Teachers engage in reflective practices and continuously monitor instruction and classroom management to identify opportunities for their classroom to become more inclusive.</p> <p>The district provides opportunities for staff to work collectively across schools to share, assess and improve inclusive practices.</p> <p>Opportunities exist for bringing together students, families, school and community leaders, and community members to reflect on the success of the school.</p> <p>Instructional strategies and school programs are consistently reviewed and revised to ensure inclusiveness and effectiveness.</p> <p>Policies ensure accessibility for all students through instructional effectiveness, school programs and school climate.</p> <p>A comprehensive system of evaluation and ongoing improvement addresses school effectiveness, including issues of inclusion.</p>

Characteristics of Middle Level Schools	Middle Level Concepts	Unified Champion Schools Elements
<p><b>Democratic, collaborative leadership</b></p>	<p>The school <b>provides meaningful decision-making roles for staff, students and parents.</b></p> <p><b>All members of the school community actively collaborate</b> to develop and implement the agreed-upon learning goals and improvement plan.</p> <p>Teachers and teacher teams <b>provide leadership essential for student success.</b></p> <p>The school <b>develops partnerships</b> with individuals, organizations, community agencies, and businesses in <b>support of its mission.</b></p> <p>The school, in addition to its <b>continuous progress monitoring</b>, will convene a broad-based panel to conduct an in-depth assessment and present their findings to the public at least once every three years.</p> <p>The <b>school and students' families are partners</b> in fostering the academic, intellectual and emotional success of each student.</p> <p>Leaders demonstrate <b>courage and collaboration.</b></p> <p>A <b>shared vision</b> that is developed by all stakeholders guides every decision.</p> <p>The school <b>includes community</b> and business groups as partners.</p> <p><b>All students have opportunities for voice</b>—posing questions, reflecting on experiences, and participating in decisions and leadership activities.</p> <p>The school <b>staff members develop alliances with families</b> to enhance and support the well-being of the children.</p>	<p><b>Inclusive Youth Leadership</b></p> <p>All young people, regardless of ability or achievement level, are given a voice to make meaningful changes in their classrooms, schools and communities.</p> <p>Youth of every ability level are given opportunities and means to execute their decisions and to be leaders and agents of change in their communities.</p> <p>There is access, opportunity and encouragement for all youth to fulfill leadership positions within the school.</p> <p>Adults model the attitudes, skills and efforts required of leadership and provide opportunities to empower youth to be leaders.</p> <p><b>Continuous Improvement</b></p> <p>School and district leaders make necessary changes to adapt school climate to changing needs of student populations.</p> <p>Opportunities exist for bringing together students, families, school and community leaders and community members to reflect on the success of the school.</p> <p>Policies ensure accessibility for all students through instructional effectiveness, school programs and school climate.</p> <p>A comprehensive system of evaluation and ongoing improvement addresses school effectiveness, including issues of inclusion.</p>

<b>Characteristics of Middle Level Schools</b>	<b>Middle Level Concepts</b>	<b>Unified Champion Schools Elements</b>
<p><b>Democratic, collaborative leadership</b></p>	<p>Staff members <b>provide all students with opportunities to develop citizenship skills</b>, to use the community as a classroom, and to engage the community in providing resources and support.</p> <p>The faculty <b>welcome and encourage the active participation</b> of all its families and makes sure that all its families are an integral part of the school.</p>	<p><b>School/Community Collaborations</b></p> <p>School personnel work with community-based organizations to create and sustain collaborations and meaningful relationships that provide students with opportunities to contribute to content, design and implementation of projects and interactions.</p> <p>Students are given opportunities to develop relationships and promote their credibility with organizations representing the full breadth of the community, including businesses, youth development groups and clubs, before- and after-school programs, faith-based groups and civic and service groups.</p> <p>Students are given opportunities to collaborate with diverse community populations, reflecting ethnic, cultural, socio-economic and ability differences.</p> <p>Students are engaged in the evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of school-community collaborations on individuals, organizations and communities.</p> <p>School-community collaborations reflect a widespread belief that everyone is essential to the success of the community.</p>

Characteristics of Middle Level Schools	Middle Level Concepts	Unified Champion Schools Elements
<p><b>Equity and access for every student</b></p>	<p>The school <b>values diversity and fosters an array of viewpoints, perspectives and experiences.</b></p> <p>The school advocates and models a set of core values that are essential in a democratic and civil society.</p> <p>The school <b>offers alternatives to tracking and ability grouping</b> while maintaining the flexibility to appropriately support and challenge each student.</p> <p>The school <b>environment is inviting, safe, inclusive and supportive of all.</b></p> <p>Organizational structures foster <b>purposeful learning and meaningful relationships.</b></p> <p>To the fullest extent possible, all <b>students, including English learners, students with disabilities, and gifted and honors students, participate in heterogeneous classes with high academic and behavioral expectations.</b></p> <p>All students have ongoing <b>opportunities to learn about and appreciate their own and others' cultures.</b></p> <p>The school's <b>reward system is designed to value diversity, civility, service and democratic citizenship.</b></p> <p>Staff members understand and <b>support the family backgrounds and values of their students.</b></p>	<p><b>Inclusive Youth Leadership</b></p> <p>All young people, regardless of ability or achievement level, are given a voice to make meaningful changes in their classrooms, schools and communities.</p> <p>Youth of every ability level are given opportunities and means to execute their decisions and to be leaders and change agents in their communities.</p> <p>There is access, opportunity and encouragement for all youth to fulfill leadership positions within the school.</p> <p><b>Creating and Sustaining Relationships</b></p> <p>School staff provide high-quality opportunities for students with and without intellectual disabilities to work together for the benefit of all.</p> <p>A climate of trust and respect, which honors the diverse talents, perspectives and assets of all students, is pervasive throughout the school and district.</p> <p><b>Unifying Programming</b></p> <p>Access and opportunities are provided regularly for students with and without intellectual disabilities to participate together in sports and other engagement activities.</p> <p>School leaders create an inclusive culture, showcasing the work and achievements of all, creating Unified programs, and eliminating boundaries between students.</p>

<b>Characteristics of Middle Level Schools</b>	<b>Middle Level Concepts</b>	<b>Unified Champion Schools Elements</b>
<b>Equity and access for every student (continued)</b>		<p><b>School/Community Collaboration</b></p> <p>Students are given opportunities to collaborate with diverse community populations, reflecting ethnic, cultural, socio-economic and ability differences.</p> <p>School-community collaborations reflect a widespread belief that everyone is essential to the success of the community.</p> <p><b>Communication</b></p> <p>When the word “student” is used, it always refers to every student in the school, regardless of ability level, special needs, services or academic placement.</p> <p>The school community intentionally shares and celebrates the skills, practices and accomplishments of all students and adults.</p> <p>Lessons, class projects and school activities, are conducted in ways that reach all types of learners by using music, videos, arts, interactive activities or a team-based approach.</p> <p><b>Continuous Improvement</b></p> <p>School and district leaders make necessary changes to adapt school climates to changing needs of student populations.</p> <p>The district provides opportunities for staff to work collectively across schools to share, assess and improve inclusive practices.</p> <p>Policies ensure accessibility for all students through instructional effectiveness, school programs and climate.</p>

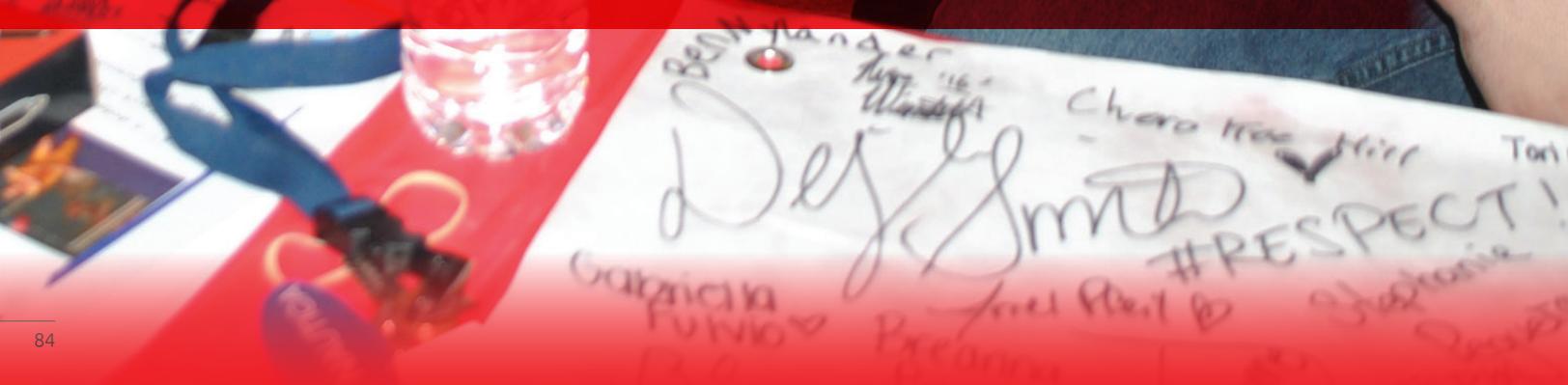


# SOCIAL INCLUSION ASSESSMENTS

1



# CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS ASSESSMENT



The following assessment is designed to assist the inclusive leadership team to determine the degree of inclusiveness in the school and set a baseline for future work. Individual members of the team should take the assessment separately then combine the results. The compilation of the perspectives of different individuals will result in a more accurate report or will highlight perspective variations.

Please read the following questions and select the options that apply to your school. You can select more than one option per question, as applicable. If you do not select any option, it is equal to selecting 'none,' 'no one,' 'not evident' (in other words, no score for that particular question).

Please note that three academic categories of students are referenced in the assessment:

1) Advanced, 2) General and 3) Special Education. While individual students might fall into more than one of these categories for different classes, please respond regarding each category as a whole for the purpose of this assessment.

Also, please note that 'special education students' and 'students with intellectual disabilities' have been used interchangeably in this assessment.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**School Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Role:**

**Principal/Assistant Principal**

**Guidance Counselor/Social Worker**

**Teacher**

**Other School Staff**

**Student**

**Parent/Guardian**

**Other (specify)\_\_\_\_\_**

# GUIDELINES FOR SCORING

1. When you select a particular option for a question, it is equivalent to one point. Based on this criterion, record the score for each question at the end of the question.

2. Please note that questions 1 and 2 are organized slightly differently than the other questions. However, the scoring criterion is the same. Whether the question is in matrix format or a simple multiple choice format, record “1” point for each option that is evident in your school. If an identified option is not evident in your school, leave the cell blank.

For example, in Question 1, if students in ‘advanced’, ‘general’ and ‘special’ education influence or are involved with school communications (e.g., announcements, newspaper), record a “1” in each cell in that row. If only students in one or two of those categories are involved, record a “1” in the appropriate column. If no students are involved, leave all cells blank.

At the end, sum each column then combine the three column scores to get the score for the question. For the rest of the questions (all multiple choice), record a “1” beside each option that is evident in your school. If that option is not evident, leave it blank. Sum the responses for each question and record that answer in the place provided.

3. At the end of each domain (e.g., ‘youth leadership’), calculate the score for the domain by adding scores for all the questions in that particular domain (e.g., Q1 to Q5 for ‘youth leadership’, Q6 to Q9 for ‘creating and sustaining relationships’, and so on).

4. When the entire assessment is complete, please input the score for each domain on the first scoring sheet (‘scoring sheet for individual response’) provided at the end and determine in which category you belong by referring to the second column (‘score ranges by level’) in the scoring sheet. Please note that there are four levels: limited, emerging, inclusive and fully accomplished. The ranges for these levels are not uniform across the domains.

5. To compute the total score, simply add all the scores from the third column (‘your domain score’). Again, the level for total score can be determined by referring to the second column (‘score ranges by level’).

6. To obtain the scores for the school, please use the second scoring sheet (‘scoring sheet for the school’). For this, calculate the average score from all the individual responses (leadership team), and input in the ‘school’s domain score.’ Then, find out the categories for each domain for the school by referring to second column (‘score ranges by level’) in the scoring sheet. The school’s total score and level can be determined by following similar step as Q5 above.



# I. YOUTH LEADERSHIP

**Q1. Which students, if any, influence school decisions, and how are they involved?**

	Advanced Education	General Education	Special Education
Communications (e.g., school newspaper, announcements)			
Student government			
Surveys			
Class discussions			
Events/assemblies (i.e., leading/ determining focus, not just attending)			
Youth leadership club			
Principal Advisory Committee			
Other (specify)			
Score (for each column)			
Score for the question (total of all three columns):			

**Q2. In what ways are students of different abilities involved in improving the inclusiveness of the school?**

	Advanced Education	General Education	Special Education
Decisions about class scheduling			
Development of inclusive events			
Creation of communications supporting inclusion (e.g., posters, newspaper articles, bulletin board displays)			
Participation in Unified clubs or sports			
Other (specify)			
Score (for each column)			
Score for the question (total of all three columns):			



**Q3. Which students serve as youth leaders in school (e.g., through sports teams, classroom discussions, service opportunities)?**

- Advanced education students
- General education students
- Special education students

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Q4. Which students, if any, receive instruction in social-emotional skills (e.g., decision making, collaboration, self-management, conflict resolution)?**

- Advanced education students
- General education students
- Special education students

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Q5. In what social-emotional learning (SEL) areas, if any, do students receive instruction?**

- Decision making
- Conflict Resolution
- Communication
- Ethics
- Emotion Regulation/Self-management
- Empathy

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Score for Youth Leadership (Q1 to 5) :**

## II. CREATING AND SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

### Q6. Where do students with intellectual disabilities interact with students without intellectual disabilities?

- Hallways
- Cafeteria
- Library/Media Center
- Enrichment classes (e.g., gym, art, music)
- Core academic classes
- Sports
- Extracurricular clubs/service-learning opportunities

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

### Q7. Which members of the school community are formally involved in efforts to include students with intellectual disabilities in school programs or activities?

- Special education teachers
- General education teachers
- Administrators, support staff and other school personnel
- Students participating in a Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program
- General education students

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

### Q8. Where do students without intellectual disabilities demonstrate their friendships with students with intellectual disabilities?

- In class
- In the hallways
- During sports and extracurricular activities
- Outside of organized activities (e.g., in their homes, during weekends)

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

### Q9. Where do parents of students without intellectual disabilities interact with parents of students with intellectual disabilities?

- At school events
- At organized community events (e.g., sports, religious services)
- Outside of organized activities (e.g., in their homes, during weekends)

**Total Score for Youth Leadership (Q6 to 9) :**

# III. UNIFYING PROGRAMMING

**Q10. Which resources, if any, does the district provide for unifying programming?**

- Money
- Time (e.g., holding training during school hours, program development)
- Personnel
- Facilities

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Q11. Which students regularly participate in school athletic programs?**

- Advanced education students
- General education students
- Special education students
- Students with exceptional athletic ability

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Q12. Which students regularly participate in extracurricular opportunities?**

- Advanced education students
- General education students
- Special education students

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Q13. For which clubs and sports does the school celebrate accomplishments?**

- Traditional sports teams
- Unified Sports® teams
- Academic extracurricular clubs
- Other extracurricular clubs

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Score for Youth Leadership (Q10 to 13) :**

## IV. SCHOOL COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

### Q14. Which individuals, if any, have an active voice developing and implementing an inclusive vision and goals for the school?

- Students
- School personnel
- Parents/Guardians
- Community members

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

### Q15. Which community organizations collaborate with the school on events or activities?

- Sports organizations (e.g., community recreational department lends equipment for school teams; members of local sports teams help coach Unified Sports teams)
- Social service organizations (e.g., social workers train students to become peer mediators; social service organizations invite students to help in the creation of a community-wide health campaign)
- Media organizations (journalists work with students on the school newspaper; local newspaper features school events or accomplishments)
- Public safety organizations (e.g., police make a presentation about drug use during a school assembly; EMTs lead student training on CPR)
- Health services organizations (e.g., doctor provides exams for members of Unified Sports teams; school nurse presents sessions on health, wellness and movement)
- Local business leaders (e.g., business leaders partner with unified club on projects; local grocery store participates in healthy eating project)
- Religious organizations (e.g., church/synagogue/mosque help to organize school canned food drive for a food pantry)

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

### Q16. Which students interact with community organizations through curricular and extracurricular activities?

- Advanced education students
- General education students
- Special education students

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

### Q17. Which students leave school grounds to participate in school-sponsored community activities?

- Advanced education students
- General education students
- Special education students

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Score for Youth Leadership (Q14 to 17) :**

# V. COMMUNICATION

## Q18. When do educators discuss the importance of inclusive language?

- In school-wide events and posters
- In the curriculum
- In day-to-day instruction
- With the broader community

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

## Q19. In what ways is inclusive language used when communicating with students, school staff, parents or community members?

- Through formal communications
- Through informal communications
- In meetings
- In informal conversations

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

## Q20. With whom does the school share the accomplishments of special education students?

- Special education students and parents
- Other students and parents
- All school personnel
- Broader community

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

## Q21. Who stops others from using language that is hurtful toward students with intellectual disabilities (e.g., terms such as: retard[ed], “those kids”, slow class)?

- School personnel
- Parents/Guardians
- Community
- Students
- No one

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Score for Youth Leadership (Q18 to 21) :**

# VI. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## Q22. Who receives instruction from the school about addressing the needs of the special education student population and the use of inclusive teaching strategies?

- Special education teachers
- General education teachers
- Administrators, support staff and other school personnel
- Parents/Guardians
- Students
- Community

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

## Q23. When do special and general education teachers have opportunities to collaborate?

- Informal discussions
- Professional development sessions
- Regular planning time
- Team teaching
- Faculty meetings
- School-wide events

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

## Q24. When do school personnel receive professional development training on promoting students' social-emotional skills (SEL)?

- In SEL specific workshops (e.g., conflict resolution, restorative justice)
- SEL strategies are integrated into all professional development

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

## Q25. In what ways does the school integrate social-emotional learning (SEL) into the school?

- Through a program/curriculum focused on social-emotional learning
- Through classroom management strategies informed by social-emotional learning best practices
- Through explicit school norms (e.g., student code of conduct)
- Through a range of pedagogies (e.g., cooperative learning, service-learning, conflict resolution/mediation related learning, moral dilemma discussions)
- Through adults modeling appropriate behavior
- Through extracurricular activities that foster social-emotional learning

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Score for Youth Leadership (Q22 to 25) :**

## VII. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

**Q26. Aside from data on student achievement, consider the data collection processes that you use to support your school improvement efforts, and check all that apply below:**

- Data are collected on school climate.
- Data are collected on social inclusion.
- Evaluation measures used to assess school climate and/or inclusion are research-based, established tools (reliable and valid).
- Data are collected regularly (annually or biannually).
- Data are not collected for school improvement efforts.
- Data are collected, but they not analyzed or used for school improvement efforts.

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Q27. Data are collected regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities:**

- Through formal communications
- Through informal communications
- In meetings
- In informal conversations

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Q28. Data are collected from:**

- Students.
- School personnel.
- Parents/Guardians
- Community members.

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Q29. With whom do administrators share findings and strategies about inclusive practices?**

- Leadership team
- Special education department
- Students
- All school personnel
- Parents/Guardians
- School district personnel
- Broader community

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Score for Youth Leadership (Q26 to 29) :**

# SCORING SHEET FOR INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE

Please note that the scoring range is different for each domain (second column). Please input your score for each domain in 'Your Domain Score' column and then determine under which level (Limited, Emerging, Inclusive and Fully Accomplished) you fall in each of the domains by referring to the second column.

Domain	Score Ranges by Levels	Your Domain Score	Your Level
Youth Leadership	Limited (0-13) Emerging (14-26) Inclusive (27-38) Fully Accomplished (39-51)		
Creating and Sustaining Relationships	Limited (0-5) Emerging (6-9) Inclusive (10-14) Fully Accomplished (15-19)		
Unifying Programming	Limited (0-5) Emerging (6-9) Inclusive (10-14) Fully Accomplished (15-18)		
School Community Collaborations	Limited (0-4) Emerging (5-9) Inclusive (10-13) Fully Accomplished (14-17)		
Communication	Limited (0-4) Emerging (5-8) Inclusive (9-12) Fully Accomplished (13-16)		
Professional Development	Limited (0-5) Emerging (6-10) Inclusive (11-15) Fully Accomplished (16-20)		
Continuous Improvement	Limited (0-5) Emerging (6-10) Inclusive (11-14) Fully Accomplished (15-18)		
Your Total Score	Limited (0-40) Emerging (41-80) Inclusive (81-120) Fully Accomplished (121-160)		

# SCORING SHEET FOR THE SCHOOL

Please input average score (from all the responses) for each domain in 'School's Domain Score' column and then determine under which level (Limited, Emerging, Inclusive and Fully Accomplished) your school falls in each of the domains by referring to the second column.

Domain	Score Ranges by Levels	School's Score <small>(average of the individual domain scores)</small>	School's Level
Youth Leadership	Limited (0-13) Emerging (14-26) Inclusive (27-38) Fully Accomplished (39-51)		
Creating and Sustaining Relationships	Limited (0-5) Emerging (6-9) Inclusive (10-14) Fully Accomplished (15-19)		
Unifying Programming	Limited (0-5) Emerging (6-9) Inclusive (10-14) Fully Accomplished (15-18)		
School Community Collaborations	Limited (0-4) Emerging (5-9) Inclusive (10-13) Fully Accomplished (14-17)		
Communication	Limited (0-4) Emerging (5-8) Inclusive (9-12) Fully Accomplished (13-16)		
Professional Development	Limited (0-5) Emerging (6-10) Inclusive (11-15) Fully Accomplished (16-20)		
Continuous Improvement	Limited (0-5) Emerging (6-10) Inclusive (11-14) Fully Accomplished (15-18)		
Your Total Score	Limited (0-40) Emerging (41-80) Inclusive (81-120) Fully Accomplished (121-160)		



# SOCIAL INCLUSION SCALE

The Social Inclusion Scale is designed to be administered to students, parents and school personnel once a year. Ideally the administration should take place at the same time each year to get a more consistent view of perceptions over time. If you plan to administer the scale to the entire population, you may want to create an online version of this survey (using Survey Monkey or another platform) to make scoring and reporting easier for your team to analyze.

Instructions: In this survey, you will find questions about your school's inclusiveness, which refers to the extent that all students in your school community are valued, respected and supported. The following questions are designed to measure how well your school specifically includes special education students (or students with all disabilities) in the school community.

**Please indicate your role:**

**Student**

**Teacher**

**Pupil Personnel Services**

**Administrator**

**Other School Staff**

**Parent/Guardian**

In the following chart, please identify the degree to which you **agree** or **disagree** with the following statements:

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Every student of any ability can be a leader in this school.				
2. In this school, the accomplishments of students of all abilities are celebrated (e.g., award ceremonies in school assemblies, sports awards dinners, displaying school projects).				
3. At this school, after school activities (e.g., sports clubs) include students with and without disabilities				
4. Most people in this school feel responsible for including special education students in all areas of school life				
5. This school provides opportunities for all students, including special education students, to help others (e.g., service-learning, community service).				
6. This school provides opportunities for all students, including special education students, to share their ideas (e.g., contribute to school decisions or inclusion efforts.				
7. In this school, students do not use negative terms to refer to students with disabilities.				
8. In this school, adults do not use negative terms to refer to students with intellectual disabilities.				
9. This school encourages students to develop friendships with special and general education students and interact in social situations (e.g., extracurricular activities, lunchtime, unstructured time within and between classes.				
10. In this school, adults encourage special education students to participate in all school activities				
11. Students in this school learn from having students of all abilities in the classroom.				

In the following chart, please indicate whether any of the following activities were **offered** at your school? If the activity was offered, please indicate **where** you participated in it. Also, indicate whether you helped **plan or lead** the activity. With this data, you will be able to see where and how students are engaged in the Unified Champion Schools strategy, which can be used to inform next steps.

Activity/Event	Was this activity offered at your school?		Did you participate in the activity or event?		Did you help plan or lead the activity or event?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>Respect Campaign or Spread the Word Day</b> (Raise awareness of the hurtful use of exclusionary language and pledge to take acts of inclusion.)						
<b>Unified Sports</b> (Students with and without intellectual disabilities train and compete together on the same teams.)						
<b>Traditional Special Olympics Sports</b> (Sports teams where only students with intellectual disabilities compete.)						
<b>Unified Club or Youth Activation Committee</b> (Any club where students of all abilities participate together as equals to make the school socially inclusive.)						
<b>Young Athletes Program Volunteer</b> (This is a program where students volunteer to help young children, ages 2-7, with physical activities.)						
<b>Special Olympics Unified Sports Day</b> (This is similar to a track and field day.)						
<b>Fans in the Stands</b> (Students support and cheer athletes at Unified Sports competitions or Special Olympics events.)						
<b>Other extracurricular activities that include students with and without intellectual disabilities.</b>						

## SCORING: AN EXAMPLE

**USE:** The results from this survey will provide you with a snapshot of the responses to the Social Inclusion Scale (whether responses are mostly in positive range or in a negative range). This data can be used to inform next steps (e.g., school leadership’s team’s discussion of action planning) for the social inclusion efforts in your school.

### Calculating the percentages of response type

- The response scale of this survey comprises the following categories: “Strongly Disagree,” “Disagree,” “Agree” and “Strongly Agree.” One way to get a good picture of the responses is to see the percentages for each of these categories. For example, consider all student responses to this scale. The percentage of responses can be calculated across all four categories for each of the questions in the Scale. This would then help you see patterns of agreement or disagreement by population.
  - An average for each category (e.g., average of % Strongly Disagree) can also be computed by taking average of the columns. This will provide information on the average percentage of responses falling into the negative category (“Strongly Disagree,” “Disagree”) or positive category (“Agree,” “Strongly Agree”). The table below provides an example.
  - A similar process can be used for other responding groups (school personnel, parents).
  - Record the number of respondents (N) and response rate (N/total available population) for each population.

Question Number	% Strongly Disagree	% Disagree	% Agree	% Strongly Agree	% Total
Q1	10	5	50	35	100
Q2	5	15	45	35	100
Q3	5	25	35	35	100
Q4	15	50	20	15	100
Q5	0	25	45	30	100
Q6	10	20	30	40	100
Q7	0	10	40	50	100
Q8	0	25	50	25	100
Q9	0	20	35	45	100
Q10	5	20	35	40	100
Q11	35	30	30	5	100
<b>Average</b>	<b>7.27</b>	<b>22.27</b>	<b>37.73</b>	<b>32.73</b>	<b>100</b>

### Interpreting the example:

Again, please note that the negative range includes “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree”, and the positive range includes “Strongly Agree” and “Agree”. In this example, students showed some variation in their perception of social inclusion, leaning towards a positive perception (70.46% were in the positive range, while 29.54% were in the negative range.) Among all the questions, those with the highest negative perception include “Q4” and “Q11,” which indicate some areas of potential improvement. Among all the questions, those with the highest positive perception include “Q1” and “Q7,” which indicate areas of particular strength and celebration.

**NOTE:** To calculate which questions have the highest negative perception, add the percentage values for “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” for each question (i.e., the two columns to the left of the bolded blue line). The highest sums indicate which questions were scored more negatively than others. In addition, to find the questions with the highest positive perception, add the percentage values for “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” (i.e. the two columns to the right of the bolded blue line).

\*This assessment was developed in collaboration with the National School Climate Center (NSCC).

# Social Inclusion Rubric

The following rubric is designed to help you determine the degree of inclusiveness in your school and to assist with continuous improvement planning by documenting your school's path to social inclusion. By measuring your work against a set of indicators or benchmarks, you will obtain clearer pictures of social inclusion, identify with which level your schools aligns, and be able to identify necessary next steps to continue progress. In order to have an accurate and comprehensive report, it is important to obtain input from various stakeholders, including students. Also, don't forget to gain the perspective of parents and various staff across the school such as paraprofessionals, custodians, bus drivers and cafeteria staff in addition to educators and students. The compilation of the perspectives of different individuals or stakeholder groups will result in a more accurate report and can help identify differences in perspectives, which provide important insights.

## Directions

Using this rubric, rate your school on seven categories— Inclusive Youth Leadership, Creating and Sustaining Relationships, Unifying Programming, School/Community Collaborations, Communication, Professional Development and Continuous Improvement. Based upon the descriptors under each level in the rubric, determine whether your school is at the "Novice," "Emerging," "Accomplished," or "Highly Inclusive" level for each category. Please note that when a category is rated as "Accomplished" or "Highly Inclusive," descriptors from preceding levels also will likely be present at the school.

Working as individuals or groups, read all the descriptors under each level and determine which level is most reflective

of your school. While all descriptors under a level might not be evident at your school, select the level that is most like your school. It is possible (and probably even likely) that the selected levels will be different for the various categories. For example, you might determine that your school is "Accomplished" regarding Unifying Programming and "Novice" for Inclusive Youth Leadership, but that information will be helpful when identifying priority areas for improvement.

If you work as a group, discuss the descriptors for each level and come to consensus on the level that is closest to your school.

If completing the rubric as individuals, compile the individual results to obtain a collective view of each category.

If there is a significant difference between the ratings identified for a specific category, debrief with each group or individual to find the reasons for their conclusions. This in itself might suggest additional areas for focus. For example, a group of students might view opportunities for "Youth Leadership" differently than teachers or administrators view those same opportunities. Why are there variations in opinions? Have their experiences at school impacted their perspectives? What does that tell you? How can those differences inform school improvement efforts? Be sure to validate each perspective and accept it as a valid response based on each rater's experience. There are no right or wrong answers, as each response offers insights into how social inclusion is experienced by various individuals or groups in the school.

This rubric can be periodically administered to monitor progress of school improvement efforts and determine priorities for next steps.

## INCLUSIVE YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Novice	Emerging	Accomplished	Highly Inclusive
<p>Student leaders are represented by a narrow range of the student population.</p> <p>Student participation in leadership opportunities is limited to traditional avenues (e.g., student council).</p> <p>If there is work by youth to create a more inclusive school, participation is generally limited to students without disabilities.</p> <p>Goals are set and decisions are made by adults.</p> <p>Little or no leadership skill development occurs.</p>	<p>Youth are represented on selected school committees and participate in some decision-making processes.</p> <p>Youth with and without disabilities are given opportunities to provide leadership, but all opportunities are not inclusive.</p> <p>Goals are set and decisions are made by adults with youth input.</p> <p>Some leadership training happens at the outset of an activity.</p>	<p>Youth of all abilities are provided opportunities to be leaders in their schools and communities.</p> <p>Youth with and without disabilities share leadership in school groups and committees in inclusive settings.</p> <p>Goal setting and decision making is shared by youth and adults.</p> <p>Youth and adults actively initiate intergenerational leadership within the school, including serving on the Unified Champion School Leadership Team.</p> <p>Leadership skills are developed in all students through classes, extracurricular activities, service opportunities and sports.</p> <p>Instruction in socio-emotional learning (SEL) (e.g., decision-making, conflict resolution, ethics) is provided to all students.</p>	<p>Student leadership positions are held by a diverse representation of the student body with all students being supported and provided the necessary skills to be agents of change in their communities.</p> <p>Students and adults share leadership in creating and maintaining an inclusive climate and physical environment in their school.</p> <p>All students are prepared for leadership roles by being given opportunities to learn and practice making and executing their decisions.</p> <p>Goal setting and decision making are led by students with and without disabilities on behalf of all youth.</p> <p>Youth engage in assessments, evaluations and reflections to examine their leadership knowledge, skills and impacts on themselves and others.</p>

## CREATING AND SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Novice	Emerging	Accomplished	Highly Inclusive
<p>Students' preconceptions and stereotypes about students with intellectual disabilities are not challenged.</p> <p>Multiple perspectives are not intentionally sought or incorporated into nurturing and supporting a positive school environment.</p> <p>Limited steps are taken to ensure the school provides a physically inclusive setting.</p> <p>There are no established avenues for students of diverse backgrounds to interact and form relationships. In fact, schedules and building arrangements sometimes hinder interactions.</p>	<p>Students with and without intellectual disabilities are afforded frequent opportunities to interact in social and academic settings (e.g., through unified clubs, after-school activities, community service).</p> <p>Instructional strategies are utilized that provide differentiated instruction to allow students with diverse learning needs to receive instruction together.</p> <p>The Unified Champion Schools strategy is explored as a means for students to interact, support each other and establish relationships. Some staff model and expect positive relationships between students with and without disabilities.</p> <p>Curriculum and classroom management strategies incorporate social-emotional learning such as collaboration, conflict resolution, regulation and self-management.</p>	<p>The school staff and students intentionally build a sense of community among students with and without disabilities that promotes student engagement and relationships in formal and informal settings with the school.</p> <p>The skills, abilities and perspectives of all students are valued and respected by staff and school/district leaders.</p> <p>Opportunities are sought to engage a broad range of students, parents, staff and community members in the ongoing work of the school, providing opportunities for the development of positive intergenerational relationships.</p> <p>All school staff foster opportunities to build positive relationships between students with and without disabilities in the classroom.</p> <p>School schedules and building arrangements ensure regular opportunities for students to interact.</p> <p>Adults model effective social-emotional learning skills.</p>	<p>There is a caring, respectful and compassionate community within and beyond the school setting to create supportive relationships for all families, youth and adults.</p> <p>Staff and school/district leaders actively seek to enlist the skills, abilities and perspectives of all students, understanding that the work of the whole is enriched by diverse perspectives and abilities.</p> <p>All students, staff, parents and the broader community are viewed as equal partners in creating and sustaining an inclusive school community.</p> <p>Policy development and decisions at the school and district levels intentionally incorporate diverse perspectives and ensure opportunities for student interaction and engagement.</p> <p>Students work to ensure all students are engaged in the school and feel they are important and respected.</p> <p>School norms explicitly expect and support social-emotional learning.</p>

## UNIFYING PROGRAMMING

Novice	Emerging	Accomplished	Highly Inclusive
<p>School and community programs provide for a limited range of student ability needs to be adequately met.</p> <p>Traditional school sports and clubs rarely involve students with intellectual disabilities.</p> <p>The continuum of opportunities for students to learn in an inclusive setting is limited to coursework at their ability levels.</p> <p>There are no social or sports avenues for students with and without intellectual disabilities to learn and grow together.</p> <p>Few resources (e.g., money, time, personnel) are provided for unifying programming.</p>	<p>A broad range of parallel activities are offered that collectively honor and develop the skills and abilities of all students.</p> <p>The district provides equitable support for inclusive student activities such as Unified Sports® and unified clubs, demonstrating equal value for these activities as traditional sports and clubs; however, implementation is not consistent or evident in all schools.</p> <p>School staff explores various opportunities for students to learn in inclusive settings, but all students are not encouraged to participate</p>	<p>Access and opportunities for all students to participate in inclusive settings in both instructional and non-academic activities are provided regularly.</p> <p>School staff consistently works to ensure the effectiveness of the inclusive learning environment both inside and outside the classroom.</p> <p>Traditional school sports and clubs consistently work toward becoming more inclusive and welcoming for all students.</p> <p>An extensive selection of Unified Sports, clubs and social activities are offered to all students.</p> <p>Unifying programming is included in the school budget and action plan.</p>	<p>School activities and groups intentionally engage a diverse student population.</p> <p>There is an expectation for the entire school community to continuously seek opportunities to become a more inclusive learning environment, offering unified programs and activities.</p> <p>School leaders ensure extra-curricular and sports opportunities are provided that build inclusiveness and eliminate boundaries between students.</p> <p>Recognition programs are provided for all students participating in Unified Sports, unified clubs and extra-curricular activities, including traditional methods such as athletic letters, award banquets, and school assemblies.</p> <p>The district allocates resources to support Unified Champion Schools activities.</p>

## SCHOOL/COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

Novice	Emerging	Accomplished	Highly Inclusive
<p>The school generally works in isolation from the community, though community partners sometimes support specific projects.</p> <p>School policy inhibits or prevents students from leaving school grounds to participate in community activities.</p> <p>The school is occasionally asked to assist with events or projects in the community, but only selected students are engaged in the activities.</p> <p>Community members have little or no opportunity to share their ideas and perspectives with the school.</p>	<p>Students and staff seek opportunities to engage community entities in school activities, but there are limited interactions.</p> <p>Opportunities exist for select students to interact with a few community organizations on a limited basis.</p> <p>Interactions with the community are planned by adults with little or no input by the students.</p> <p>Community members have little voice or active involvement in the school.</p>	<p>Students and staff are trained in collaborative skills and are expected to build meaningful diverse partnerships with the community.</p> <p>Two-way communication and ongoing interaction with community partners is central to the school.</p> <p>Students and adults at the school work with multiple community partners to develop common goals and implement shared projects.</p> <p>The community accepts and encourages inclusive practices in the schools and wider community.</p> <p>All students are provided opportunities for engagement in the community through a variety of programs.</p>	<p>The school and community create and work toward a shared vision that supports and sustains an inclusive school climate.</p> <p>Students and staff at the school maintain mutually beneficial relationships with community entities that represent a broad cross-section of the community.</p> <p>School and community programs equitably develop each student's potential through sports and academic, civic, social and service activities that engage both students with and without intellectual disabilities.</p> <p>Participants in school-community collaborations regularly reflect on their shared goals, progress and effectiveness of their collaborative process.</p>

# COMMUNICATION

Novice	Emerging	Accomplished	Highly Inclusive
<p>Inclusion and inclusive language is rarely used in formal and informal school communications.</p> <p>School communication leaders/ staff have not been trained to use inclusive language.</p> <p>School communications prioritize certain students’ academic, athletic and service attributions and contributions.</p> <p>There are no formal programs to eliminate the use of offensive or abusive language within the school.</p>	<p>School staff members are trained in the use of inclusive language and generally use these skills in their daily communications.</p> <p>School regularly offers assemblies and events which focus on inclusion and how to talk about it with peers, parents and community members.</p> <p>Programs that reduce the use of offensive or abusive language (e.g., R-word) are offered.</p>	<p>School communications highlight students’ diverse gifts, talents and contributions, demonstrating the value placed on both students’ unique individual abilities and similarities.</p> <p>Students are taught to use inclusive language in their school and personal verbal, written and social networking communications.</p> <p>There are clear expectations that all students and staff use inclusive language in their daily communications, which is supported by modeling and reinforcement.</p> <p>Signs, posters and displays in the school reflect inclusion and the school’s commitment to ensuring every student is valued.</p>	<p>Mechanisms and systems are in place to regularly inform stakeholders of the positive impacts of inclusiveness on the entire student body.</p> <p>The word/concept of “student” is intentionally used to refer to all students.</p> <p>School communications use inclusive language and formats.</p> <p>The value students and staff place on inclusion is communicated throughout the school, in trophies and awards that are displayed, the goals and mission of the school, and the activities and efforts that are promoted.</p> <p>The word “inclusion” is frequently used on the school’s web site and in presentations given by school leaders, staff and students.</p> <p>Students with and without intellectual disabilities regularly speak to school and community groups about the importance of social inclusion.</p>

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Novice	Emerging	Accomplished	Highly Inclusive
<p>Basic knowledge about addressing the needs of a diverse student population is provided to all staff; however, it does not address issues of social inclusion.</p> <p>Professional development is targeted at distinctly different audiences rather than shared learning experiences between general education and special education staff.</p> <p>Social-emotional learning is not explicitly addressed in district-supported professional development.</p>	<p>Informational programs are provided to parents, students and staff to increase understanding of diverse student abilities, inclusive teaching strategies and the importance of social inclusion.</p> <p>Special and general education teachers occasionally collaborate as professional learners within a professional learning community.</p> <p>Professional development is offered in classroom management strategies and pedagogies that support and are informed by social-emotional learning best practices.</p>	<p>Specific district professional development opportunities frequently incorporate discussions and skill building in supporting inclusiveness.</p> <p>School and community events are offered to students and the broader community to increase knowledge and skills that support inclusive schools.</p> <p>Collaborations between special and general education teachers are encouraged to build competencies in providing an inclusive learning environment, including social inclusion.</p> <p>All staff members are expected to become proficient in teaching, supporting and reinforcing social-emotional skills.</p>	<p>Students, staff and families are provided opportunities to increase their competencies to create and sustain an inclusive school environment.</p> <p>High-quality, ongoing professional development on social inclusion and school climate is supported through the use of regular and frequent professional learning communities.</p> <p>There is an expectation that special and general education teachers will collaborate to create an inclusive learning environment, and are provided regular, scheduled opportunities for this to occur.</p> <p>Students with and without disabilities are engaged as co-facilitators of professional development to share strategies they find most effective in creating and sustaining an inclusive school environment.</p>

## CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

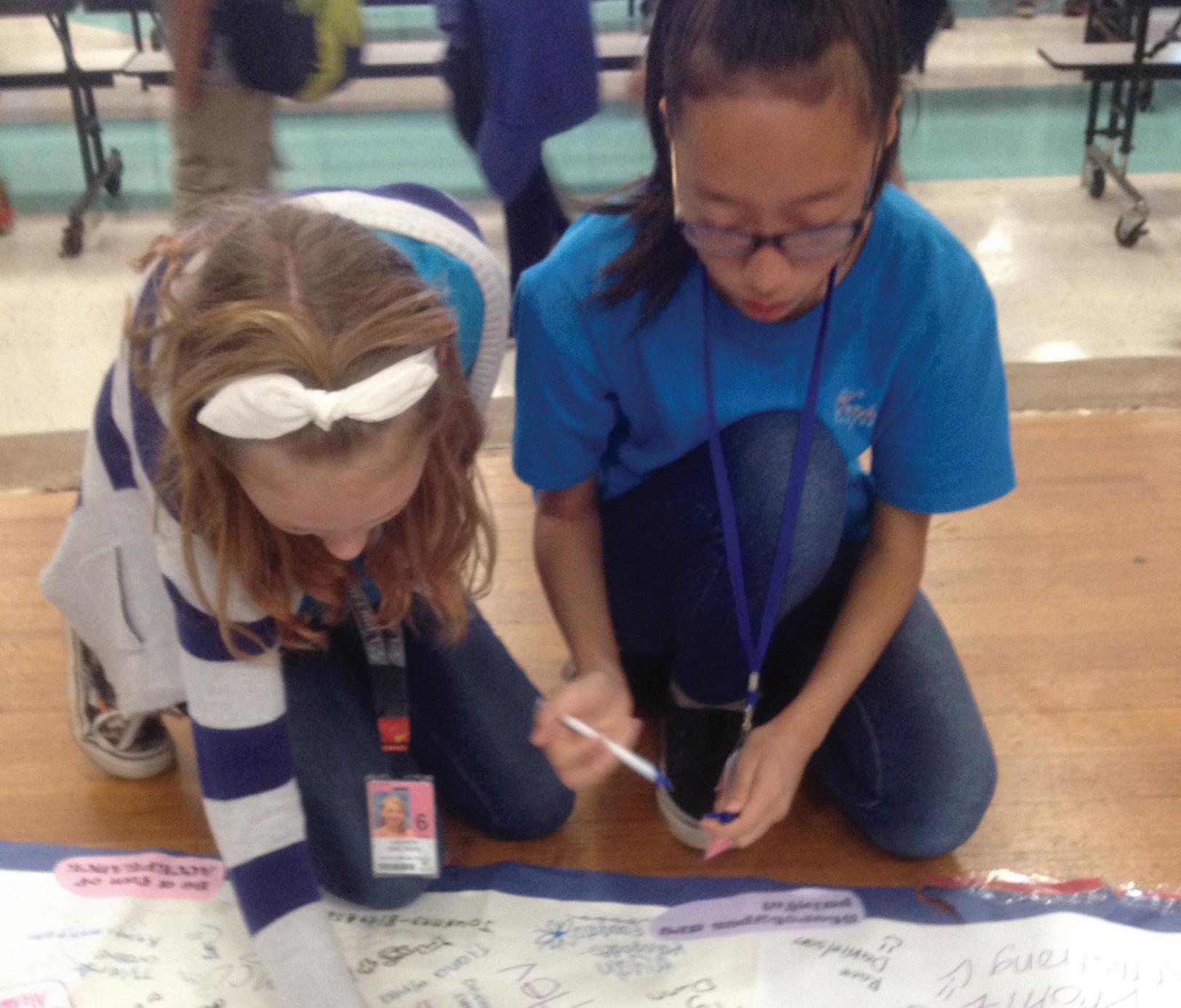
Novice	Emerging	Accomplished	Highly Inclusive
<p>Plans for developing and supporting an inclusive school climate are implemented without collecting data to guide decisions.</p> <p>Programs and activities to create a more inclusive school climate and increase the effectiveness of the learning environment for all students are adopted without a shared vision and collective agenda.</p>	<p>School and district leaders allocate time and resources to develop effective learning environments that provide inclusive school climates and meet the needs of all students.</p> <p>Efforts to improve school climate and increase effectiveness of instructional practices are consistently reviewed and revised to provide inclusiveness and effectiveness of the learning environment.</p> <p>Data is collected to monitor inclusion of students with disabilities in academic settings.</p>	<p>A social inclusive assessment (e.g., CSIS Assessment, Social Inclusion Scale) is used to establish baseline data regarding the degree of social inclusion in the school.</p> <p>All constituents (including students, staff, parents and community) are given regular opportunities to reflect and share input on the effectiveness of the learning environment in meeting the needs of all students.</p> <p>Policies are in place and actively used to ensure social inclusion for all students through instructional effectiveness, school programs and school climate.</p> <p>Data is collected to assess inclusion of students with disabilities in extracurricular activities, sports and social events.</p>	<p>Data is regularly collected on the inclusiveness of the school climate and effectiveness of the learning environment from multiple sources across all stakeholders in the school and community throughout the year.</p> <p>Data on discipline, attendance, and participation in extracurricular offerings is disaggregated to ensure all students and disability subgroups have equitable opportunities to succeed in formal and informal settings.</p> <p>A baseline assessment is conducted during initial stages of implementation, and a rubric (e.g., Social Inclusion Rubric) is used to assess progress and identify areas for continuous improvement. This evidence guides decisions and plans for continuous improvement.</p> <p>Evidence is used to improve experiences and progress toward goals to ensure inclusiveness and effectiveness of the learning environment.</p> <p>Evidence of progress is communicated with the broader community to deepen understanding of an inclusive school climate and an effective learning environment.</p>



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♥ BE KIND  
BE A FRIEND  
#FRIENDS!

Don't Judge Disability  
on ABILITY  
#we r all stars  
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# ACTION PLANNING FORMATS



# Special Olympics Unified Champion School Strategic Plan

**Leadership Team Members**

School(s) to be involved:

What do we hope social inclusion will achieve? As a team, ask yourselves what you would like success to look like in concrete, measurable terms. What will people in our school do that demonstrates we are a socially inclusive school? Which set of goals will help us progress on the social inclusion rubric? Identify 3-5 SMART goals. SMART goals are:

S - Specific

M - Measurable

A - Action-oriented

R - Realistic

T - Time-bound

How will social inclusion help meet our school's broader goals?

# Finding Our Starting Point

Effective planning starts with an assessment of the current situation. It begins with asking

1) Who are we? and 2) Analyzing Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

Who are we?

1. Who are we as a school?

2. What are the common interests of our school community and how can we best represent them?

3. What are our values?

## SWOT ANALYSIS (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats)

What are our **strengths** relative to social inclusion in our school?

What are our **weaknesses**?

What **opportunities** are made available by implementing the Unified Champion Schools strategy to support social inclusion?

If we do not address social inclusion, what are the **threats**?

5. What are the primary obstacles to social inclusion and how might we overcome them?

6. Are there previous initiatives that failed due to lack of support or other obstacles? What were they, and why did they fail?

7. What assistance do we need with this work?

### MONITORING

1. Who has oversight and review authority for the plan content? Who is responsible for measuring progress?

2. What measures of progress will we use?

3. How often will we review progress?

4. How will we use progress monitoring to ensure our efforts continuously improve?

# INPUTS

Who will we engage?  
What resources do we have?

# OUTPUTS

Activities

What we will do

Participation

Who will we reach

# OUTCOMES - IMPACT

Short Term

Short Term Results

Medium Term

Medium Term Results

Long Term

Long Term Results

**CURRENT STATUS**  
Where are we now?

**PRIORITIES**  
What goals will we address first

Assumptions about Social Inclusion in our School

External Factors That May Influence Outcomes

# What is our vision for social inclusion in our school?

## Whole School Engagement Action Plan

Strategy/Activity	Tasks	When will each task be completed?	Who will facilitate the completion of each task?	Who else can help?
<p>This strategy/activity also connects with:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Youth Leadership</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unified Sports</p>	1	1	1	
	2	2	2	
	3	3	3	
	4	4	4	
	5	5	5	
	6	6	6	
	7	7	7	
	8	8	8	
<p>This strategy/activity also connects with:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Youth Leadership</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unified Sports</p>	1	1	1	
	2	2	2	
	3	3	3	
	4	4	4	
	5	5	5	
	6	6	6	
	7	7	7	
	8	8	8	

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Strategy/Activity	Tasks	When will each task be completed?	Who will facilitate the completion of each task?	Who else can help?
	1	1	1	
	2	2	2	
	3	3	3	
This strategy/activity also connects with:  <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Youth Leadership  <input type="checkbox"/> Unified Sports	1	1	1	
	2	2	2	
	3	3	3	
	4	4	4	
	5	5	5	
	6	6	6	
	7	7	7	
	8	8	8	

# Inclusive Youth Leadership Action Plan

Strategy/Activity	Tasks	When will each task be completed?	Who will facilitate the completion of each task?	Who else can help?
<p>This strategy/activity also connects with:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Whole School Engagement</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unified Sports</p>	1	1	1	
	2	2	2	
	3	3	3	
	4	4	4	
	5	5	5	
	6	6	6	
	7	7	7	
	8	8	8	
<p>This strategy/activity also connects with:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Whole School Engagement</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unified Sports</p>	1	1	1	
	2	2	2	
	3	3	3	
	4	4	4	
	5	5	5	
	6	6	6	
	7	7	7	
	8	8	8	

# Inclusive Youth Leadership Action Plan

Strategy/Activity	Tasks	When will each task be completed?	Who will facilitate the completion of each task?	Who else can help?
<p>This strategy/activity also connects with:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Whole School Engagement</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unified Sports</p>	1	1	1	
	2	2	2	
	3	3	3	
	4	4	4	
	5	5	5	
	6	6	6	
	7	7	7	
	8	8	8	
<p>This strategy/activity also connects with:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Whole School Engagement</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unified Sports</p>	1	1	1	
	2	2	2	
	3	3	3	
	4	4	4	
	5	5	5	
	6	6	6	
	7	7	7	
	8	8	8	

# Unified Sports Action Plan

Strategy/Activity	Tasks	When will each task be completed?	Who will facilitate the completion of each task?	Who else can help?
<p>This strategy/activity also connects with:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Whole School Engagement</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Youth Leadership</p>	1	1	1	
	2	2	2	
	3	3	3	
	4	4	4	
	5	5	5	
	6	6	6	
	7	7	7	
	8	8	8	
<p>This strategy/activity also connects with:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Whole School Engagement</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Youth Leadership</p>	1	1	1	
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	8	8	8	

# Unified Sports Action Plan

Strategy/Activity	Tasks	When will each task be completed?	Who will facilitate the completion of each task?	Who else can help?
<p>This strategy/activity also connects with:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Whole School Engagement</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive Youth Leadership</p>	1	1	1	
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	8	8	8	
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	7	7	7	
	8	8	8	

# Getting Started Checklists

There are many ways the whole school can learn about and create a socially inclusive school. The following tips and checklists offer some ideas to get started with a few different activities. These activities can be changed and expanded to best address students' identified needs and fit into the structure of your school. Have the students work in inclusive teams or unified pairs on many of these activities. Ensure that all students have opportunities to use their strengths and develop new skills.

*NOTE: The first list includes steps that should be implemented with any major activity. Subsequent lists outline steps that address each specific activity.*

## General Steps for Implementing Any Major Activity

**There are some actions that need to be done when preparing for any activity or event.**

- \_\_\_1. Work with your teachers to schedule a meeting with the Unified Champion School Leadership Team to talk about the activity or event you are planning. Before the meeting, work with your teacher(s) to make sure your presentation includes your ideas and is well organized. Be prepared to discuss a timeline for recruiting students organizing, and preparing for the activity.
- \_\_\_2. Talk with school staff about the date, purpose of the activity, and why it is important to your school. Your Leadership Team can help you with explaining the activity to other people in the school.
- \_\_\_3. Publicize the activity or event. Consider asking staff to assist with sharing information through announcements, the school website, letters sent home, the school newspaper and local news media.
- \_\_\_4. After the event, be sure to thank all of those involved. Send a special thank-you note to any guest speakers, sponsors or those who donated to the activity.

**Whole School Engagement**

## School Assembly or Youth Rally

**School assemblies or rallies can be a good way to share information, create excitement, or introduce a new program or activity about social inclusion and being respectful of others. The following are things you need to do to hold a school assembly or youth rally. Work with your teachers as you make your plans.**

- \_\_\_1. Use a club, advisory session or class to discuss issues or concerns that you would like to address in an assembly. After deciding the issue to be addressed, brainstorm ideas for the assembly, such as guest speakers, skits, pep rally or student presentation.
- \_\_\_2. Research the selected issue(s), identify who or what it affects and what changes are needed.
- \_\_\_3. Develop a plan.
  - Set the date and time for the assembly.
  - Create a plan for each task that needs to be completed, including deadlines and a list of who is responsible for carrying out each step.
  - Make sure the date and time are cleared with the principal and your teachers before advertising the assembly.
  - Consider working with another group in the school or community to help with the assembly.
- \_\_\_4. Invite guest speakers, develop a presentation, and prepare any necessary materials.
  - Get the audience involved; ensure the event is fun, memorable and engaging.
  - Use a speech, skit or other presentation to tell attendees about the topic.
  - Consider using videos, visuals or other multimedia to maintain interest.
  - Use speakers or others who can be part of the assembly to educate and engage participants.

**Whole School Engagement**

## *It's Our School, Too! Play*

**This play is written for a cast of 10-20 students with and without intellectual disabilities. The script includes a variety of short scenes shared by students at real schools. The play is designed to let others know what school can be like for students with intellectual disabilities.**

- \_\_\_1. Get a copy of the script for the play in the Educator Resources section found at [www.specialolympics.org/mlplaybook-resources](http://www.specialolympics.org/mlplaybook-resources).
- \_\_\_2. Share the script with students in your language arts class, Unified Club or other interested group. Ask your teacher if you can lead a discussion among students interested in performing the play, and identify areas of concern that students may have about inclusion in school.
- \_\_\_3. Develop a plan.
  - Assign role and schedule rehearsals. Make sure that both students with and without intellectual disabilities have roles in the play.
  - Create a plan for each task that needs to be completed, including deadlines, and a list of who is responsible for carrying out each step. Be sure to assign inclusive co-leaders for each major task, and make sure they are cleared with your teachers and principal before releasing the information to others.
- \_\_\_4. Practice until everyone knows their roles.
- \_\_\_5. Perform the play for the school and/or community.
- \_\_\_6. After the play, work with your teachers to schedule times during advisor-advisee or other classes to discuss the play, what the audience experienced, and any issues that exist in the local school and/or community.
- \_\_\_6. Work with the Student Council, National Junior Honor Society, Unified Club or other interested group to discuss the issues and develop a plan to make changes that will create a more socially inclusive school.

## Spread the Word Campaign

**The Spread the Word (STW) Campaign ([spreadtheword.global](http://spreadtheword.global)) helps others understand the hurtful effects exclusion and encourages people to pledge to spread inclusion through action. Activities vary from school to school, but are often planned to coincide with the Spread the Word annual day of awareness held the first Wednesday in March.**

\_\_\_1. Work with other students in the Unified Club, a class or other groups in the school to organize activities that will raise awareness about inclusion and the Spread the Word mission.

\_\_\_2. Meet with the principal to discuss plans for the Spread the Word Campaign, and obtain his/her support and approval.

\_\_\_3. Decide which activities the campaign will include, such as:

- Holding a small rally or school assembly. Have students give speeches about the negative effects of hurtful language and promote the philosophy of inclusion. Distribute information to other students.
- Setting up a pledge station where all students and adults sign a banner or poster in a pledge to spread inclusion.
- Teaching others about the use of respectful words, and including information on stopping use of hurtful language as part of your school's behavior expectations.
- If school policies allow, sharing information about the campaign via social media or the school website. Consider writing a blog, developing a podcast, or including information in the school newsletter.

\_\_\_4. Develop a plan.

- Schedule Spread the Word Campaign activities.
- Create a plan for each task that needs to be completed, including deadlines, and a list of who is responsible for carrying out each step. Arrange for inclusive co-chairs (one student with an intellectual disability and one without) for major tasks.
- Make sure the scheduled activities are all cleared by your teachers or principal before releasing the information to others.
- Hold a meeting with everyone who will be working a pledge station, and provide them with talking points and discussion topics.

\_\_\_5. Ask your teacher to help you check with your State Special Olympics office for Spread the Word stickers, posters, banners and other items to use at the pledge station. Also, check the resources available here:

<https://www.spreadtheword.global/resources>

\_\_\_6. Be sure to track the number of pledges signed, number of people involved, and highlights of success stories. Ask your mathematics teacher for help with identifying statistics about the pledges. Talk with your Leadership Team about sharing this information with your board of education. Consider asking the local newspaper to share this information with the community.

**Whole School Engagement**

## Fans in the Stands™

**Fans in the Stands is a program that ensures every student or team has fans who cheer for them at every game, rain or shine, win or lose. Fans in the Stands promote unity, acceptance, empowerment, respect, inclusion, pride, confidence and fun—for both the athletes and the fans!**

- \_\_\_1. Identify students who may be interested in being Fans in the Stands. This effort may be organized by the Unified Club, one of the interdisciplinary teams, or other groups at the school.
- \_\_\_2. Develop a calendar of all intramural, interscholastic, Special Olympics and Unified Sports events that will take place during each semester.
- \_\_\_3. Publicize Fans in the Stands and dates of cheering events. Ask staff to attend and assist with communications through announcements, the school website and school newsletter.
- \_\_\_4. Identify students who will take responsibility for ensuring cheering fans are present at each event. You might set up a table in the cafeteria or in the front hall before school where students can sign up to be Fans in the Stands.
- \_\_\_5. Prior to each event, create items such as posters, signs and banners to encourage the team. Create special cheers and chants to support the teams.

**Whole School Engagement**

## Unified Sports Day or Unified Sports Festival

**Organize a Unified Sports Day or Unified Sports Festival at the school with inclusive sports activities for the student body.**

- \_\_\_1. Meet with the principal to get approval and administrative support. Share the goals and possible activities. Be sure to stress the positive impact the event can have on creating a socially inclusive school climate.
- \_\_\_2. Work with the physical education teachers or Unified Sports coach/team members to organize activities and make accommodations to ensure all activities are accessible to all students.
  - \_\_\_3. Develop a plan.
    - Set the date and time for the day's activities.
    - Decide which activities will be included, determine whether the day will focus on a specific sport, and identify how all students will have equitable opportunities to participate.
    - Create a plan for each task that needs to be completed, including deadlines and a list of who is responsible for carrying out each step.
    - Make sure everyone is involved.
    - Make sure the date, time and location are all cleared with the necessary school personnel before releasing the information to others.
  - \_\_\_4. Publicize the United Sports Day to your school and community. Reach out to the local newspaper and radio station. Include information about the event on the local access television.

**Unified Sports**

## Unified Clubs

**A Unified Club is a school club that is focused on Unified Champion Schools activities and is recognized as a formal club by the school. It teams students of all abilities through sports activities, and social and recreational opportunities to build friendships and collaborate on projects and activities.**

\_\_\_1. Make personal invitations to students with and without intellectual disabilities who are interested in making your school a place of acceptance. Identify a core group of 3-5 students who can serve as a student advisory committee during the initial setup stages of the club, and provide leadership after it is established.

\_\_\_2. Work with the student advisory committee and your club advisor to establish the club. While adults provide guidance, the students should provide primary club leadership.

- Find out the school's requirements for starting a club; be sure to follow the steps for approval.
- Develop a presentation that includes why it is important to have a socially inclusive student club and what type of events you plan to do. Include facts and identify the issue(s) the club will address within the school. It is important to explain how this club can impact students and improve your school.
- Work with your principal to have the socially inclusive student club designated as a formal school club, following all rules and policies that are expected of other clubs in the school.
- Set up a structure for the club, including the election of members to leadership roles (e.g., chair, secretary, treasurer). When possible, establish co-leaders, having students with and without intellectual disabilities partner to serve as club officers or committee chairs.
- Make sure that all members have roles to address.
- Ensure someone is designated to:
  - o Be the liaison with the Inclusive Leadership Team and your state's Special Olympics office, as needed.
  - o Keep track of funds and project costs.
  - o Maintain membership records and take meeting notes.

\_\_\_3. Have an introductory meeting with the advisory committee and club advisor to determine key guidelines for the club.

- How often will the club meet?
- When will the club meet, and for how long? Use time during the school day as much as possible.
- Where will the club meet?
- Is there money for activities? Does your school allocate money for clubs? Does your State Special Olympics office have money to support club activities? Ask your teacher if there are grant opportunities. Are there fundraising opportunities?
- How will the club make decisions?

\_\_\_4. Identify issues important to club members. Determine how the club members will make decisions.

# Student Advisory Committee

## **Come up with a plan to recruit members and engage them in the club:**

- Invite friends, teammates and other interested students to join the club.
- Advertise the club through posters, announcements, school paper or other communications. You might coordinate with art classes to make colorful posters. Include time and place for meetings, and describe the types of activities you will be doing.
- If allowed, use social media to promote the club. Include information about the club, pictures and descriptions of past activities, and updates on any upcoming activities. Invite students from your school to stay up-to-date with the club's activities.
- Talk to the special education teacher(s) in your school to help involve students with disabilities. Ask them to share club information with students and assist you with any advice you may need for recruiting students with disabilities.

## **Hold your first meeting:**

- Establish an agenda for the meeting.
- Provide a description of the club and its purpose.
- Include an icebreaker or get-to-know-you activity at the first meeting to start establishing friendships among club members.
- Have the student advisory committee introduce themselves and explain their roles.
- Distribute a membership form to obtain contact information from each member.
- Establish club routines and guidelines for interacting and collaborating, which ensures everyone is meaningfully engaged.
- Brainstorm ideas for future activities.
- Discuss ideas for committees to get everyone involved and provide more opportunities for leadership.
- Share the dates of upcoming meetings and activities, and give closing remarks.
- Remind members of the next meeting and encourage them to recruit additional members.

## **Develop a list of activities to build into initial meetings:**

- Talk with your teacher or advisor about including disabilities awareness training as part of one of your first few meetings. This will ensure all participants have a better understanding of different disabilities so that students can better support one another.
- Identify other information or activities you want to include in the first meetings to address social inclusion in your school.

## **Use your regularly scheduled meeting to further enhance the skills of club members. Meetings should be led by the student advisory committee, but find opportunities for all students to take leadership roles during the meeting.**

- Always welcome new members or interested students.
- Discuss ideas with the group. Be certain each individual has the opportunity to share his or her thoughts.
- If you see one individual controlling the conversation or leadership of the group, pause and ask others about their opinions on the topic.
- Provide all members with notes of the meeting and action items to be completed through social media or other established forms of communication.

## Making Existing Clubs Inclusive

**Talk with the members and advisor of an existing school club about making it an inclusive club. Help the club to include diverse students or student groups as members, including students with and without intellectual disabilities. Engage your inclusive club in the following steps:**

\_\_\_1. Work with your teachers to schedule a meeting with the Unified Champion School Leadership Team to discuss making more clubs at your school inclusive. Be prepared to discuss a timeline for recruiting, organizing and preparing for the activity.

\_\_\_2. Talk with your principal about social inclusion and why it is important for students with disabilities to be included in school clubs.

\_\_\_3. Speak with club advisors and officers about the value of inclusive youth leadership and how it supports and enhances their goals.

\_\_\_4. Connect with the club members to better understand their current work. Ask them the following questions:

- What is the club's mission?
- What type of work are you currently doing?
- Are students with intellectual disabilities members of the club?
- How might the club improve by including students with disabilities?
- How might the school improve by having clubs with more diverse student representation?

\_\_\_5. Work with the club members to increase their understanding of social inclusion and gain skills in collaborating with different students. Club members might find it helpful to lead activities from the Special Olympics curriculum found at the link below and click on "Middle School"

[http://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/?\\_ga=2.125056642.985354402.1507557185-1542624116.1491931800&\\_gac=1.229657326.1506348744.CjwKCAjw0qLOBRBUEiwAMG5xMM62VWLzwxbydYXYrz0jx9iMvL4cu-JfCo3MZZbMTd4PCIOhPJGnNBocJ1YQAvD\\_BwE#section14](http://resources.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools-resources/?_ga=2.125056642.985354402.1507557185-1542624116.1491931800&_gac=1.229657326.1506348744.CjwKCAjw0qLOBRBUEiwAMG5xMM62VWLzwxbydYXYrz0jx9iMvL4cu-JfCo3MZZbMTd4PCIOhPJGnNBocJ1YQAvD_BwE#section14).

\_\_\_6. If there is a selection process for the club, revise guidelines to include students with intellectual disabilities and other diverse groups in the club's membership.

\_\_\_7. Have a team meeting to discuss the club and identify students who are interested in being part of the club. You might also consider requesting that teachers ask their students if they are interested.

\_\_\_8. Make posters about the club and hang them in the hallways, and include messages in the daily announcements to gain interest.

\_\_\_9. Ensure all students are provided leadership and co-leadership opportunities. Work with your teachers to increase skills in decision-making.

## Unified Sports Competitive & Player Development Models

There are differences between the three Unified Sports models, and how the models are implemented will depend on the sport or how the school is organized. The following checklists serve as a good starting point for creating Unified Sports opportunities. Whether your school is rural, urban or suburban, the following activities provide ideas that can be adjusted to suit your needs and interests.

**Work with your teachers or principal on these tasks.**

- \_\_\_1. Contact your State Special Olympics office to begin the process of forming a Unified Sports team at your school.
- \_\_\_2. Select a sport; identify when students will start playing and where the sport will be played.
- \_\_\_3. Identify an adult coach and others who can support the team in different ways.
- \_\_\_4. Have all Unified Sports coaches complete training requirements for coaches. A free online course is available at <https://nfhslearn.com/courses/36000/coaching-unified-sports>.
- \_\_\_5. Recruit teammates with and without intellectual disabilities. Ensure there is a meaningful role for each student who is interested in participating (e.g., teammate, assistant coach, fan, manager).
  - a) Competitive: Use a targeted approach to recruit students without disabilities who will be of similar ability as students with disabilities and will be committed to the team.
  - b) Player Development: Recruit students without disabilities who will be of similar age as students with disabilities and be committed to the team.
- \_\_\_6. Ask interested teammates/parents to complete and submit required participation forms.
- \_\_\_7. Secure logistics and set a team schedule:
  - a) Work with the school's athletic director or principal to identify the team practice schedule, transportation (if necessary), equipment, uniforms and facility needs.
  - b) Develop a schedule for intramural or interscholastic games.
- \_\_\_8. Conduct a team orientation meeting (this could include parents).
- \_\_\_9. Hold regular practices and competitions.
- \_\_\_10. Ensure the Unified Sports teams receive the same kind of support as other teams in the school, including pep rallies, Fans in the Stands, recognition letters.

## Unified Sports Recreation Model

- \_\_\_1. Schedule a meeting with the Unified Champion School Leadership Team to discuss getting Unified Sports started in your school. Develop a timeline for recruiting, organizing and preparing for the activity.
- \_\_\_2. Contact your State Special Olympics office to begin the process of initiating a Unified Sports activity at your school.
- \_\_\_3. Choose the sport/activity you will implement and when/where it will take place.
- \_\_\_4. Recruit an adult and identify others who can support the activity in different ways.
- \_\_\_5. Have all coaches complete training requirements. A free online course is available at <https://nfhslearn.com/courses/36000/coaching-unified-sports>. Your principal can help with this.
- \_\_\_6. Recruit participants with and without intellectual disabilities. Ensure there will be a meaningful role for each student who is interested in participating.
- \_\_\_7. Ask interested students/parents to complete and submit required participation forms.
- \_\_\_8. Secure logistics and set a schedule:
  - Work with the school's athletic director or principal to identify the schedule, transportation, equipment, uniforms and facility needs.
- \_\_\_9. Conduct an orientation meeting (this could include parents).
- \_\_\_10. Get together on a scheduled regular basis.

NOT IN  
OUR HOUSE

STOP  
SARCASM

STOP  
TEASING

STOP  
HITTING

STOP  
THE  
GOSSIP

STOP  
BULLYING

# Examples of Advisor-Advisee or Classroom Discussions

## Special Olympics Activities and Lessons Grades 6-8

At this level, these activities work to fulfill this age group's need for affirmation and peer relationships. The first activity asks individuals to think about the different pieces of themselves. This discussion also addresses the concept of labeling, and the hurtfulness of name-calling, like the use of the word, "retard(ed)." Individuals are given an opportunity to experience the difficulties and frustrations of people with intellectual disabilities, and are challenged to consider their own reactions and responses to bullying.

The activities in this section are based more on discussion and experiences, and therefore, would be most effective in a homeroom or advisor-advisee setting; or they could be combined with more physically-oriented team-building exercises. The group is asked to think critically about their environment, and work to brainstorm, plan and execute an initiative to improve their school and community.



## Lesson 1: SO...What's the Challenge?

### OPENING

Write the following quote on a chalkboard or poster board and have it on display as students arrive. “There are all kinds of courage. It takes a great deal of courage to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends.” Harry Potter fans will recognize the quote from Dumbledore in “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone.” Have students discuss or write in their journal: What does this quote mean to me? Do I agree or disagree with it? How does it relate to an experience in my life?

### TEAM-UP ACTIVITY

Explain to the group that they will be brainstorming about the different pieces of themselves. Divide participants into five different groups and assign each group to think about one category: physical traits, personality traits, interests, things I’m proud of, or things I’d like to work on. Explain that each individual has to think of one word to describe himself or herself, but the word should be based on the category assigned to that group. Have people share (or act out/demonstrate) their identifying word. Ask the groups: What would it be like if you were only identified and judged by one characteristic of yourself? What were your reactions to the different categories?

### REFLECTION

Talk to the group about the power that one word can have as a label on other people. Ask how many people have heard the word, “retard(ed)” before. Do they hear the R-word used in movies or songs? How about in school? Have they used it? Is it just as bad to remain quiet when someone is calling someone a “retard” as it is to use the term yourself? How does this relate to Dumbledore’s quote?

### ACTION

Have the group reflect in their journals (either with words or pictures) about an experience from their own lives—at school or in their community—when they:

- Discriminated against someone.
- Stood by quietly as a friend discriminated against someone.
- Were a victim of discrimination.

## Lesson 2: Changing Perceptions

### OPENING

Ask the group if they think it is actually possible to reverse the trends of intolerance related to intellectual disabilities. If so, whose responsibility is it? Have individuals complete the following sentence in their journals: "In order for my generation to help reverse stereotypes against those with intellectual disabilities..."

### TEAM-UP ACTIVITY

After discussing their answers, tell the group that you are going to give them a difficult but important assignment that they will have five minutes to finish. Explain that there will be a prize for those who complete it (the prize is important because you are trying to establish a sense of urgency and competition).

Have them either:

- Translate the following Latin phrase into English: Utviaminveniamautfaciam

Answer: Either I shall find a way or I will make one.

- Compute the following math problem: The sum of the first and twice the second is 100, and the product is a maximum. What are  $x$  and  $y$ ?
- Answer:  $x=50, y=25$

After a few minutes of trying, discreetly distribute answer sheets to some groups but not others.

### REFLECTION

Once time is up, ask students to discuss or journal their feelings about the exercise. Ask: "Did you sincerely try to complete the challenge? For those who did not get the answer sheets, did it increase your frustration when other groups got the answer and you didn't? How might this relate to the feeling of having an intellectual disability?"

### ACTION

Share some facts about Special Olympics from the website with the group. Ask them to consider: How do sports help those with intellectual disabilities to change their perceptions of themselves? What type of impact does Special Olympics have on those who have never met someone with an intellectual disability? Tell the group to go to <https://www.youtube.com/user/SpecialOlympicsHQ> . Have them identify and share 1-2 videos with friends who may have never experienced Special Olympics.

## Lesson 3: What Does My School Look Like?

### OPENING

Ask the group to close their eyes and think about their school. Have them answer the following questions: If you were asked to describe your school using three words, what words would you choose?

Before they share their responses, divide the group into pairs and have each partner take turns trying to guess the other person's favorite and least favorite parts of school (you can turn this into a game show style where the partners write down their answers separately and get points for how many answers they get correct about the other person).

After students compare their perspectives, ask them: "How can people who go to the same school see it from completely different perspectives?"

### TEAM-UP ACTIVITY

Tell the group they are going to spend some time thinking about how their school may look to someone with an intellectual disability. Have them work together in pairs or small groups (preferably inclusive) to think about related questions they need to have answered to better understand their school from this perspective:

- How many students at our school have intellectual disabilities?
- Are students with intellectual disabilities mainstreamed into general classes?
- Are there staff members dedicated to those with intellectual disabilities?
- Are students with intellectual disabilities encouraged/allowed to sign up for sports teams, clubs and special programs? If so, do they participate?
- What are the perceptions of other students regarding those with intellectual disabilities? Do they interact during classes, sit together during lunch, participate in extracurricular activities?
- Are there opportunities for students with and without intellectual disabilities to interact and get to know one another?
- Do students with intellectual disabilities feel welcomed and included at school?

### REFLECTION

Have the groups brainstorm about what they would do with an unlimited budget to make their school more inclusive toward those with intellectual disabilities. Have them write about and describe the programs they would implement and the strengths and weaknesses of each. If they could only choose one, which would they choose?

### ACTION

Have the groups share their ideas with one another and select a few ideas that they might be able to work on together. Have them discuss strategies about how to put these ideas in place, the steps needed as they move forward, and how they can measure their success.

## Lesson 4: How Can I Create Change? Project

### OPENING

Share Eunice Kennedy Shriver’s opening remarks for the 1987 Special Olympics World Games. She said, “You are the stars and the world is watching you. By your presence, you send a message to every village, every city, every nation. A message of hope. A message of victory. The right to play on any playing field? You have earned it. The right to study in any school? You have earned it. The right to hold a job? You have earned it. The right to be anyone’s neighbor? You have earned it.”

### REFLECTION

Individuals should engage in reflection throughout the project, making regular entries into their journals. They should explore changes in their knowledge, skills and/or attitudes. What did you learn? What is the most satisfying aspect of working together? What surprised you? Have you accomplished your goals? How did the experience make you feel? How have you helped others? Are there other ways that you can continue to help?

### ACTION

Ask the group to think about these three questions: What is? What could be? How can I make it happen? Help them brainstorm: What are the current needs in the Special Olympics community? How can we use our leadership skills to promote inclusion and acceptance for everyone in our community? How would you describe “what is” with regard to tolerance and inclusion in school? Do you think “what is” is good enough? What improvements could be made? Ask the group to reflect on the previous activities. Describe the opportunities to make a difference in their school or community. List their ideas, and help them plan out their ideas and work out the steps to make them happen. Projects can be small (write and perform a cheer or song for another Special Olympics team), or large-scale (work together to develop a youth-led rally for respect).



## Glossary

### **CO-LEADERS/CO-LEADERSHIP**

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

### **FANS IN THE STANDS**

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

### **INTERGENERATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

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

### **INCLUSIVE YOUTH LEADERSHIP**

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

### **SPECIAL OLYMPICS ACTIVITIES AND LESSONS EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES**

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

### **SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS**

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools is a comprehensive program of the Unified Schools strategy that combines Unified Sports, inclusive youth leadership and whole school engagement to create the greatest impact. This model is implemented in the United States. After first reference, it can be referred to as Unified Champion Schools.

### **SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED SCHOOLS**

Special Olympics Unified Schools refers to the larger global schools strategy to engage youth. It is the strategy for promoting social inclusion among youth with and without intellectual disabilities, reaching out to youth where they spend the majority of their time—at school.

### **SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED SPORTS®**

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

## **SPREAD THE WORD CAMPAIGN**

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

## **UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAM**

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

## **WHOLE SCHOOL AWARENESS**

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

## **YOUNG ADOLESCENTS**

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

## **YOUNG ATHLETES™**

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

## **YOUTH ACTIVATION COMMITTEE**

A Youth Activation Committee (YAC) is made up of young people who work together to promote school communities where all young people are agents of change. A YAC can be district-based, state-based, national or regional.

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