



Unified Champion Schools Starter Guide

Special Olympics
Michigan





What is Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools?

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools is an education-based project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education and State of Michigan that uses the sports and education programs of Special Olympics to activate young people across the U.S. in order to promote school communities where all young people are agents of change – fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics believes that through sports young people can make a difference in friendships, schools and communities. Special Olympics Michigan has expanded Unified Champion Schools to more than 200 schools throughout Michigan for the 2016-2017 academic year. The belief of Unified Champion Schools is that young people are not just the leaders of tomorrow – but they can be leaders today in their schools, their communities and around the world.



How it works

Unified Champion Schools is made up of 3 main components

1. Youth Leadership and Advocacy
2. Inclusive Sports
3. Whole School Engagement.

Youth Leadership and Advocacy

Unified Champion Schools is built around empowering Youth to lead. Schools form a Youth Activation Committee (YAC) comprised of students with and without disabilities. Similar to a student council, the YAC is the student leadership committee, which works closely with the school liaison to make decisions for the Unified Champion Schools school year. The YAC decides, what Unified Sport they will participate in, how they will host their R—word campaign, what volunteer and Special Olympics Activities they will participate in. They plan and implement the activities for the school year.

Elementary School

Many elementary schools utilize lunch time to host their YAC meetings. The concept of “Lunch Buddies” allows students to meet and eat together at lunch time. Meeting regularly is important, most elementary age level YACs will meet every other week or monthly. Students help promote activities, help decide what activities they will do in school.

Middle School/High School

YACs at the Middle and High School levels function as a student group. They can meet in school during lunch or planning hours but can also utilize time as an after school club that meets regularly. These groups determine what sports they will participate in, what social and school-wide awareness activities they’ll do as well. These students should be leading the program!

Inclusive Sports

Unified Sports combine students with and without disabilities, on the same team as meaningful partners, creating friendships on the field, in the classroom and beyond. Unified Sports include bowling, golf, bocce, soccer, volleyball, flag football and basketball just to name a few. Unified Sports teams can participate in Special Olympics Michigan competitions, as part of an intramural league within the school setting or in interscholastic competition against other Unified Sport teams.

Unified Sports partners and athletes practice and play together and can be conducted during or after school, funding from the Unified Champion Schools award can be utilized for equipment, facility rentals, travel and uniform purchases.



Elementary School

For younger students, it is important to encourage sports that promote socialization and getting to know one another. Students can participate in an event such as unified bocce or bowling. A unified event could be added to a school's annual field day. Unified recreation can also be built into physical education class or in the class room. Special Olympics offers modifications for students with physical disabilities as well.

Middle School/High School

For older students, middle school and high school, work on strengthening relationships through training, competition and teamwork. Any sport can become unified including soccer, flag football, volleyball, golf, basketball, bowling, etc. At the high school and middle school levels competition can be done within school, against other Unified Champion schools, or at Special Olympics Michigan Regional and State Events. Unified Sports at this level stress competition, fun and teamwork. There is a lot to learn in being equal players on a playing field. It is important to select a sport that is appropriate for the players involved.

Whole School Engagement.

Each school plans a school-wide Respect, R-word or anti-bully campaign. One of the most demeaning words to intellectually disabled students is the word retard(ed). It is a slang term often used as a synonym for stupid, dumb or idiotic. Through planning and implementation by your school's YAC, this movement creates a platform for students to be activists promoting inclusion, dignity and acceptance bringing together the entire population to take a stand for respect amongst peers.

Elementary Schools

For elementary school students we acknowledge that many students do not use the word. Schools can do a respect or acceptance campaign in place of an R-word initiative. Having a poster decorating contest, assembly or another creative craft that shows respect for all students in a building can be done to show unity throughout the school.

Middle School/High School

For middle school students and high school students, R-word or Spread the Word to End the Word campaigns encourage students to sign the banner and pledge to stop using the R-word. R-word campaigns can be hosted in an assembly format, at lunch and during the school day with banner signing or at an athletics or unified event with recognition at half time or pregame activities. Some schools have even hosted disability awareness fairs educating student populations about different types of disabilities. A disability awareness fair can be interactive, educational and fun for all participants within a school population.



Benefits

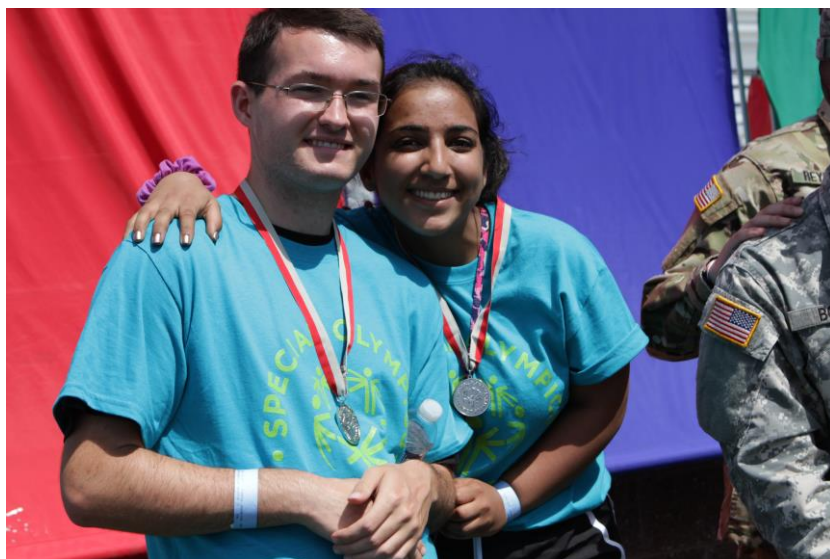
The entire school can benefit from adding Unified Champion Schools.

- Positive change in the school's overall climate, creating an accepting and friendly environment for students with and without disabilities.
- Unified Champion Schools creates friendships amongst students with and without disabilities.
- Financial/resource assistance to schools to conduct the program.
- Studies show that Unified Champion Schools increases graduation and attendance rates and decreases expulsions.
- It provides leadership development and personal growth as part of a Unified Sports team, YAC and volunteering.
- Unified Champion Schools partners well with other programs such as LINKS/P2P
- It provides a social outlet for students who may not have a group they belong to.
- It provides equal extracurricular and sport opportunities for students with and without disabilities meeting the office of civil rights mandate.
- Many of our lifelong volunteers started as students, it's a movement that students can stay involved with their whole lives.
- Special Olympics is a worldwide network in more than 170 countries. When students leave campus they can stay involved across the world.
- Volunteering for Special Olympics Michigan is a great resume builder and it helps students meet their volunteer requirements.
- Interacting and befriending our athletes is a stress reliever for students.
- Students can continue their involvement after school by joining an SO College program or community program.
- Students get more out of volunteering than what they give!
- Participating in Unified Sports is a great way to stay active and fit and its fun!



What it takes to get started

1. **A school staff liaison** – Identifying a school staff member that will serve as the main contact for SOMI and will handle all financials and reporting, and serve as a mentor to the YAC to plan and implement the program.
2. **Fill out the registration form** – The school staff liaison can log on to <http://www.somi.org/Get-Involved/Project-UNIFY/Project-UNIFY-School-Registration.html> and fill out the school registration form to officially register, once received, SOMI staff will work with a liaison to develop a budget.
3. **A few student leaders** – Forming the Youth Activation Committee is one of the first steps for Unified Champion Schools, the YAC will report to the school staff liaison and will be comprised of students with and without disabilities.
4. **Receive your award** – it's important to develop a plan between the YAC and school liaison of how resources will be used. Schools will be awarded funding based on the frequency and amount of activities, Unified Sports and R-word days they choose to do.
5. **Creativity, Passion and Respect!**





Statistics

**All statistics are from Lansing School District Strand Report*

Statistics from Lansing Public Schools					
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Progress
Graduation rate – Special Education		34.3%	43.7%	49.8%	15.5%
Special Education Dropout	31.8%	15.9%	6.2%	3.6%	28.2%
Suspension/expulsion			6,335	4,395	1,940
Educational Environment -80% or more	31.5%	39.6%	43.7%	50%	19.5%
Educational Environment 80 % or more (PU Schools)		44.7%	59.6%	62%	17.3%
Special Education Attendance Average		86%	89%	90%	4%
Unified Champion Schools Schools Attendance Average		95%	97%	98%	3%



Interest or Questions?

Contact

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