



# Unified Champion Schools Youth Leadership Guidebook 2023-2024

**Special  
Olympics**  
Pennsylvania



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools**

# Welcome

Welcome to the Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) family! Special Olympics aims to build a society of acceptance and inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities and, by extension, for everyone. We know that sports training and competition can help achieve that goal. And we know that students – with their energy, idealism, intelligence, and creativity – can be not only participants, but leaders in our mission.

Unified Champion Schools (UCS) have three components: Special Olympics Unified Sports® (IUS), Inclusive Youth Leadership (IYL), and Whole School Engagement (WSE). To ignite young people’s passion for our cause, we must reach them where they most often are– at school. At all grade levels, students lives revolve around their schools and school activities.

We hope resource will be a great first step in ensuring that you feel comfortable and informed on all that your involvement as a Unified Champion School can do. At Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA), we are committed to the success of your Unified Champion School. There is nothing that inspires more excitement and optimism than activating young people around the mission of inclusion and acceptance for all – so we are here to help every step of the way.

SOPA is excited to take part in this journey with you!

## -The SOPA UCS Team

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# Social Media Guidance

Social Media is a great way to share stories and information from Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® across the country and elevating the voices of the Unified Generation. Here are some suggestions to help you do this!

## Accounts to Follow:

- Special Olympics North America
  - Facebook: @SONorthAmerica
  - Twitter: @SONorthAmerica
  - Instagram: @SONorthAmerica
  
- Special Olympics International
  - Facebook: @SpecialOlympics
  - Twitter: @SpecialOlympics
  - Instagram: @SpecialOlympics
  - YouTube: Special Olympics
  
- Special Olympics Pennsylvania
  - Facebook: @SpecialOlympicsPA
  - Twitter: @SOPennsylvania
  - Instagram: @specialolympicspennsylvania
  - YouTube: Special Olympics Pennsylvania
  - TikTok: @specialolympics\_pa
  
- Unified Generation
  - TikTok: @unifiedgeneration
  - YouTube: Unified Generation
  
- Main Hashtag: #UnifiedGeneration
  - Additional Hashtags: #InclusionRevolution, #PlayUnified



When thinking about what to post on social media about Unified Champion Schools think about these things:

- User-Generated Content: Think about how your youth leaders can be the spokespeople of their own work!
- Takeovers: Let youth leaders “takeover” social media accounts during events or Unified Sports events.
- Tag Supporters: Think about your local department of education, relevant partners, and organizations as well as any individual supporters or ambassadors that may help broaden the reach of your post.

# Unified Champion Schools 101

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools (UCS) are aimed at promoting social inclusion through planned activities affecting the school community. With sports as the foundation, a UCS consists of three components: Special Olympics Unified Sports® (IUS), Inclusive Youth Leadership (IYL), and Whole School Engagement (WSE). These offer a unique combination that equip young people with tools and training to create sports and school climates of acceptance. These are school climates where students with disabilities feel welcome and are routinely included and valued in all activities, opportunities, and functions. Over ten years of research and evaluation has shown that these three factors are essential for schools in the United States to promote positive attitudes about people with intellectual disabilities and promote social inclusion.

- 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
  - Welcomes and values the engagement of all students
- Within Unified Champion Schools:
  - Students with and without intellectual disabilities have opportunities for physical activity and friendships across the school setting – in hallways & lunchrooms, in classrooms & gymnasiums, and on & off athletic fields.
  - Students with and without intellectual disabilities are provided opportunities to interact with their peers and to personally learn and grow.



*At its core, Unified Champion Schools are not just about including students with disabilities but unifying all students. Rather than adults/teachers leading the programming, students with and without disabilities are unified as the mobilizers of social inclusion and change.*

# Terminology Guide

Because saying the right thing is just as important as doing the right thing

- Say: a person with an intellectual disability, rather than is suffering from, or is afflicted by/with their disability
- Do not refer to people with intellectual disabilities as those with special needs.
  - A Unified Sports team consists of people with and without intellectual disabilities working together equally.
- It is important to know that we do not label types of disabilities among our athletes.
  - It is not appropriate to ask what type of disability an athlete has, but if the situation ever does arise, please consider the following:
    - Speak to the person before the disability, “people first”, a person with an intellectual disability, not an intellectually disabled person.
- Down Syndrome has replaced Down’s Syndrome.
- A person has a physical disability rather than crippled.
- Someone has a visual impairment rather than blind.
- A person has a seizure disorder or epilepsy, rather than is epileptic.



# Getting Your Unified Club Started

A Unified Club is a club for students with and without intellectual disabilities who collaborate as equals to conduct activities designed to make their school more inclusive and a better place. This can be done through creative interactive school events, awareness campaigns, pep rallies, sports, games, and community service.

Co-leadership is an important function of a Unified Club. Students with and without intellectual disabilities learn about how people work, communicate, organize, and lead differently. Leadership positions within the club should be held by students with and without disabilities – meaning there are co-presidents, co-secretaries, co-treasurers, etc. The club structure and atmosphere need to ensure all student members have the opportunity to speak, contribute, and shape the direction of activities being planned.

Through this process, students with disabilities become empowered and learn essential skills which help them live more independently and improve opportunities for employment. Students without disabilities become better educated on how to work more effectively with peers who have different learning and communication styles and expand their understanding of collaborative leadership.

The liaison plays an integral role in providing guidance and support for all students to attain the desired club dynamics and atmosphere. When true co-leadership and collaboration transpires, all students benefit and carry this experience into the next chapters of their lives.





# Checklist for Starting a Unified Club

- Find out your school's requirements for starting a club and make sure you follow their steps.
  - Share why it is important to have a Unified Club?
    - (Improving social inclusion in your school, creating positive attitudes, etc.)
  - What types of events you want your club to plan?
  - Facts to show why a Unified Club would be beneficial to your school.
  
- Talk to the teachers in your school.
  - Recruit special education students as Unified Club members.
  - Provide materials to help spread the word about the club to parents, teachers & students.
  
- Once you have your members create a core group of students to serve on your "executive committee":
  - Co-Chairs/Presidents: This unified pair (a special education student and a general education student) will be in close communication with your club advisor.
  - Co-Treasurers: This person will keep track of the funds you have. They will oversee figuring out the cost of putting on each event.
  - Co-Secretaries: This person will be in charge of taking notes at meetings and make sure all club members have up to date information.
  
- Make decisions as an executive committee before the first meeting:
  - How often will the club meet?
    - It is important to pick a time that allows for the most students to attend without any conflict, preferably after school.
  - How long will each meeting last?
    - An hour should be enough time - An upcoming event may require an extra meeting or a longer meeting time.
  - Where will your club meet?
    - In your liaison's classroom?
    - Does your school have a space for clubs to meet?
  - How will you increase membership?
    - Create colorful and eye-catching posters. Make sure they include the meeting time and place.
    - Form a Facebook group or Instagram account. This should have a description of a group, a list of upcoming events, and pictures.
    - Have morning announcements promoting your club
    - Ask if your school can send an email blast to all students to recruit members.
  - Develop rules for your club:
    - Examples include attendance requirements.
    - Make sure everyone understands their roles and expectations.
    - Create a system for making decisions (blind votes, ballots, etc.)

# Naming Your IYL Club

Don't have a name for your club? Check out these ideas!

In Special Olympics, we call them "Unified Clubs"—but as long as your name holds the ideals of promoting inclusion and living unified, you are allowed to name it something more reflective of your school's culture. If you are transforming an existing club, you can keep the original name.

- Examples of names that are good and different than Unified Club:

- The Brave Bunch
- Caring Club
- Peace Club
- Friends First
- Club United
- Unified Ambassadors
- Unified Youth Club
- Friends Forever
- Students Helping Students
- Perfect Peers
- Fantastic Friends



- Get creative and use something specific to your school like these:

- Panther Partners
- Falcon Friends
- Titans Connect
- Eagle Friends
- #youbelongGC
- Warrior Pride
- Panthers All Inclusive Club
- Trailblazers
- Lancers Unite
- Spartan Leadership Club





# Checklist for Spread the Word: Inclusion Champions of Change Campaign

The Spread the Word: Inclusion – Champions of Change Campaign raises awareness on the importance of making sure every single person feels included. It is a campaign that highlights equality, respect, and valuing others. Activities vary from school to school but often coincide with the Spread the Word Day (the first Wednesday in March).

\_\_\_ 1. Schedule a meeting with the UCS Leadership Team/Unified Club (Liaisons, coaches, youth leaders) to discuss holding the Campaign in your school. Develop a timeline for recruiting, organizing, and preparing for the campaign.

\_\_\_ 2. Schedule a meeting with administration. During the meeting with the principal or other administrators, discuss plans for the campaign to ensure support and approval.

\_\_\_ 3. Decide what activities the campaign will include, such as:

- Deadlines and a list of who is responsible for carrying out each step.
- Ensure activities are approved by necessary school personnel before releasing the information to others.

\_\_\_ 4. At meeting before campaign, review all campaign activities and expectations for anyone leading a component of the event.

\_\_\_ 5. Publicize and hold the event! Take lots of pictures and post to social media.  
#InclusionRevolution

\_\_\_ 6. Make sure your UCS Liaison emails or shares how your event went with SOPA staff 😊



# Types of Spread the Word Activities

Student leaders have come up with many imaginative and creative ways to create events and activities which teach acceptance and respect. You can learn about these ideas by going to the Spread the Word Resource Page: [www.spreadtheword.global/resources](http://www.spreadtheword.global/resources).

Here are a few examples:



## *School-Wide Assembly*

Plan an assembly focused on acceptance. Invite speakers to discuss the power of our language and how we can help others Pledge on pieces of paper and hang them all around the school.

## *Lunch Room Campaign*

Unified Club members take turns staffing a Spread the Word table during all lunch sessions. Each should wear a Spread the Word tee shirt. Make sure to make & hang colorful signs on the wall. Encourage students to come to the table and learn about using respectful language and how to make the school more inclusive. Have a Spread the Word banner on the table which all students are asked to sign the banner. They can also write what inclusion means to them!



# More Spread the Word Activities



## Video Campaign

Make a video with your Unified Club and try to partner with your school news if you have it. Show the video during daily announcements. Encourage students to pledge online at <https://www.spreadtheword.global> and share on social media platforms.

## Other Things to Know:

Special Olympics holds their Spread the Word Day in March. Your school can hold its Spread the Word campaign any time during the year. You can always do more than one Spread the Word event throughout the year!



# Fun Activities for Unified Clubs

You can do so much more with your clubs than hold Spread the Word Inclusion events or Fans in the Stands. The club is meant to inspire friendships and community, so have fun with it! Here are some ideas from other schools that have been successful:



- Movie Night- You can either hold a viewing right after school or hold it outside of school and have everyone meet at the movie theater.
- Pizza Party- See if you can find people to sponsor the pizza or use it as a fundraiser and sell it for \$1 a slice.
- Halloween Extravaganza- Who doesn't love a good costume contest? Bring some candy and watch a classic Halloween film.
- Holiday Party- This works best with a potluck, write Holiday cards to one another saying what you are thankful for about one another, have arts and crafts, celebrate a wonderful first semester.
- School dances- Work with student government or whoever plans dances and ask to have one where the overall goal is inclusion.
- Highlight the Unified Sports Team after a great game by sharing their accomplishments. It can be casual or formal.
- Paint - a Unity Wall or Unity Rocks
  - You could use sidewalk chalk and make a temporary mural

Have other ideas? Go for it! As long as you make the event inclusive for all, your club can do it.



# Ideas for Whole School Engagements

There are so many ideas for Whole School Engagements other than Spread the Word Inclusion events or Fans in the Stands. Get your collective creativity flowing! WSE activities are inclusive opportunities to rally your school community.

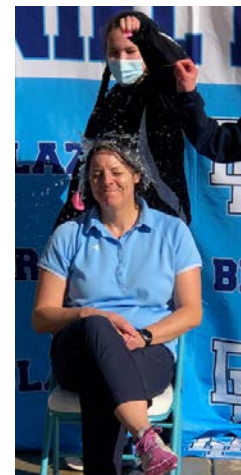


- Pep-Rallies – for each sport season include your Unified team in the festivities
  - Winter sport pep rally – include the Unified Bocce team
  - Spring sports pep rally – include the Unified Track & Field team
- Clap-Outs – have the entire school line the hallways and clap out your Unified team as they walk to the gym, track, or bus!
- Unified Sports Day – teach the whole school about your sport! Then have the Unified team compete against other sports teams at your school.
- Unified tournament where staff and students compete against each other.
- Unity Days – it could be any theme! Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion or Social Emotional Learning
- Respect Week – Make posters, have daily announcements, create a video or TikTok promoting inclusion at your school.

# Fundraising Ideas

Are you brave enough to be "Freezin for a Reason" or are you "Too Chicken to Plunge?" Registering as a "Cool Schools" team is a great team-building experience and an awesome way to support Special Olympics athletes within your school community!

- Cool Schools Fundraising – all returning UCS schools are required to participate! Sign your school up as a team to raise money and participate in a Plunge, Polar Pop, or Rain Rally.
  - Plunge – raise money and attend a Plunge near you – Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Altoona, Lehigh Valley, Capital Area, Erie, Beaver
  - Pop – can be done at your school. Raise money to "Pop" a balloon over your head (or your favorite teacher's head). This could be a competition for each team to see who raises the most money
  - Rain Rally – connect with your local fire department and have them bring the rain to you! Raise money to run through the sprinkles and try to be the team who raises the most



- Holiday or other school-based fundraisers - singing grams, lollipops, Valentines, candy-grams, sticky-notes onto lockers, Pumpkin-grams, have some proceeds of your coffee shop or school carnival be donated back to Special Olympics
- Connect the Community – recognize the Unified teams at other high school sporting events and have attendees donate to sign an inclusion pledge
- T-Shirt Design Contest - Sell the winning design as a fundraiser
- School Carnival - Raise money from carnival games

# Expectations of School Leaders

## Student Co-Chair Expectations

- Review and develop your club's roster and Whole School Engagement
- Planning at the beginning of the year
- Post/share photos after each event on social media – tag us!
- All links and information can be found on the SOPA website at
  - [www.specialolympicspa.org/special-programs/initiatives/unified-champion-schools](http://www.specialolympicspa.org/special-programs/initiatives/unified-champion-schools)
- Attend Youth Summit
- Lead a minimum of two club meetings each month



## Faculty Liaison Expectations

- Fill out 3 different reporting surveys:
  - January - SOPA mid-year
  - April - UMASS
  - May - SOPA end-of-year
- Share WSE activities with SOPA:
  - Provide link to students to share WSE stories
- Help identify appropriate students to attend Youth Summit
- Secure transportation & permission slips to Youth Summit and (when applicable) other events
- Attend Youth Summit & complete feedback survey
- Support and encourage youth leaders to make their club "student driven and focused"
- If you're the club leader, have a minimum of 2 club meetings per month

# Unified Club Monthly Timeline

- September
  - Liaison registers 4 students for Youth Summit
  - Hold first club meeting
    - If you don't have a club, follow the steps on page 6 to get one started!
- October
  - Promote your school's Unified Bocce team (if you have one) & help recruit by making posters or daily announcements
  - Attend Youth Summit (only 4 students per school)
  - Hold a minimum of two club meetings
  - Start planning the first Whole School Engagement (WSE) activity
- November
  - Hype up your school's Unified Bocce team (if you have one) & help recruit by making posters or daily announcements
  - Hold a minimum of two club meetings – make sure co-leaders have been selected
  - Continue planning or hold the first WSE activity (remember to share on social media).
- December
  - Hold a minimum of two club meetings
  - First WSE activity deadline
  - Register your school for our Cool Schools Fundraiser (Plunge, Pop or Rain Rally)
- January
  - Hold a minimum of two club meetings
  - Start planning the 2nd WSE activity
    - Cool Schools Fundraiser – Plunge or Pop
    - Fans in the Stands for Unified Bocce
  - Promote your school's Unified Track & Field team (if you have one) & help recruit by making posters or daily announcements



- February
  - Hold a minimum of two club meetings
  - Continue planning or hold the 2nd WSE activity
    - Cool Schools Fundraiser – Plunge or Pop
    - Fans in the Stands for Unified Bocce
  - Hype up your school's Unified Track & Field team (if you have one) & help recruit by making posters or daily announcements
- March
  - Hold a minimum of two club meetings
  - Hold the 2nd WSE activity
    - Cool Schools Fundraiser – Pop or Rain Rally
    - Fans in the Stands for Unified Bocce
    - Spread the Word Campaign
- April
  - Hold a minimum of two club meetings
  - Start planning the 3rd WSE activity
    - Cool Schools Fundraiser – Pop or Rain Rally
    - Fans in the Stands for Unified Track & Field
    - Spread the Word Campaign
  - Seniors – Complete Senior Survey
- May/June
  - Hold a minimum of two club meetings
    - Make sure to celebrate your accomplishments of the year
  - Continue planning or hold the 3rd WSE activity
    - Fans in the Stands for Unified Track & Field
    - Spread the Word Campaign
  - UCS end-of-year Virtual Celebration Party!





# Glossary of Terms

- athlete - Not capitalized. Refers to an individual with an intellectual disability.
  - Example: Special Olympics athletes are children and adults with intellectual disabilities in 200 countries around the world.
- inclusive youth leadership (IYL) - Students with and without intellectual disabilities working together to lead and plan advocacy, awareness, and other Special Olympics and related inclusive activities throughout the school year.
  - Examples include such things as: Unified Clubs or a similar inclusive student groups.
- inclusive sports
  - See Special Olympics Unified Sports®
- Office of Special Education Programs at the U.S. Department of Education - Refers to Unified Champion Schools' main supporter, partner, and source of federal funding in the United States. Always refer to in full.
- partner - Not capitalized. Refers to an individual without an intellectual disability.
  - Example: The Unified Sports tennis match included an athlete and a partner from Eunice Kennedy Shriver High School. I spend time with my Unified partner Pat on and off the field.
- program - Lowercase program refers to the services we provide as Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools, or the Unified Champion Schools work happening at schools.
  - Example: Hendrickson High School's Unified Champion Schools program has been growing for six years.
- Program - Note capitalization. Refers to a Special Olympics Program – a 501c3 accredited organization in a state or region. When referring to a Special Olympics state Program, always capitalize. This can be used short form as Program.
  - Example: The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools monthly newsletter features stories and best practices from Programs across the country and the work they are doing in schools.
- R-word - Note hyphen and capital "R." Refers to the words "retard" or "retarded." Derogatory use of these words can hurt millions of people with intellectual disabilities, their families, and friends.
- Unified - The U in Unified is capitalized when used as an adjective. When referring to Special Olympics Unified Sports® or school activities, the U is always capitalized but the sport/activity is not.
  - Examples: This is Jennifer's first year as a Unified athlete. • Keith coaches Unified floor hockey. Unified Champion Schools (UCS) See Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®
- Spread the Word >> Inclusion - Capitalized.



# Whole School Engagement (WSE) Planning Checklist

\_\_\_1. Dedicate a club meeting to brainstorming ideas for a Whole School Engagement (WSE), such as a guest speaker, pep rally, activity day, assembly or student presentation.

\_\_\_2. Meet with the principal to discuss plans for the WSE and ensure administrative support and approval. Make sure the presentation is well thought out and organized.

\_\_\_3. Develop a plan.

- Set the date and time for the WSE.
- 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, time and location are all cleared with the necessary school administration before releasing the information to others.
- Consider joining efforts with another group in the school or community to broaden the audience.

\_\_\_4. Invite guest speakers, develop a presentation and prepare any necessary materials.

- Make sure the WSE is relevant to your community. Try to personalize parts of the assembly to your local community and/or school.
- Get the audience involved, ensuring the event is fun, memorable and engaging.
- Incorporate a speech, skit or other presentation to inform attendees about the topic.
- Consider using videos, visuals or other multimedia to maintain participants' interest.
- Identify and utilize people who can lead part of the WSE and will educate, motivate and activate participants.

\_\_\_5. Communicate with school administration about the date, purpose of the WSE and why this is important to your school. Consider asking school staff to assist with communication through announcements, the school website, letters sent home, school newspaper and local news media.

\_\_\_6. Publicize the WSE around the school. Then, have the event!

\_\_\_7. After the WSE, be sure to thank all of those involved with the successful event. Send a special thank you note to any guest speakers.



# Community Integration

Special Olympics Pennsylvania encourages all students who participate in Unified Sports at their high school to join us in the community. These sports are offered during three seasons as outlined below.

## SEASONS AT A GLANCE



	SPRING	FALL	WINTER
<b>Training Site Registration</b> (see link below)	Nov. 1 - Dec. 1	April 1 - May 1	August 1 - Sept. 1
<b>Athlete, Unified Partner, Volunteer Signup</b>	Dec. 15 - Jan. 15	May 15 - June 15	Sept. 15 - Oct. 15
<b>Season Length</b>	March - June	August - November	December - March
<b>Sports Offered</b>	Athletics (Track & Field), Basketball, Equestrian, Golf, Gymnastics, Softball, Swimming, Tennis	Bocce, Bowling, Flag Football, Long Distance Running/Walking, Powerlifting, Soccer, Volleyball	Alpine Skiing, Bowling, Figure Skating, Floor Hockey, Snowboard, Snowshoe, Speed Skating

**SIGN UP FOR THE NEXT SEASON** and continue to have fun, be healthy, make friends, and compete!

<https://specialolympicspa.org/get-involved/sports-sign-ups>