



SC Unified Track & Field

Spring 2022

Unified Sports combines persons with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team for sports training and competition. South Carolina is considered a national leader among state Special Olympics programs for developing Unified Champion Schools where students are involved in Unified Sports.

Unified Track & Field

-Is a sport within interscholastic competition that follows the governing by-laws and general philosophies and procedures of the SCHSL, including season start date and competition start date.

-Is a sports program that utilizes Special Olympics Participation release forms, including Athlete Medical & Release forms for students with Intellectual Disabilities and Class-A Volunteer Applications for non-disabled unified partners

-Is an alternative to a school's varsity track & field teams and does not replace those teams. Athletes and partners would not be eligible to participate on both varsity and unified teams.

-Sees all individuals as contributing members of the team, regardless of ability or disability.

-Rewards team success rather than individual accomplishment.

-Combines scores or creates unified relay team combining athletes with and without intellectual disabilities, identified as "Special-Athlete" or "Unified Partner".

Unified Track & Field Events will include, but are not limited to...

100-meter race, 4x100m Relay, 4x400m relay and Shot Put (or more designated events agreed on by the district office or athletic department)

-During interscholastic ("regular season") events, schools are encouraged to include unified opportunities in other traditional events

Unified Track & Field School Grant Funding:

-Offered by Special Olympic South Carolina for participating middle and high schools competing in Unified Track & Field during the 2019 Track Season, beyond any other funding support from Special Olympics through Unified Champion Schools programming

-Provides **\$1500** in funding per school recipient, provided the school meets all requirements set forth by the governing bodies, competition directors and Special Olympics

-Qualifying Schools must apply for funding through the online application system, which can be found through the Special Olympics South Carolina website, www.so-sc.org, or through the contact listed below

-Funding can be utilized for uniforms, coach stipends, equipment, transportation, or other related expenses approved by Special Olympics South Carolina

-Expectations of Schools receiving grant funding for Unified Track & Field include:

1. Head Coach for Unified Track that completes Unified Sports Coach Certification through National Federation of High Schools, which is a free online training. Head Coach can also be the Varsity Head Coach, can be an Assistant Coach or a totally different coach from the other track coaches.
2. Unified Track Team trains a minimum of 2x per week for at least 8 weeks.
3. Unified Track Team competes in at least 2 track competitions during the Spring-2019 season.



For more information regarding Unified Sports or Unified Champion Schools, please contact:

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Special Olympics identifies two types of participants on Unified Sports

teams: Unified Partner and the Special Olympics Athlete. Athletes and Partners are considered teammates and equals. This is very important for truly inclusive teams, on and off of the playing field.

What is a Unified Partner?

A Unified partner is a student without an intellectual disability, who actively participates with the athletes in a fun and meaningful way for training and competition.

A valuable outcome of Unified Sports is that people with disabilities are given the chance to interact with their peers who do not have a disability. Unified Sports does however allow students with other types of disabilities (such as a physical or learning disability) to participate as Unified partners as long as it does not pose a health or safety risk.



Who is a Special Olympics Athlete?

Athletes are the heart of Special Olympics Unified Sports! A Special Olympics athlete can be a student or a member of the community. To qualify as a Special Olympics athlete, an individual must meet one of the following criteria:

1. The individual has been diagnosed with an intellectual disability by a medical professional or as determined by a government agency;
2. The person has a cognitive delay, as determined by standardized measures, including an intelligent quotient or "IQ" of 75 or lower;
3. The person has a significant developmental delay, as determined by standardized measures, including a minimum of a 2-year development delay.
4. The person has a closely related developmental disability. A "closely related developmental disability" means having functional limitations in both general learning (such as IQ) and in adaptive skills (such as in recreation, work, independent living, self-direction, or self-care).

Persons whose functional limitations are based solely on a physical, behavioral, or emotional disability, or a specific learning or sensory disability, are not eligible to participate as Special Olympics athletes, but may be eligible to volunteer for Special Olympics.

The Foundation of Unified Sports: The Principle of Meaningful Involvement

This is the most important concept of Unified Sports that the coach and all players must understand and implement. Fundamentally, the principle of meaningful involvement ensures that every player is given an opportunity to contribute to the success of his or her team through their unique skills and qualities.

Indicators of Meaningful Involvement

- ✓ Teammates compete without causing undue risk of injury to themselves or others.
- ✓ Teammates participate according to the rules of competition.
- ✓ Teammates have the ability and opportunity to contribute to the performance of the team.
- ✓



Meaningful involvement is not achieved when certain team members:

- ⊗ Display superior sports skills without involving their teammates.
- ⊗ Serve predominantly as on-field coaches rather than teammates or mentors, except on more developmental teams
- ⊗ Control most aspects of the game, especially during the most critical periods.
- ⊗ Do not train or practice regularly and only show up on the day of competition.

Unified Sports® Sustainability Tips

- Integrate Unified Sports into the physical education curriculum.
- Ensure Unified Sports is recognized as an official school sport, activity and club on campus.
- Reduce costs by using the same uniforms across sports and grade levels, where appropriate. Purchase a single set of uniforms that can be used for multiple sports year after year, and share school equipment for Unified Sports teams when possible.
- Work with the Unified Youth Club and/or Athletics Boosters to raise funds for the Unified Sports program.
- Involve younger students in leadership roles to help ensure the program will continue after older students graduate.
- Start “Fans in the Stands” to share the excitement of Unified Sports with the entire school and local community.

Inclusion Tip!

Unified Sports brings new opportunities for students to be involved and recognized in their schools. In some schools, *Unified Sports participants can earn the opportunity to “letter” in their sport.* “Lettering” is when the school recognizes a student’s athletic and/or student activities achievements by awarding them a “letter” to display on a school “letter jacket”.

Getting Started; Things to Consider:

1. Have all Special Olympics athletes and Unified partners complete paperwork & other requirements including Special Olympics athletes medical release forms (good for 3 years), the Special Olympics Class-A Volunteer Application & online Protective Behaviors course for coaches/partners.
2. Hold a Unified partner orientation prior to the first practice.
 - a. Consider having a Special Olympics athlete or special education teacher help educate partners on people first language (“people with disabilities”, not “disabled people”. “I have autism”, not “I’m autistic”.)
 - b. Recruit a teacher or specialist who is knowledgeable about working with students with disabilities to discuss proper ways to communicate and interact with Special Olympics athletes. This includes setting their own parameters for interactions, such as high-fives instead of hugs...this comes down to what they are comfortable with and what the school supports.
 - c. Clearly define the role of a Unified Partner; unified partners are there to be teammates and friends. They are not there to “serve” Special Olympics athletes. This is a critical concept for the partners to understand from the start so that true friendships can be made between teammates.
3. Consider hosting a Unified Sports event. This can be an excellent way to create greater awareness throughout the school as more students see what Unified Sports is, creates a great energy and pride around the school’s Unified Sports teams, and provides opportunities for many individuals and groups in the school to get involved (i.e. pep band, cheerleaders, ROTC, chorus, leadership groups, student council, etc.).

Education Tip! Teachers and students can register on the Get Into It® website for free! Special Olympics Get Into It® program consists of online resources that include lessons, activities, videos, athlete stories and supplemental materials. This is a great way to educate the entire school or specific classes about Special Olympics and disabilities. *This can also be used to “UNIFY” the larger student athlete population.*



What can Unified Sports do for your school?

Unified Sports allows all students, regardless of ability level, the opportunity to share their skills and talents with the school and community. On the court the partners and athletes learn the value of teamwork and the importance of inclusion in all aspects of life. Off the court, the students build friendships and lasting relationships that will impact their overall school experience. These feature stories highlight real-life examples of the impact of Unified Sports on all participants!

What can Unified Sports do for students with intellectual disabilities? Unified

Sports gives students with intellectual disabilities an opportunity to have a “typical” school experience. The program helps build confidence and important social skills while giving students with intellectual disabilities a chance to create new friendships.

What can Unified Sports do for Unified partners? Unified Sports gives students an opportunity to be agents of change in their communities. It helps partners realize that everyone is more alike than different and encourages students to be accepting of others. It also allows Unified partners an opportunity to fit in to something at school, feel acceptance, be active and most importantly have fun!

Steps for Developing Unified Track & Field Program:



1. **HOLD INITIAL MEETING** that includes:
 - a. Athletic Director
 - b. Current Head Coach and Assistant Coaches for Track
 - c. One or two teachers who work with the Special Olympics athletes in your school; this can be a Special Education teacher, classroom assistant or the teacher of the Unified PE class. Often, there are overlaps between Special Education, Unified PE and the athletic department. This can be a great place to start!
2. **RECRUIT A COACH:** a Head Coach for the Unified Track team can be the Head Coach for the Varsity team, but often works better to have a separate coach. You could consider an Assistant Coach or a brand-new person to add to the coaching staff. A few things to consider when recruiting a coach:
 - a. You don't have to have experience with Special Olympics population to be a coach.
 - b. Consult with the Special Education or Physical Education Departments for recommendations; quite often, there are staff involved with both Athletics and Special Education or PE, who may be a natural fit.
3. **CERTIFY COACH:** through the online NFHS Unified Sports Coach Certification (free)
4. **RECRUIT ATHLETES & PARTNERS:**
 - a. Unified PE: If your school has a unified PE class, this is an automatic resource for recruiting athletes and partners for the Unified Track team! Talk to the Unified PE teacher to get recommendations.
 - b. Consider students with or without intellectual disabilities who have good attitudes, are excited to participate in school activities and are looking for new ways to be involved.
 - c. Talk to other coaches. There may be student athletes who are involved with varsity sports in the Fall that could join the Unified Track team during the Spring. **IMPORTANT TO NOTE:** Unified Partners will not be able to advance in the varsity track & field events; these partners should NOT be from the varsity track team.
5. **SCHEDULE THE SEASON:**
 - a. Practices- at least 2 per week throughout the "regular" track season, but can be more!
 - b. Competitions- at least 2 per season; this can be at home meets or away meets. Special Olympics can assist with connecting you with other schools that have Unified Track teams so that you can identify opportunities to compete against other schools
 - c. Advancement Opportunities- Special Olympics is excited that schools are interested in hosting competitions outside of the regular season. This can be a regional event, statewide invitational event that adds unified opportunities or the State Championship for Unified Track. For more information on how to serve as a host for a regional or state event, please contact Special Olympics South Carolina.

The Unified Track & Field Season Should Consist of:



TRAINING:

Athletes and Unified Partners Train a Minimum of 2x Weekly



COMPETITION:

Unified Team Competes a Minimum of 2x During Regular Season (Home or Away Meets)



ADVANCEMENT:

Opportunities for Advanced Competitions at the Regional & State Levels will Continue to Expand, but will Include a Unified State Championship

6. PAPER WORK:

- a. SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETE MEDICAL RELEASE FORMS for all Special Olympics athletes (these are good for 3 years, so they probably already have these forms). Keep the medical release form in the coaches' backpack and in the athletic offices, so there is always a form available to pull in case of an emergency. These forms should travel with the athletes to away meets.
- b. PARTNER PARTICIPATION FORMS for all Unified Partners. These forms are only needed to be filled out one time and turned to Special Olympics.
- c. OPTIONAL- COMMITMENT FORMS for Unified Partner and Special Olympics athletes, recognizing the privilege and responsibility that comes with being on a team.
- d. OPTIONAL- LETTERS HOME TO PARENTS of unified partner and athletes to explain what the team is, what the expectations of teammates are and important dates and times for the season.

7. PROMOTE YOUR PROGRAM:

- a. Unified Sports is an extremely positive program and can truly unify the entire school community. Hosting *A Fan Night* for the Unified Track team is a great way to allow this team to promote unity among the entire student body! Combine this with a RESPECT campaign at the school. Student Council, Beta Club or the school's Unified Club could take this on as a project.
- b. *Invite media* to see and celebrate your Unified Track program! This is a great way to show a positive, inclusive culture within your school's athletic program and promote Unified Sports with other schools in your area.
- c. *Sports Banquet*: including your Unified Track team in your Spring Sports Banquet is a no-brainer! This is an appropriate opportunity to recognize and celebrate the unified team with the other teams representing the school. Many schools now provide letters to recognize these athletes and partners, alongside the other track team members.