



Breaking down Barriers through UNIFIED SPORTS



Unified Sports[®] is a unique program that provides students with and without intellectual disabilities opportunities to participate in sports activities alongside one another. These programs break down barriers among different student groups, promote an environment that fosters respect and initiates relationships and bonds built between diverse student groups.



Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools create opportunities for students with and without intellectual disabilities to participate in sports activities in an inclusive environment. Unified Sports becomes a unique and successful strategy for promoting social inclusion in a school community.

How Does it Look in Schools?

There are a variety of ways that schools have integrated inclusive sports opportunities into the school structure. Here are a few of the most common...

1. Unified PE

A physical education environment which provides a unique opportunity for students with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) to come together through ongoing educational and physical activities, using the power of Special Olympics. Unified PE classes may have the opportunity to compete in sports with other schools or participate in Special Olympics competitions and events.

2. Reverse Mainstreaming During Training Opportunities

EXAMPLE: Motor Activities Training Program- for Special Olympics athletes with profound physical and/or intellectual disabilities; unified partners can assist in the development of the athlete's fine and gross motor skills through the MATP program, which includes challenges focused on these skills, including grasping, head turning, striking, etc.

EXAMPLE: Unified Partners come into the Special Education classroom during their PE time, recess or other time that provides them with the opportunity to train in sports activities together (often takes place with peer tutors)





3. Inclusive Young Athletes Programs

Special Olympics Young Athletes is an inclusive early childhood sports and educational play program that includes games, songs and other fun, physical activities. With an emphasis on training and participation through activities and play, rather than competition, Young Athletes learn basic sports skills like kicking and throwing a ball and playing with others. This program also provides children with gross motor skills training, group interaction and socialization opportunities. These basic skills will prepare the Young Athletes for future participation in sports.

Things to Consider When Designing an Inclusive Young Athletes Program...

Partner Selection: To have an inclusive Young Athletes program, you must select unified partners (students without intellectual disabilities). When choosing your partners, consider the following:

- Age
- Grade
- Application Process: Mix of ages/grades

Schedule: Once partners are selected, it's time to work on the schedule. When scheduling your program, consider the following:

- Recess
- Related Arts
- Before/After School
- P.E.



Activities: Once partners are selected and a schedule is made, it's time to have fun! Consider the following when selecting activities:

- **Foundational Skills:** Athletes that are starting in the program and are 2-5 years old. The focus should be on Foundational Skills (i.e. running, jumping, balancing). Partners can serve as peer coaches and help athletes master a skill.
- **Transition to SO Sport Skills:** Athletes that have participated in the Young Athlete Program before and are 6-7 years old. The focus should shift from Foundational Skills to Traditional Special Olympics Sport Skills. Coaches can refer to a particular sport and find individual skill training plans. Partners can again serve as peer coaches and help athletes master a skill.
- **Unified Team Play:** Athletes and partners can also participate in Unified Sports. Athletes and Partners cannot compete until they are 8, however, if they have mastered skills and are ready for more of a challenge, consider starting a cheerleading team or doing Bocce or Bowling. These are great Unified Sports to participate in at an Elementary level. Modifications will be based on their ages and ability.

How to Host an Awareness-Raising UNIFIED Sports Event:

Do you want everyone to **know** just how **Unified Sports** can break down barriers while creating an environment of respect, excitement and happiness for all participants?

Do you want to **grow and expand Unified Sports** at your schools?

Do you want **more support from the school community**, and possibly, the sports booster club or athletic department?

Do you want to **engage the entire school** with social inclusion opportunities provided through Unified Recreation & Experiences?

A Unified Sports Event may be just what you need!

As opposed to Unified Sports competitions, Unified Sports events that are heavily focused on Unified Recreation do not require participants to meet the training requirements typically seen with true Unified Sports programs. These events are focused on raising awareness for Special Olympics and Project UNIFY while providing an opportunity for you and adults to be engaged in social inclusion through Unified Sports.

Youth leaders engaged through Project UNIFY can take the lead in planning and executing these events, and the opportunities are endless! Let youth and THEIR imagination go wild! Here are a few ideas that schools have come up with in the past:

1. Unified basketball team scrimmages a faculty team during lunch periods, in front of entire student body! (one school did this, charging \$2 admission as a fundraiser to support their team)
2. Unified Soccer team is introduced at half time of the varsity soccer game and runs a few drills in front of the crowd
3. Special Olympics cheerleading squad is invited to cheer alongside the JV or Varsity squad at a pep rally, basketball or football game.
4. Varsity tennis team partners up with the Special Olympics tennis players to host clinic or play one-day unified tournament together.
5. Unified bowling/bocce teams invite another student group to join them for a recreational day/tournament (i.e. student council, football team, teacher cadets)
6. Middle or High School hosts Young Athletes event.

