A Guide to Becoming a Project UNIFY School
What is Special Olympics Project UNIFY®?

Special Olympics Project UNIFY® brings youth with and without intellectual disabilities together 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, respect and human dignity. Project UNIFY, is supported in part by funding from the U.S. Department of Education.

Project UNIFY combines three main components:
1. Youth Leadership
2. Inclusive Sports
3. Whole School Engagement

It is the combination of these unique components that provides the best opportunity for creating positive school climates and ensuring that all students, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, become part of the social fabric of the school.

Special Olympics Project UNIFY® Vision

To promote school communities where all young people are agents of change - fostering acceptance, respect, dignity and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities, and for everyone.

About Project UNIFY

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 is the belief that young people are no longer seen as just recipients of learning, but rather as architects of relationships and community building.

PU integrates Special Olympics programs with ongoing youth activities and focuses on creating and sustaining positive school climates, classroom practices, 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.
Youth Leadership

Special Olympics Project UNIFY Club or Project UNIFY Leadership Board

- Start a new Special Olympics Project UNIFY Club or Project UNIFY Leadership Board at your school focused around Special Olympics and officially recognized by the school administration.
- Your Project UNIFY club or Leadership Board will promote activities that engage students at your school in Special Olympics sports experiences, leadership initiatives to raise school awareness, and social and recreational opportunities with students with intellectual disabilities.

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Youth leadership and advocacy through Project UNIFY helps to create a welcoming and inclusive school climate that promotes positive and respectful attitudes for all students.

Project UNIFY Clubs

Special Olympics Project UNIFY clubs are inclusive clubs that offer students without intellectual disabilities ways to build relationships and support others with intellectual disabilities through a variety of activities related to Special Olympics. The Project UNIFY club members encourage welcoming and respectful school environments, and promote “Pledge Respect” campaigns (such as the Spread the Word to End the Word event).

Activity ideas:
- Help teach sport skills, volunteer or participate in Special Olympics sports events.
- Promote Special Olympics Unified Sports and become a Unified Partner.
- Raise awareness for Special Olympics by creating a Cool Schools team for the Polar Bear Plunge.
- Fans in the Stands (cheer at Special Olympics events).
- Organize inclusive activities at your schools that bring together students with and without disabilities.
YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Project UNIFY Leadership Board

The Special Olympics Project UNIFY Leadership Board consist of leaders in their school who are genuinely passionate about creating inclusive and welcoming school environments. These students will educate, motivate, and activate their peers by promoting sports participation, youth leadership and whole-school awareness through Special Olympics initiatives. A group of 8-12 student leaders from various grade levels may be represented.

Activity ideas:
- Promote Special Olympics Unified Sports at your school and become a Unified Partner.
- Help teach sport skills, volunteer or participate in Special Olympics sports events.
- Organize and implement inclusive activities at your schools to bring together students with and without disabilities
- Organize and lead Special Olympics sports events or training opportunities.
- Fans in the Stands (cheer at Special Olympics events).
- Fundraise for Special Olympics Delaware (for a Cool Schools team at the Polar Bear Plunge, etc.)
- Organize and lead the Spread the Word to End the Word event at your school. Help find ways to make the whole school fully engaged, such as an assembly, pep rally or other event.
- Visit another school, such as a middle school or elementary school, to talk about inclusion, acceptance and respect during the national “Spread the Word to End the Word” day. Help them to organize a “Pledge Respect” campaign.

NOTE: The faculty adviser helps the Project UNIFY Youth Activation Committee but the majority of the work rests on the student leaders in order to strengthen their leadership roles.

OTHER PROJECT UNIFY YOUTH LEADERSHIP IDEAS:
- Volunteer at a local Special Olympics Delaware area program in your community for further community service opportunities (see p.10 for SODE area program locations).
- Use Special Olympics “Get Into It” lessons & resources to teach students about Project UNIFY
- Think of other creative school fundraisers that youth can help organize and lead
Unified Sports

Special Olympics 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.

Students who participate in inclusive sports:
• learn new sports together, experience meaningful inclusion, socialize and form friendships, demonstrate inclusion in their schools and/or communities.

**ACTIVITY IDEAS:**
1. Start a Unified sports activity at your school by contacting Special Olympics Delaware to get details - www.sode.org
2. Or, contact a Special Olympics community team in your area and sign up individually to become a Unified Partner.
3. Start practicing (Teams practice for at least 8 weeks prior to regional competitions).

Inclusive sports activities in school

In addition to becoming a Unified Partner, participants can also be a part of Special Olympics “player development” or “skills development” with an existing Special Olympics team. These inclusive sports activities allow youth an opportunity to help at any and all levels.

**ACTIVITY IDEAS:**
- Help to recruit volunteers and organize a Special Olympics sports tournament (basketball, soccer, etc.)
- Host a Special Olympics sports training day or a clinic (volleyball, softball, etc.) with varsity sports clubs
- Inclusive sports activities can be done after school, during recess, or during the day. Start a youth-led “walking club” during or after school for Special Olympics athletes.
- Adaptive physical education - volunteer your help with the class!
- Team up with local Special Olympics area programs and volunteer at practices, competitions or events.
Inclusive sports with Young Athletes™

Special Olympics Young Athletes™ Program (YAP) is another sports program that encompasses sport and play for younger children ages 2-7 years old, focusing on the development of motor skills and hand-eye coordination that encourage mental and physical growth in an inclusive setting. Through YAP, a child acquires and improves fundamental skills such as:

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

**ACTIVITY IDEAS:**

- Young Athletes Programs (YAP) can be done as a class lesson or as a whole day activity
- Young Athletes can be done indoors or outdoors
- Team up with other schools. Youth from Elementary and Middle Schools can volunteer during the day of the event. High Schools can help to organize the Young Athletes event, set up equipment, and recruit volunteers to help. This is a great service-learning opportunity for students.

*SODE Young Athletes Program (YAP) provides opportunities for young children with and without disabilities to have fun, be active, and learn foundational sports skills. YAP raises awareness about the abilities of children who have challenges through inclusive peer participation, demonstration and other events.*
“Pledge Respect” initiatives have been taking social advocacy to a whole new level by the variety of creative ideas and events that have been utilized by schools of all grade levels to carry the message of respect, acceptance and inclusion. Pledge Respect activities can align with school anti-bullying programs and also fit with programs for celebrating diversity, promoting people-first language and disability awareness.

**Spread the Word to End the Word (STWTETW)** is an ongoing effort by Special Olympics and supporters to raise the consciousness of society about the hurtfulness of the word “retard(ed)” to people with disabilities and those who love them.

The campaign, created by youth, is intended to engage schools, organizations and communities to rally and pledge their support with signatures, awareness-themed activities and events that help to foster greater acceptance of people with intellectual disabilities. Although the campaign promotes respectful language, it opens the dialogue for additional conversations about how schools and communities can change their attitudes by respecting all people.

Special Olympics Delaware provides the resources, materials, and t-shirt order form that schools use to create a campus-wide awareness event. The STWTETW toolkit is given to participating schools who request the kit and who commit to promoting respectful attitudes amongst their students. Most activities are centered annually in March, but people everywhere can help spread the word throughout their communities and schools year-round.

**Middle School and High School Activity Ideas:**
- Student-organized “Pep Rally for Respect” or school assembly
- Pledge campaign in the main lobby or cafeteria and sign the banner
- Morning announcements on the day of the event
- Online activation - Blog, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
- Make a video about how your school participated
- Make plans to visit your feeder elementary or middle school and speak at an assembly, help demonstrate the Pledge Campaign, give out stickers and ask them to sign the banner
- 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.
School-wide “Pledge Respect” Initiatives

May be aligned with anti-bullying and disability awareness

The theme of “Respect” can be used as a springboard to open up discussions about the definition of respect, how you are a respectful person, how you give respect, and how you earn respect.

The “Pledge Respect” activities may be aligned with anti-bullying programs and, again, can be utilized to fit in with disability awareness activities. Schools can be creative in how they integrate their own “Pledge Respect” campaign at their school.

Elementary School Activity Ideas

For younger age groups, the theme and activities can be very general and positive. Here is one example:

“We define and practice “respect” and “being a good friend.” We practice through role-playing and supportive child-friendly literature. We have developed visual supports to clarify the language and new vocabulary. We devote the entire week to practicing and defining respect and respectful behavior. We have the parents and families involved for the actual “pledging” by sending home cut-out “pledge hearts” and encouraging families to spread the word to families and friends across the country. We hang the hearts on our banner and also on bulletin boards around the school. We have partnered with the Elementary School that we share a building with to join for activities. Our PTA wanted to be involved and offered to purchase t-shirts for our entire student body, and we also allowed families to order additional shirts and make donations to the Special Olympics. All classroom teachers are involved and embrace the event.”

(- Lauren Fleck, Bush EEC, Brandywine School District)
Special Olympics Get Into It™ - Lessons and Resources

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

GET INTO IT is a free, K-12 age-appropriate service-learning curriculum designed to advance students’ civic knowledge and skill development, promote acceptance and understanding of people's differences and to motivate them to become advocates for and together with all people. The curriculum is designed for general education classrooms with modifications and extensions to include all learners. Features of this widely-endorsed curriculum are: lessons broken into grade-level sections, inspiring athlete stories, experiential role plays, opportunities for student self-reflection, powerful youth-oriented videos, a culminating youth-led service-learning project.
Volunteering with Special Olympics outside of school in your own local community

- Additional opportunities exist for youth to help by volunteering with Special Olympics outside of school. Make a difference with community service!
- Volunteers are the backbone of the Special Olympics movement.
- Volunteers from the community are essential and can offer their time and knowledge to help our Special Olympics athletes.
- Training is provided for all volunteer positions to maximize your skills set.

SIGN UP TODAY!
Students may sign up to help in their community by contacting their local Special Olympics Delaware Area program to be involved in any of the following ways:
- Become a Unified Partner
- Sign up as a team volunteer in helping athletes to prepare for their sport

CONTACT A SPECIAL OLYMPICS AREA DIRECTOR TO VOLUNTEER IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY:

1. Special Olympics Wilmington - Dave Cloud, Area Director
   302-416-0041 OR Email: sode.wilmington@gmail.com

2. Special Olympics Newark - Tim Kiser, Area Director
   302-593-0052 OR Email: sode.newark@gmail.com

3. Special Olympics MOT (Middletown, Odessa, Townsend, Smyrna) - Bonnie Wagner, Area Director
   302-740-9108 OR Email: sode.mot@gmail.com

4. Special Olympics Kent County - Dave Manwiller, Area Director
   302-233-8018 OR Email: sode.kent@gmail.com

5. Special Olympics Sussex County - Kris Jarecki, Area Director
   302-245-6945 OR Email: sode.esussex@gmail.com
   Carol Breeding, Asst. Area Director
   302-542-6465 OR Email: sode.wsussex@gmail.com
PROJECT UNIFY CONTACTS

For more information on school participation and youth leadership with Special Olympics Project UNIFY, “Get Into It” resources OR to request materials for the Spread the Word to End the Word campaigns or Pledge Respect initiatives, please contact:

Kylie Melvin
PU Coordinator, Youth & School Initiatives
302-831-8582
Email: kymel@udel.edu

Ruth Coughlan
PU Program Liaison
302-831-4048
Email: coughlan@udel.edu

- For information on starting a Young Athletes Program, contact Jon Buzby at jbzby@udel.edu.
- To learn more about volunteering outside of school in one of our Special Olympics Area programs, contact the Area Director for that area or email Mark Wise at mwise@udel.edu.

WEBSITES

Special Olympics Delaware (SODE)
www.sode.org

SODE Project UNIFY Webpage
www.sode.org/project-unify/

Project UNIFY
www.specialolympics.org/project_unify.aspx

Special Olympics International
www.specialolympics.org

Get Into It™
www.getintoit.specialolympics.org

Spread the Word to End the Word
www.r-word.org

SOCIAL MEDIA

FACEBOOK:
Special Olympics Delaware - Project Unify

FOLLOW ON TWITTER:
@unifysode and @sodelaware

FOLLOW ON INSTAGRAM
#projectunifysode
(Tag #unifysode)

Special Olympics Delaware
619 South College Avenue
Newark, DE 19716
Phone: 302-831-4653
FAX: 302-831-3483