A Guide to Becoming a Project UNIFY School
Project UNIFY Vision:

Promote school communities where all young people are agents of change—fostering acceptance, respect, dignity and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities and thereby anyone who is perceived as different.

For generations, millions of Americans have looked to the Special Olympics movement as being at the heart of building a more healthy, hopeful and accepting nation. And now, a new generation of youth is showing the urgency and dedication to be change makers. At the core of Project UNIFY (PU) is a paradigm shift with young people no longer seen as recipients of learning and programming but rather as architects of relationships and community building.

PU integrates Special Olympics programs with ongoing youth activities and focuses on creating and sustaining education systems, classroom practices, school climate, and community engagement to ensure all students develop intellectual, physical, civic and emotional competencies.

PU was implemented in 2008; building on the Special Olympics platform of sports, competitions and events for individuals with intellectual disabilities. A focus was put on school-based opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities to be successful and students without intellectual disabilities to gain awareness and understanding leading to advocacy for human rights and social justice.

This guide provides information on Project UNIFY initiatives for schools.

Special Olympics Mission

To provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continued 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.
Unified Sports™

Overview: Special Olympics Unified Sports is fun for all ages, but is particularly powerful as an educational tool in schools. Unified Sports is an inclusive program which combines individuals with intellectual disabilities (athletes) and individuals without intellectual disabilities (partners) on sports teams for training and competition. Athletes and partners compete alongside one another, each in a meaningful and integral role on the Unified Sports team.

Special Olympics Arkansas offers Unified Teams in several sports already. And starting a team is easy! Follow these steps and you will be crossing the finish line in no time.

1. Visit our website
   http://www.specialolympicsarkansas.org/unified-sports.html
2. Follow directions for set up
3. Reach out to your Area Director or Field Representative about competition dates
4. Start practicing (Teams should practice for eight weeks prior to regional competitions).

Inclusive Sports Activities

Overview: Inclusive Sports Activities allows youth with and without intellectual disabilities the opportunity to take full participation in physical activities and sports at any and all levels. Inclusive Sports can be recreational activities as well, always placing a spotlight on the individual's abilities. Youth learn how to take those individual abilities and team together to accomplish goals.

Activity Ideas:
• Activities can be done in a class lesson, physical education classes, a whole day event, after school or during recess.
• The activities are endless; here are a few ideas for inclusive sports activities:
  • Bocce
  • Adaptive PE
  • Fundamental Skill Building
  • Kickball
  • Inclusive Dance

• Schools can also team up together. Inclusive sports are a great way for older students to display leadership in schools and help younger students learn by inclusive examples.
Young Athletes Program

Overview: Young Athletes Program (YAP) is an innovative sports/play program designed to introduce children ages 2 to 7, with and without intellectual disabilities to the world of sports. Through YAP, a child acquires and improves fundamental skills such as:

- Walking
- Throwing
- Balancing
- Running
- Catching
- Jumping

These building blocks result in notable improvements in a child’s motor skills, cognitive development, social skills, emotional development and communication skills.

Activity Ideas:
- YAP activities can be done as a class lesson or as a whole day activity.
- YAP can be done indoors or outdoors.
- Team up with other schools or organizations. Youth from middle and high schools can organize the YAP event and/or volunteer the day of the event.

Special Olympics Oath:

Let me win; But if I cannot win, Let me be brave in the attempt.
Partner Clubs

Overview: Partner Clubs, also known as Buddy Clubs, offers students without intellectual disabilities ways to build relationships and support others with intellectual disabilities through a variety of activities related to Special Olympics. Partners can help teach sports skills, organize Special Olympics events and games, fundraise for Special Olympics, and help Special Olympics in many other important ways.

Activity Ideas:
• Make a video about Special Olympics, Special Olympics athletes, and Partner Club members in your school.
• Organize an assembly to introduce the Partner Club to the school.
• Attend a local Special Olympics event with the athletes who you helped to train in order to see them compete and then watch the benefits of your coaching.
• Organize inclusive activities at your school to raise awareness of others.

Youth Activation Council

Overview: A gathering of young people with and without intellectual disabilities who will be educated, motivated and activated to commit to the UNIFY vision: Promote school communities where all young people are agents of change--fostering acceptance, respect, dignity and advocacy with and for people with intellectual disabilities and, therefore, anyone who is perceived as being different.

Youth Activation Council (YAC) members are leaders in their schools who promote respect and acceptance for all students. They are ambassadors for Special Olympics and challenge peers to create a healthier, more tolerant school environment.

All high school students are welcome to join the council. Please contact Special Olympics Arkansas for more information.
Other Youth Leadership Ideas

• Youth as Volunteers
  • Have youth help with Special Olympics teams or go to other schools and talk about inclusion.

• Youth Leadership Training
  • Conduct training to teach students how to successfully communicate the UNIFY message in schools. Special Olympics Arkansas has curriculum for this training.

• Youth Coaches
  • The students serve as coaches for their peer athletes in preparing for local competitions and games.

• Special Olympics Fundraisers
  • Youth organized fundraising events such as “Hat Day”, or participation in a scheduled Special Olympics fundraiser such as a Polar Plunge, or 5K Run/Walk.
Special Olympics Get Into It

This interactive resource is designed to provide FREE education and engagement tools for teachers and students to educate about compassion, diversity and respect as exemplified through the Special Olympics movement and athletes. Through *Get into it* we can:

- **Educate** - Provide youth with school and community-based opportunities and strategies to help them understand their potential and ways to serve as active agents for change in their local, national and global communities.

- **Motivate** - Energize youth to unleash their creative leadership potential to respect and advocate with and for persons with disabilities.

- **Activate** - Transform communities by inspiring youth to open their minds, accept and include people with intellectual disabilities and, thereby, anyone who is perceived as different.

Activity Ideas:
- Older students can present *Get Into It* lessons to younger classrooms.
- Many of the resources can be turned into art projects. Have students illustrate differences or pictures of being kind and hang them in the classroom or school hallways.
- Reading Buddies! *Get Into It* provides some great books with inclusive messages. Have students read to each other or ask for older students to work on reading with younger students.

Check out the *Get Into It* resources at www.getintoit.specialolympics.org
Spread the Word to End the Word

Overview: Spread the Word to End the Word is an ongoing effort by Special Olympics and supporters to raise the consciousness of society about the dehumanizing and hurtful effects of the word “retard(ed)” and encourage people to pledge to stop using the R-word.

The campaign, created by youth, is intended to engage schools, organizations and communities to rally and pledge their support at www.r-word.org and promotes the inclusion and acceptance of people with intellectual disabilities.

Most activities are centered annually in March, but people everywhere can help spread the word throughout their communities and schools year-round.

Activity Ideas:
• Youth organized rallies/assembly
• Pledge drive
• Online activation - Blog, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
School Wide Activity

Pep Rally or Assemblies

• Youth Rally/Youth Forum
  • Students can get involved by organizing assemblies and rallies that represent a UNIFYing message.

  • Host an essay contest with a theme of respect or inclusion. Have students share and read their essays with schools.

  • Decorate the hallways with art that has the UNIFY message.

• Have a guest speaker come to your school. Special Olympics Arkansas has Global Messengers and Project UNIFY Global Messengers who would love to visit with your students.
Resources and Contacts

Special Olympics Arkansas
- Website: [www.specialolympicsarkansas.org](http://www.specialolympicsarkansas.org)
- Facebook: Special Olympics Arkansas
- Twitter: @SOArkansas
- Contact: Director of Field Services, Initiatives, and Volunteers – Jennifer Grantham
- Email: Jennifer@specialolympicsarkansas.org
- Phone: 501-771-0222
- Special Olympics Arkansas Address
  - 2115 Main Street North Little Rock Ar, 72114
Special Olympics Project UNIFY®

Special Olympics Project UNIFY is a series of innovative activities through which public and private schools can become more involved in Special Olympics through a variety of youth leadership opportunities, sports and awareness activities. These activities align with many anti-bullying, character education and social justice campaigns in which most schools are involved. For schools that already have active Special Olympics programs, Project UNIFY will enhance that relationship. For those schools not involved in Special Olympics, Project UNIFY will offer a variety of activities that will educate students about Special Olympics athletes and building schools and communities of inclusion and acceptance.

Project UNIFY initiatives includes activities such as:

Sports
- Unified Sports® or Inclusive Sports Opportunities: sports participation involving people with and without intellectual disabilities.
- Young Athletes Program: inclusive “sports readiness” program for two to seven year olds.

Youth Leadership/Advocacy
- Partner/Buddy Clubs: newly formed clubs or an existing school club which plan/carry out activities for/with Special Olympics athletes.
- Youth Volunteers: students volunteering with the local Special Olympics program during competition and other events.
- Youth Coaches: the students serve as coaches for their peer athletes in preparing for competition/local games.
- Special Olympics Fundraisers: youth organized fundraising events such as a “Hat Day” or participation in a scheduled Special Olympics fundraiser such as a Polar Plunge or 5K Run/Walk.

School-wide Activities
- Get Into It: dozens of free skill-based activities, games, worksheets and more endorsed by the Department of Education for use in general education classrooms. [https://getintoit.specialolympics.org](https://getintoit.specialolympics.org)
- Spread the Word to End the Word: campaign to encourage acceptance of people with intellectual disabilities and educate students about not using the R-word (retard/retarded) through activities such as pledge drives.
- Pep Rally or Assembly: supporting R-word events, awareness campaigns or the athletes competing in Special Olympics.
All Project UNIFY schools will be **required** to include:

- Youth leadership roles in carrying out the initiatives, with Special Olympics athlete involvement in some manner.
- The Special Olympics Project UNIFY logo used on all printed materials.
- Completion of an online survey at the beginning and end of Project UNIFY.
- Brief monthly updates. This can be done by the student or educator.

For the 2013-2014 school year, there are two categories of schools within Project UNIFY.

- Category 1 schools must include three or more of the above initiatives, one of which must be a Unified Sports/Inclusive Sports opportunity.
- Category 2 schools will include at least two of the above initiatives.

*To participate in Project UNIFY for the 2014-15 school year, please complete the attached form and return it to Special Olympics Arkansas*

Questions? Contact Special Olympics Arkansas or 501-771-0222