



# Special Olympics Iowa Unified Champion Schools® Toolkit



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
Schools



## Welcome

Welcome to the Special Olympics Iowa (SOIA) Unified Champion Schools® Program! SOIA 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.

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools' strategy is a research backed plan for transforming schools to be more inclusive through the implementation of three components: Unified Sports®, Inclusive Youth Leadership and Whole School Engagement. As a result, we expect you to see an immediate impact on students with and without intellectual disabilities as they are participating on the same team and interacting throughout the school day.

This toolkit will be a resource in ensuring you feel comfortable and informed on how to build and sustain a successful Unified Champion Schools program. In addition to this resource, you will always have access to SOIA staff who are committed to supporting your Unified Champion Schools efforts. Each school is unique and may execute the Unified Champion Schools strategies in a different way. We believe that all Iowa students can be leaders and with the right opportunities, they can become a more unified generation.

SOIA is excited to welcome you as a Unified Champion School!

John Kliegl

President and CEO, Special Olympics Iowa



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## Special Olympics Iowa Overview

Since 1968, Special Olympics Iowa has been a statewide movement that unleashes the human spirit through the transformative power and joy of sports. Using sports as the catalyst and including programming on health, leadership and education, Special Olympics is fighting inactivity, injustice and intolerance. As a result, people with intellectual disabilities become accepted and valued members of their communities, which leads to a more respectful and inclusive society for all.

For people with intellectual disabilities, the benefits of Special Olympics include:

- Improved physical fitness and motor skills
- Greater self-confidence
- A more positive self-image
- Lifelong friendships

Special Olympics athletes carry these benefits into their daily lives at home, in the classroom, on the job and in the community. For Athletes, Special Olympics provides a gateway to empowerment, competence, acceptance and joy.

## Special Olympics Iowa Mission

WHAT we do

The mission of Special Olympics Iowa is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports

WHO we do it for

for individuals with intellectual disabilities by

WHY we do it

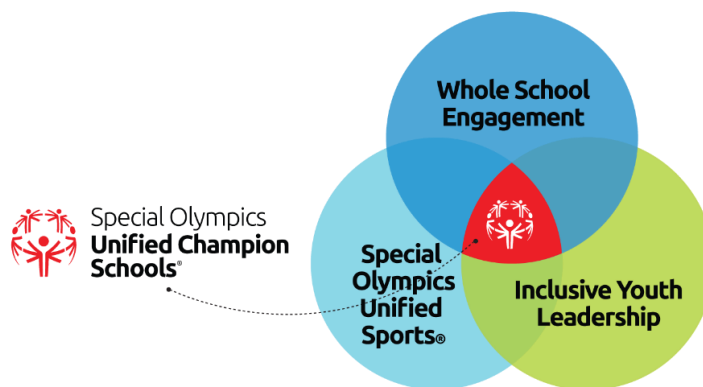
giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendships with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.



## What is a Unified Champion School®?

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® bring together students with and without intellectual disabilities through education, sports and youth leadership to provide them with the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to create and sustain school communities that promote acceptance and respect.

Special Olympics Iowa partners with pre-schools, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools and colleges to implement or continue three main components of the Unified Champion Schools model.



### Special Olympics Unified Sports®

A fully inclusive sports or fitness program that combines an approximately equal number of students with and without intellectual disabilities.



### Inclusive Youth Leadership

Students with and without intellectual disabilities work together to lead and plan advocacy, awareness and other inclusive activities throughout the school year.






### Whole School Engagement

Awareness and education activities that promote inclusion and which reach the majority of the school population.



## The Three Component Menu

Unified Champion Schools® must complete at least one activity from each of the three components during the school year.

<b>Unified Sports</b> 	<b>Inclusive Youth Leadership</b> 	<b>Whole School Engagement</b> 
<i>Choose at least one activity below:</i>	<i>Choose at least one activity below:</i>	<i>Choose at least one activity below:</i>
Unified Sports	Unified Club	Inclusion Week
Unified/Inclusive/Peer PE	Mentor Program	Cool School Plunge
Unified Fitness	Student Coaches or Volunteers	Unified Sports Day
Young Athletes Program (pre-school & elementary)	Youth Summit	Fans in the Stands
	Unified Young Readers Club (pre-school & elementary)	

## Through Unified Champion Schools®

- Schools and communities become more welcoming to people of all abilities
- Socially inclusive school climates become free from teasing, bullying and the exclusion of any group of students
- Students with disabilities are routinely included and feel a part of all social activities and opportunities
- Young people with and without disabilities are playing sports together and socially interacting
- Special Olympics is viewed as a school and community partner that offers inclusive programming that benefits all students



## Unified Champion Schools® Requirements

What does it take to be an official **Unified Champion School®** with SOIA?

1. Unified Sports®
  - Offer at least one Unified Sports® opportunity each school year
  - Have an adult coach for each sport who is a Special Olympics Iowa Certified Coach
  - Unified Sports is officially recognized by the school in a similar style as other athletics/activities
2. Inclusive Youth Leadership
  - Offer at least one Inclusive Youth Leadership opportunity for students with and without intellectual disabilities each school year
  - The inclusive club/group has an adult liaison and is officially recognized by the school in a similar style as other clubs/activities
3. Whole School Engagement
  - Host at least one Whole School Engagement activity each school year
  - Students with and without intellectual disabilities are involved with planning and leading your Whole School Engagement activity
4. Additional Requirements
  - Special Olympics Iowa and Unified Champion Schools® logos used on all printed materials
  - Completion of Unified Champion Schools® mid-term and final report
  - HAVE FUN 😊



## School Year Checklist

### Stay on track with the Unified Champion Schools® Checklist

\*These are just guidelines! Be creative and have fun!\*

Fall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Obtain permission from a school administrator to submit the Budget Agreement</li> <li>○ Identify or form a Unified Club to meet on a monthly basis</li> <li>○ Identify a Unified Sport to be offered, set dates on your calendar and let SOIA know if you need any Unified Sports Trainings or Equipment!</li> <li>○ Brainstorm Whole School Engagement activities or events</li> </ul> <p>Optional ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Have your Unified club volunteer at your Area's Fall competition!</li> </ul>
Winter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ School liaison to complete the online Unified Champion Schools mid-term report</li> <li>○ Continue to regularly host Unified Club meetings and help fundraise for your Unified Sports team!</li> <li>○ Implement Unified Sport (if the sport you choose falls under this season)</li> <li>○ Begin planning for the next whole school engagement events (we recommend Inclusion Week!)</li> </ul> <p>Optional ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Have your Unified Club participate in one of the SOIA local Polar Plunges or set up a Cool School Plunge for your school!</li> </ul>
Spring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Hold a Whole School Engagement event and share your success with SOIA</li> <li>○ Continue to regularly host Unified Club meetings!</li> <li>○ Implement Unified Sport (if the sport you choose falls under this season)</li> <li>○ School liaison to complete the required online Unified Champion Schools final report</li> </ul> <p>Optional ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Have your Unified Club volunteer at your Area's Spring competition!</li> </ul>





## School Leadership Team

We highly encourage each Unified Champion School® to identify a School Leadership Team, made up of student leaders, staff liaisons and a school administrator, all dedicated to supporting Unified Champion School® activities.

### Staff Liaison

- Every school is required to designate a staff liaison to support student leaders and serve as the primary contact for SOIA communication.
- Some districts have found great success in having two staff liaisons, a primary and a co-liaison. This helps with position turnover.
- The staff liaisons can be any teacher, school counselor, administrator, etc.
- The primary liaison is responsible for completing the mandatory mid-term reporting (December) and final (May/June) reporting.

### Student Leaders

- Student leaders are the key in the success of a Unified Champion School. We encourage each school to identify at least one traditional education student and at least one special education student to help promote Inclusive Youth Leadership.
- Student leaders can take the lead for planning and implementing Unified Champion Schools activities with support from the school liaison.

### Administrator

- Administrator approval is required to participate in Unified Champion Schools. All schools must provide the contact for a school administrator (ex: Principal, Assistant Principal, etc.) to support the Unified Champion Schools efforts.
- The Administrator is responsible for supporting the staff liaisons and student leaders in Unified Champion Schools activities.

### Other (optional)

- Non-school staff (ex: parents, volunteers, community partners, etc.) can be involved with Unified Champion Schools, however the primary liaisons must be official staff of the school.



## Working with Special Olympics Iowa

Special Olympics Iowa is committed to the success of all Unified Champion Schools® and dedicated to providing support, assistance and a helping-hand whenever possible. Our Unified Champion School staff and Regional Directors can be a great resource to contact when brainstorming an event, problem-solving or to share your successes and celebrations!

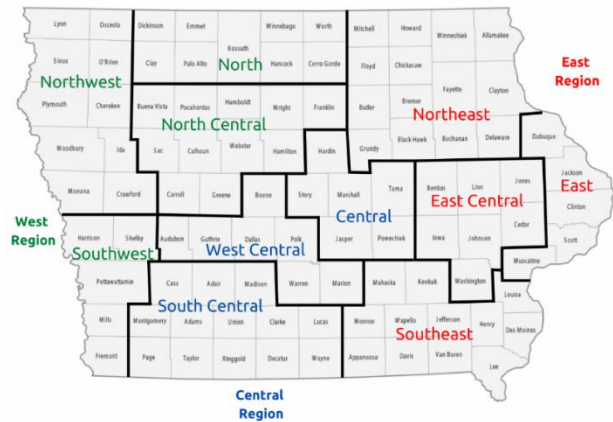
### Special Olympics Iowa Staff

Krista Smith, Director of Unified Programs

- Unified Champion Schools
- Young Athletes

Jerry Lowe, Community Programs Coordinator

- Health and Fitness
- DMPS Unified Champion Schools



### Regional Directors

Special Olympics Iowa splits the state into three regions, divided by counties. You can contact your local Regional Director to participate in local competitions or to get connected with other events going on in your area.

Katie Wiese, Sr. Director of **West** Regional Field Services

Sydney Dommer, Director of **East** Regional Field Services

Dallas Hinkhouse, Director of **Central** Regional Field Services

**Unified Sports®**





## 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 and inclusion opportunities for all teammates to build friendships, on and off the playing field.

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

- Integrates athletes with and without intellectual disabilities in a setting where all teammates are challenged to improve their skills
- Provides valuable sports opportunities to individuals with intellectual disabilities who may not be presently involved with Special Olympics, especially those with mild intellectual disabilities and those in communities where there are not enough Special Olympics athletes to create teams
- Prepares athletes for participation in school or community sports
- Increases public awareness of the spirit and skill of individuals with intellectual disabilities
- Models genuine inclusion for the entire school community

### **Goals of Special Olympics Unified Sports®**

- Sport skill development – under the direction of certified coaches, participants will have the opportunity to develop sport skills
- Competition experience – athletes benefit from physical and mental challenges participating in a variety of competitions organized by SOIA
- Meaningful inclusion – Unified Sports® rules and guidelines on age and ability ensure all teammates play important, meaningful and valued roles on the team
- Friendships and socialization – this program provides a forum for positive social interactions



## Getting Started Checklist

1. **Contact Special Olympics Iowa UCS staff member** ([ksmith@soiowa.org](mailto:ksmith@soiowa.org))

2. **Choose the sport(s) you would like to implement this year:**

Basketball	Bocce	Bowling	Cheer & Dance
Cycling	Figure skating	Flag Football	Golf
Pickleball	Powerlifting	Snowshoeing	Soccer
Softball	Speed Skating	Swimming	Tennis
Track & Field	Volleyball	Unified PE	Young Athletes

3. **Identify a coach** (Note: coaches will need to become certified as a Unified Sports® coach, <https://nfhslearn.com/courses/coaching-unified-sports>)

- Hold interest meeting at the school to promote the team
- Look for those who are passionate about the cause and/or the sport

4. **Recruit Special Olympics Iowa athletes**

- Athletes are students who have an intellectual disability
- Athletes also include people who have closely related developmental disabilities, such as those with functional limitations, both in general learning and in adaptive skills such as recreation, work, independent living, self-direction or self-care (Many eligible Special Olympics athletes may not be in special education classrooms or programs)
- Ask permission to send a school-wide email with details about the program and contact information
- Meet the special education staff in your school to help identify and recruit athletes



## 5. Recruit Unified partners

- Unified partners are any students without an intellectual disability
- A “targeted approach” is recommended when recruiting partners to ensure they are committed to the team
- Also, some schools have an issue with recruiting too many Unified partners and then don’t have a meaningful role for them
- Consider students from your school’s Unified Club, Key Club, Student Council or Best Buddies Club

## 6. Submit teammate forms

- Special Olympics athletes must fill out the Athlete Medical Packet, which must be signed by a medical professional before the first team practice.
- Unified partners must fill out the Class A Volunteer Application
- The team’s coach(es) must fill out the Volunteer Application and complete online trainings
- These forms can be found on <https://www.soiowa.org/get-involved/participation-forms/>

## 7. Secure a facility

- Work with your school Athletic Director on team practice schedules, transportation and facility needs

## 8. Hold regular practices

- Unified Sports teams should practice and compete similarly to any other team at your school
- Remember, your team should practice at least once a week, with the majority of athletes and partners on the team participating in each practice
- Practice can take place during school in a PE class, or after school



## Iowa High School Athletic Association

Special Olympics Iowa and the Iowa High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) are beginning a partnership! The partnership is an exciting step to grow and recognize Unified sports as other sports are recognized in your schools and across the state. IHSAA will work to promote unified sports programs in schools during the 2023-2024 school year. We will help bring and support opportunities throughout the year as able in various unified sports. As unified sports grow here in Iowa, we look forward to expanding offerings to schools in 2024-25 school year and beyond.

Potential for additional opportunities through Special Olympics Iowa and the IHSAA like unified bowling, unified basketball, and others as more and more IHSAA member schools establish unified programs. These opportunities will be shared as they become available while IHSAA also works to promote unified programs through the Special Olympics of Iowa.

Please contact Special Olympics Iowa or IHSAA Assistant Director, Andy Umthun, [aumthun@iahsaa.org](mailto:aumthun@iahsaa.org) with questions or more information on this partnership.





## Unified PE

Unified Physical Education provides a unique opportunity for students with and without intellectual disabilities to come together through ongoing physical educational and physical activities, using the power of Special Olympics. The Unified Physical Education course is structured around the national physical education standards and grade-level outcomes. Additionally, the class supports the development of leadership skills for all students as well as the empowerment of ALL students to foster an inclusive class and school-wide environment. Students in Unified Physical Education courses may have the opportunity to participate in competitions with other schools or attend Special Olympics Iowa events.

[Special Olympics Unified Physical Education Resources](#)

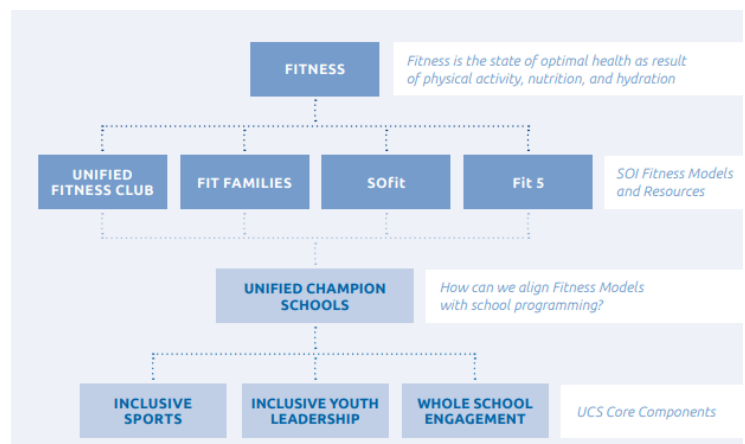
## Unified Fitness

Special Olympics Iowa provides quality sports opportunities for both individuals with and without intellectual disabilities. Good health and physical fitness are essential to sports participation, and Special Olympics Iowa has been working to integrate both into its sports programming. This is significant, not only for the general population, but especially for people with intellectual disabilities who are in comparatively poorer health.

Through a unique combination of intentionally planned and implemented activities, fitness as a part of the Unified Champion Schools program has the capacity to promote social inclusion, and lifelong healthy behaviors within the student body and broader school community.

### Opportunities for Unified Fitness in Schools

- Unified Fitness Club
- SOfit
- Fit 5







## Unified Fitness Club

Unified Fitness Club, created by Special Olympics Connecticut, is a year-round physical-activity-based program that utilizes activity trackers and incentives to engage participants of all abilities and activity levels in healthy lifestyles while also inspiring friendships.

### Goal








Unified Fitness Club provides a fun, social environment that encourages year-round physical activity

### Model

- Clubs follow the year-round Unified Sports Recreation Model, meeting at least once per week
- Walking is often the main activity of choice because it is appropriate for all levels of fitness. Other fitness activities could include hiking, stretching/yoga, Zumba, cycling and strength training
- Steps are tracked through pedometers or other activity trackers
- Clubs and participants earn incentives for reaching various number of steps
- Club leader makes sure all participants fill out Special Olympics Iowa forms for their roles in the club, help compile step data for the group, distribute incentives, plan weekly walks or physical activity sessions and implement all areas of fitness” physical activity, nutrition and hydration
- Unified Fitness Club is typically conducted in after-school programming, but you can get creative to meet the needs to the students and engage the entire student body

### [Unified Fitness Kits + Cards](#)



Unified Fitness club Example Activities	Whole School Engagement	Inclusive Youth Leadership	Unified Sports
Students with and without intellectual disabilities start a fitness-based after-school club, choosing physical activity that unites all Unified Fitness Club members or choosing to introduce a new physical activity during each club meeting			
Coaches of Unified Sports team work with their team captains to create a pre-season Unified Sports Club that encourages fitness training leading up to the sports season			
Parents work with school administrators to organize safe walking routes to and from school, with planned pick-up and drop-off points, for groups of students with and without intellectual disabilities			
Students with and without intellectual disabilities enjoy physical activity before school by meeting as a Unified Fitness Club to follow planned walking routes around the school campus			



## SOfit

SOfit, created by Special Olympics Minnesota, is an eight-week Unified class that combines physical activity, nutrition, and both emotional and social wellness, all through a holistic approach, empowering participants to challenge the way they view health and lifestyle choices.







### Goal

SOfit educates and encourages athletes and Unified partners to maintain healthy lifestyles through increased physical activity, improved nutrition, and a focus on social and emotional wellness.

### Model

- SOfit is a Unified eight-week holistic wellness program
- SOfit offers opportunities to learn, discuss and practice sustained wellness through physical activity, nutrition and wellness education
- Students with and without intellectual disabilities set goals to stay motivated to improve the way they look at nutrition, exercise, and other lifestyle choices
- Each team or group has at least one SOfit trained coach/leader
- Each wellness class is split between a physical and educational component. Classes vary in length, but it is recommended that sessions are at least 45 minutes long to ensure time for check-ins, teaching, physical activity and breaks
- Physical Activity: Coaches collaborate with their team to plan one physical activity each week
- Wellness Education: Coaches collaborate with their team to choose relevant topics from one of the four pillars of wellness: social, emotional, physical, nutritional
- SOfit teachers may utilize the Special Olympics SOfit curriculum to guide the lessons
- Even though SOfit programming is typically eight weeks long, and classes are 45 minutes split into the two components, you can get creative to meet the needs of the students and engage the entire student body



<b>SOfit Example Activities</b>	<b>Whole School Engagement</b>	<b>Inclusive Youth Leadership</b>	<b>Unified Sports</b>
Unified Physical Education teachers integrate the SOfit wellness curriculum into their regular class unit plans to increase understanding and practice of year-round fitness			
Students inspired by their Unified Physical Education course want to share their knowledge with the school; they plan a whole-school wellness week, using the SOfit wellness curriculum to share fitness tips during the morning announcements			
School administrators trying to align with the school district wellness policies create a Unified Wellness elective modeled after SOfit			
Coaches of a Unified Sports team want their athletes to perform at their best on a daily basis; coaches implement SOfit within practices and training			



## Fit 5

Fit 5, created by Special Olympics International, is a resource based on achieving fitness and personal bests through the three simple goals of engaging in five days of exercise per week, eating five total servings of fruits and vegetables per day, and drinking five bottles of water per day. The Fit 5 resource is supported by a series of fitness cards and videos providing a series of exercises in strength, endurance, and flexibility ranging in level of difficulty. All activities can be done in any setting with none to very little equipment. The cards have simple instructions and easy-to-follow pictures, while the videos encourage participants to learn by doing.

### Goal

Fit 5 and fitness cards and videos are resources that empower individuals to make healthy choices related to physical activity, nutrition and hydration.

### The Resource









- There are many ways to be physically active, and Fit 5 provides examples of exercises for endurance, strength, flexibility and balance.
- Eating right is important, and Fit 5 provides examples of healthy food options, portion sizes, and building a healthy plate.
- Drinking the right amount of water is important, and Fit 5 provides hydration tips, healthy drink choices, and signs of dehydration.
- The Fit 5 guide comes with weekly and yearly trackers to keep up with exercise, nutrition and hydration goals.



## In a School Setting

Fit 5 can be used separately or in conjunction with one of the previously discussed fitness models and incorporated into the following: •

- Unified Sports
- Physical Education or Unified Physical Education classes
- Educational Classroom Setting: a school could utilize the Fit 5 cards and videos as a classroom activity break to get students moving and energized

<b>Fit 5 Example Activities</b>	<b>Whole School Engagement</b>	<b>Inclusive Youth Leadership</b>	<b>Unified Sports</b>
Coaches of Unified Sports teams work with their team captains to create a pre-season/off-season Unified Sports Club, utilizing Fit 5 resources, that encourages fitness training all year round			
Unified Physical Education teachers integrate the Fit 5 resources into their regular class unit plans to increase understanding and practice of year-round fitness			
Students inspired by their Unified Physical Education course want to share their knowledge with the school; they plan a whole-school wellness week/wellness challenge using the Fit 5 resources			
Student leaders implement Fit 5 resources into their Unified Fitness Club, SOfit, or Fit Families initiatives to encourage year-round fitness			



## Implementation Planning

Selected fitness models and implementation settings will vary based on individual school needs, and the needs and interests of students involved. Paying attention to student interest will ensure selection of a model that is valued and sustainable. The setting for your fitness programming can vary drastically based on available space, time of sessions, and weather. The great thing about fitness is that it can be done almost anywhere. Be creative and utilize any spaces available in and around your school. Any of the models or resources can be implemented by the whole school, physical education or special education classes, sports teams, or clubs.

### Before- or After-School Clubs

- Clubs allow you to reach students that may not want to participate in traditional sport opportunities
- Schools can create a new and unique club that meets the needs of its participants. The club can choose a specific activity that unites everyone in that group, like a hiking club, or the club may choose to vary activities
- Establish walking, or maybe even biking routes, as a before/after-school program. Utilize parent volunteers to help plan and organize drop-off points and other details. Safe walking routes could also be planned around the school campus if a club meets before or after school to enjoy some physical activity before or after a long day of sitting

### Physical Education and Unified Physical Education

- A teacher can place students into small teams, and a challenge may be created among the groups. Encourage groups to motivate each other to be active, make healthy eating choices, and stay properly hydrated. Incentives may be provided for teams that exceed or meet their goals
- A teacher could utilize the Special Olympics Fitness resource and integrate information into a physical education or Unified Physical Education class



## Unified Sports

- A coach can create a pre-season teammate fitness challenge
- Keep teammates involved in healthy practices by creating opportunities outside of practice time
- A coach can organize off-season Unified Fitness Clubs, creating an opportunity for Unified Sports athletes and others to participate in fitness training leading up to their sport season.
- A coach can integrate SOfit lessons into their Unified Sports team practices. It is important to recognize Special Olympics athletes as athletes, which means providing them opportunity to reach their full potential or personal best. SOfit can introduce athletes to holistic wellness and fitness, which will aid them in making healthy choices on a daily basis and living healthy lifestyles outside of a team practice

## Training

The individuals in the school who are chosen to run the Special Olympics Fitness programming should be trained in, or have experience with, basic fitness principles and working with people with intellectual disabilities. Since it can be difficult to find one person with the training and/or experience in both of these areas, look for individuals who could work together and combine their knowledge. For example, a strength and conditioning coach could align with a special education teacher. However, a school may already have someone with both of those qualifications, and it is important to sometimes look beyond physical education teachers, special education teachers, and coaches. Schools are made up of a variety of unique individuals who could be an asset to your program. Those who require training should utilize the local Special Olympics program's established training models, until more in-depth fitness-specific trainings are developed.





## Young Athletes in Unified Champion Schools

### Special Olympics Iowa Young Athletes

Young Athletes is a sport and play program for children with and without intellectual disabilities (ID), ages 2 to 7 years old. Young Athletes can serve as a key component to an elementary or pre-K Unified Champion School by providing an inclusive sports experience for children. Young Athletes introduces children to sports by teaching them age-appropriate gross motor development skills that support their future participation in Unified Sports®. When conducted in schools or early childhood development centers and combined with Inclusive Youth Leadership and Whole School Engagement, there is a greater potential to impact attitude change and create an environment of inclusion and respect.

### Young Athletes Activity Guide

The [Young Athletes Activity Guide](#) has games and activities that help children learn movements they will use in sports and daily life. There are eight skill areas in the Activity Guide. Each skill area includes activities that can be done with one child or a group of children. There are tips in the Activity Guide on how to adapt the activities to match the skills or needs of each child.

There is an 8-week curriculum guide available that compliments the Young Athletes Activity Guide.

Every Unified Champion Elementary School will receive this equipment and Activity Guide.

### Young Athletes Play Day

The Young Athletes Play Day is a one-day event where students with and without intellectual disabilities are introduced to basic sport skills. Children participate in 11 different activities, representing different sports offered by Special Olympics Iowa. These events happen all over the state and typically run two hours.

# Inclusive Youth Leadership





## Inclusive Youth Leadership

Inclusive Youth Leadership offers opportunities for young people of all abilities to be leaders in their schools and communities by promoting equity and acceptance. These leadership activities help students fund their voices by teaching them to become change agents, striving for respect and inclusion.

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

- Recognizes the leadership assets and value that ALL students possess and can use to contribute meaningfully to the school community
- Brings together students with and without intellectual disabilities as leaders in their school, creating a socially inclusive environment in which lasting friendships can form
- Helps fundraise for your Unified Sprots® team and raises awareness with your whole school
- Provides students with and without intellectual disabilities the knowledge, skills and dispositions to take on leadership roles in their school
- Encourages co-leadership opportunities that promote a deeper understanding of the strengths, gifts and skills of all students

### **Inclusive Youth Leadership Opportunities**

- Start a Unified Club
- Attend the annual Special Olympics Iowa Unified Youth Summit
- Include students with intellectual disabilities in your school's existing clubs and leadership opportunities



## Steps to Starting a Sustainable Unified Club

### What is a Unified Club?

A Unified Club is a club for students with and without intellectual disabilities that come together for sports, games, community service, school events and most of all, to have fun together!

### Steps to starting and maintaining a Unified Club

1. Find out what your school's requirements are for starting a club and make sure you follow their steps
2. Make sure your club leaders are inclusive by selecting leaders with and without disabilities
3. Optional: Select 2-3 fundraisers your school can do this year to raise funds for Unified on your campus!
4. Make a plan to HAVE FUN!

### Unified Club Best Practices

- Ask the Special Education Teacher and/or Special Olympics Iowa coach to share the unified club information with athletes, partners and parents
- Consider having a disability awareness training as part of one of your first few meetings to ensure all participants have a clear understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with various disabilities – knowing this, students can better support each other
- Meetings should be led by the Unified club's leadership but try to find opportunities for all students to take a leadership role within the meetings
- Encourage students to continue their growth through state-level opportunities like the Special Olympics Iowa Youth Summit!

We recommend [Inclusion Tiles](#) as an icebreaker to what inclusion means! The online version can be found [here](#).



## Sample Year at a Glance

August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold first club meeting with icebreakers and <a href="#">Inclusion Tiles</a> activity</li> <li>• Determine club leadership</li> <li>• Determine which Unified Sports you will compete in this year</li> </ul>
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice for upcoming competitions</li> <li>• Utilize Inclusive Youth Leadership resources to teach students about leadership throughout the year</li> <li>• Implement leadership lessons by planning a student lead fundraiser for Unified Club Events, shirts, sports equipment or other needs</li> </ul>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer, be Fans in the Stands or compete at SOIA Area bowling competitions</li> </ul>
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create educational/promotional recordings to be displayed during school announcements</li> <li>• Attend an area Polar Plunge</li> </ul>
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan and host an inclusive holiday party</li> </ul>
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compete in SOIA Area basketball competitions</li> <li>• Start planning for Inclusion Week!</li> </ul>
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan and host an inclusive Valentine's Day party</li> <li>• Create banners and be Fans in the Stands at a local Special Olympics Iowa event</li> </ul>
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion Week!</li> <li>• Include Unified Team athletes in your school's pep assembly</li> </ul>
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compete in a SOIA area track &amp; field competition</li> <li>• Host a Cool School Plunge!</li> </ul>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold an end of the year celebration!</li> </ul>



## Sample Memo to Parents and Guardians

To: Parents and Guardians

From: Teacher Name, Title

Date: *(enter date here)*

Re: Special Olympics Iowa Unified Champion Schools Programs

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Dear Parent or Guardian,

The Unified Club® is a Special Olympics Iowa school-based program. It teams students with and without intellectual disabilities through sports training, competition, social, academic and recreational opportunities.

The Unified Club® provides opportunities to build student character, increase acceptance of disabilities, develop leadership and their schools in a service-learning environment and enhance their school community. It is a program that teaches beyond the classroom and expands students' social horizons.

Each Unified Club® determines what activities and events they wish to participate in throughout the year. In addition to social and recreational activities, Unified Sports® will be offered by Special Olympics Iowa. Clubs are encouraged to participate in sports opportunities offered by Special Olympics Iowa, but are not required to do so. Clubs meet on a regular basis during the school day or before/after school.

Attached you will find the permission slip and forms required for your student to participate in the Unified Club® and/or Unified Sports® this year. Please review the forms and contact me if you have any questions. When the forms are complete, send them back to school with your student.

Sincerely,

(Insert teacher and student name/title here)



## Unified Young Readers Club

The [Unified Young Readers Club](#) books and study guides are another tool for teachers to use as they address topics such as inclusion, awareness, friendship, bullying and acceptance to audiences of both students with and without intellectual disabilities. Each book has a theme that relates to multiple state academic standards and aligns with the precepts of positive school climate initiatives like PBIS and Leader in Me. Guidance counselors can use these resources to help them as students work on ways to make and keep friends and identify feelings. Whether the books are used with self-contained classes or with inclusive groups, the resulting “Ah Ha!” moments will be just as satisfying.

The Unified Young Readers Club is a great inclusive activity for a younger audience and accompanies Special Olympics Young Athletes play with books and study guides that support teachers as they address such topics as inclusion, awareness, friendship, bullying, and acceptance to audiences of both students with and without intellectual disabilities. Each book has a theme that relates to multiple state academic standards and aligns with the precepts of positive school climate initiatives.



## Special Olympics Iowa & Best Buddies are Better Together

### Improving School Environments Together through Inclusive Friendship, Leadership and Sport.

Best Buddies School Chapters and Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® (UCS) share complementary missions of inclusion, leadership, and opportunity. Best Buddies and UCS' education strategy brings a unique approach to schools across the country through a cohesive focus on acceptance. Offering both programs on your school campus will provide a diverse opportunity for students to engage in inclusive activities, empowering events, and gain inclusive leadership skills.

### What are the Differences?

Best Buddies School Friendship Chapters employ a formal club structure that fosters genuine friendships and social connection between people with and without IDD through one-to-one friendships and large group activities. Students with and without IDD are empowered to lead chapter events.

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program is aimed at promoting social inclusion through a three component model: sports, inclusive youth leadership opportunities, and whole school engagement. This equips young people with the tools and training to create sports, classroom and school climates of acceptance.







## **We go Hand in Hand**

- Host a Special Olympics Unified Sports event for one of your monthly Best Buddies chapter events
- Both programs require a student leadership team comprised of individuals with and without IDD
- Highlight both clubs during Inclusion Week or Best Buddies Month in March
- Buddy pairs could compete together in Special Olympics Unified Sports
- Both clubs could co-lead an assembly or classroom educational lesson on disability awareness and inclusion
- Take advantage of Best Buddies inclusive leadership and advocacy trainings hosted each semester
- Both programs offer inclusive, annual leadership conferences

# Whole School Engagement





## Whole School Engagement

An important feature of creating a socially inclusive school climate is engaging the entire school community in the process. With tools such as Inclusion Week, Minutes That Matter, Fans in the Stands and Unified Sports Days, youth raise awareness and begin creating an educational environment where respect and acceptance are the norm. All students feel included and engaged!

Whole School activities engage students, teachers, staff, community leaders and others to increase their social inclusion knowledge, skills and dispositions and support a socially inclusive school climate.

### **Whole School engagement is a unique and important component because it:**

- Engages the entire staff and student body in building awareness and understanding the benefit to all when the assets and contributions of each individual are recognized, honored and supported
- Energizes social inclusion efforts and expands stakeholder involvement beyond a passionate few
- Is a critical component to creating a socially inclusive school climate
- Provides an opportunity for the most engaged students at a Unified Champion School® to create a ripple effect from their actions and advocacy

### **Goals of Whole School Engagement:**

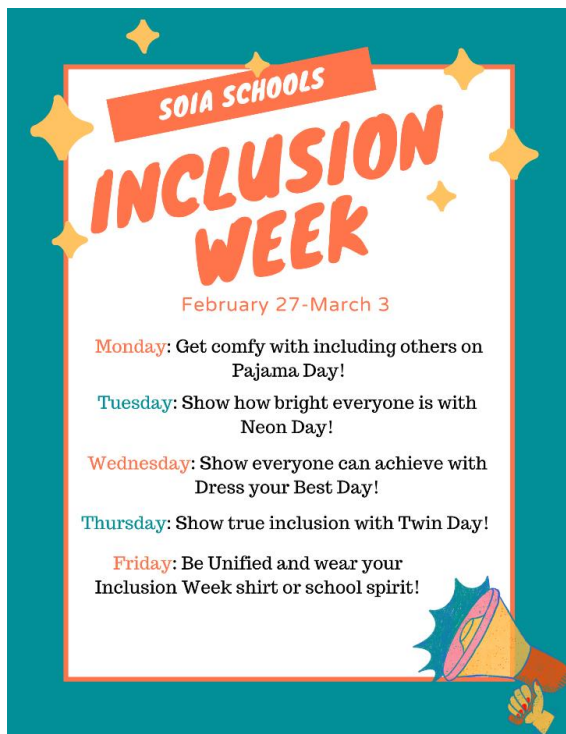
- Students without disabilities will hold more positive attitudes toward their peers with intellectual disabilities
- Schools will become communities of acceptance where students with intellectual disabilities feel welcomed and are routinely included in and feel a part of all school activities, opportunities and functions

## Inclusion Week!

Inclusion Week is a whole week dedicated to bring awareness and celebrate Inclusion! It highlights the joys of ALL abilities and allows us to share the importance of inclusion.

Special Olympics Iowa and Best Buddies partner throughout Inclusion Week to provide activities that promote and advocate for inclusion of students of all abilities!

110+ schools participate in Inclusion Week, ranging from all geographic locations of Iowa and include preschool, elementary, middle, high and college levels.



## Other Whole School Engagement Opportunities

- One Day Unified Sports Day or Young Athletes Play Day
- Participate in a local Polar Plunge or host your own Cool School Plunge
- Be Fans in the Stands or volunteers at a SOIA competition
- Have a pep rally for your Unified team
- Recognize SOIA athletes in the same way as other athletes at your school

## Cool School Plunge



# COOL SCHOOL POLAR PLUNGE

## FUNDRAISING JUST GOT COOL

### What is a Polar Plunge®?

The Polar Plunge® is a signature fundraiser for Special Olympics and offers a unique opportunity for individuals and organizations to raise money and support Special Olympics Iowa athletes by jumping into frigid waters.

### How can my school participate?

Staff and students register and fundraise money for Special Olympics Iowa and their school or Special Olympics delegation, earn awesome incentives, and get the chance to cool their body while warming their hearts!

### What happens next?

On the day of the event, we bring the Polar Plunge directly to your school with our plunge unit, a custom-made mobile Plunge pool!



## CONTACT US

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Grimes, IA 50111  
[www.solowa.org](http://www.solowa.org)

Krista Smith  
Unified Programs Coordinator  
[ksmith@solowa.org](mailto:ksmith@solowa.org)  
515-986-5520



## National Banner Recognition

### Demonstrated commitment to inclusion

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® receiving national banner recognition is one that has demonstrated commitment to inclusion by meeting 10 national standards of excellence. These standards were developed by a national panel of leaders from Special Olympics and the education community.

To achieve National Banner Recognition Status, you must incorporate and sustain 10 standards, which include: Special Olympics Unified Sports® (where students with and without disabilities train and compete as teammates), Inclusive Youth Leadership and Whole School Engagement. Banner Unified Champion Schools® should also be able to demonstrate they are self-sustainable or have a plan in place to sustain these activities in the future.

Once your school achieves this recognition status, not only is your school recognized on the Special Olympics International website, you also get an awesome pep rally and are awarded a gym-sized banner to celebrate your outstanding achievement!





## Funding and Fundraising

### Special Olympics Iowa

Special Olympics Iowa does not charge athletes and Unified partners to participate in Unified programs so it's important that each year, your school promotes a culture of inclusion but also sustainability! Fundraising opportunities help support Unified Sports®, Inclusive Youth Leadership and Whole School Engagement.

### Unified Champion Schools®

The Unified Champion Schools program is funded through the US Office of Special Education at the US Department of Education (OSEP). The use of federal funding must be pre-approved, requested and then exclusively used for inclusive activities that are budget reducing for your school, club, center, etc. Every school is given a set amount of funding that can be used to enhance their programs.



### Sustainability within Unified Champion Schools®

Years 1 through 3 as a Unified Champion School®, you will receive a set allotment amount

Years 4 and on, our goal is for your school to be self-sustainable while incorporating fundraising events with Special Olympics Iowa

Schools are encouraged to fundraise for their Unified Clubs/school related expenses, local program opportunities and or/SOIA

As Unified Champion Schools® fundraise for local sporting opportunities, please contact Krista Smith ([ksmith@soiowa.org](mailto:ksmith@soiowa.org)) to set up your Special Olympics account



## Key Terms

### **athlete**

Not capitalized. Refers to an individual with an intellectual disability.

Example: Special Olympics Iowa has over 12,000 athletes statewide.

### **Inclusive Youth Leadership (IYL)**

Students with and without intellectual disabilities working together to lead and plan advocacy, awareness and other Special Olympics related include activities throughout the school year.

### **Unified partner**

Unified is capitalized, partner is not. Refers to an individual without an intellectual disability.

Example: I spend time with my Unified partner Joey on and off the field.

### **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 it in full.

### **Special Olympics College Club**

Capitalized. Special Olympics College Club is a specific brand within Special Olympics College programming. Special Olympics College Clubs are registered student organizations recognized both by their institution and SOIA. College clubs fall under the inclusive youth leadership component but also support whole campus engagement and Special Olympics Unified Sports.

### **Special Olympics college programming**

Special Olympics college programming is Unified Champion Schools programming for colleges and universities that fall under the Special Olympics Unified Champion schools umbrella. All U.S. postsecondary institutions (colleges, universities, community colleges, junior colleges, etc) with Special Olympics college programming including Special Olympics Unified sports, inclusive leadership and whole campus engagement should be counted as a Unified Champion school.

### **Special Olympics North America (SONA)**

Refers to the Special Olympics region that includes the United States, Canada and Caribbean programs.





## **Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® (SOUCS)**

Special Olympics Unified Champion schools on first reference. After first reference, it can be referred to as Unified Champion school or SOUCS. 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.

Example: Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® promotes social inclusion through planned and implemented activities affecting systems-wide change.

## **Special Olympics Unified Sports®**

On first reference, refer to as Special Olympics Unified Sports®. Unified Sports on second reference is fine. Always capitalize when referring to include sports and fitness activities that bring together people with intellectual disabilities (athletes) and those without intellectual disabilities (partners) on sports teams for training and competition. Examples include such things as: Interscholastic Unified Sports, Unified PE or Unified Intramurals. Special Olympics Unified Sports and Special Olympics Young Athletes are examples of inclusive sports.

## **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 by the sport/activity is not.

Example: Mary coaches Unified basketball.

## **Unified Champion City Schools (UCCS)**

The Unified Champion City schools initiative is a focused, initiative-based approach within ongoing Unified Champion Schools work to amplify the essential elements of Unified Champion Schools programming within city school districts. Through the Unified Champion City Schools initiative, Special Olympics will be partnering with underserved communities to expand and accelerate UCS programming and make a lasting impact of inclusion.

## **Unified Club**

A Unified Club is a non-academic, school-based club that brings students with and without ID together for planning and participating in Special Olympics activities including Unified Sports, social and community activities that foster understanding and acceptance and that promote leadership and collaborative skill building.



## Resources

### Special Olympics Iowa Homepage

[www.soiowa.org](http://www.soiowa.org)

### Special Olympics school Resource Homepage

<https://www.specialolympics.org/what-we-do/youth-and-schools/unified-schools?locale=en>

### Class A Volunteer Requirements

<https://www.soiowa.org/get-involved/class-a-volunteers/>

Class A Volunteer form

Online Protective Behaviors Training (16 years & older)

Online Concussion Awareness

### Coaching Unified Sports Online Certification (One-time training)

This is a free online course done by ESPN that all Unified Coaches attending State events must complete

<https://nfhslearn.com/courses/coaching-unified-sports>

## Special Olympics Iowa Social Media

Follow us!



Facebook (@specialolympicsiowa)



Instagram (@specialolympicsia)