

**National Recognition Program**  
**Middle School Application Review Rubric**

Please use this rubric when reviewing each National Recognition Program application. The school must **meet all 12 standards to receive recognition as a Banner School**. If the school exceeds many of the standards, they will be considered for a national banner presentation by one of our sponsors and other opportunities to highlight their work. If their response indicates that they are below or approaching the standard, that information can be used for feedback to help them improve.

**Special Olympics Unified Sports®**

A fully inclusive sports or fitness program that combines an approximately equal number of students with and without intellectual disabilities (ID). Examples include such things as Unified PE, Unified Fitness, Interscholastic, or Intramural Unified Sports.

<p>1. Special Olympics Unified Sports is offered in <b>at least 2 seasons</b> throughout the school year. (For instance, Unified PE for at least two marking periods, and/or Interscholastic Unified Bocce in winter and a Unified Fitness Club in the spring.)</p>			
Below Standard	Approaching Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard
No evidence is provided of when or how frequently Special Olympics Unified Sports is offered.	Evidence is provided that Special Olympics Unified Sports are offered in only one season/ marking period throughout the school year.	Evidence is provided that Special Olympics Unified Sports are offered in at least two seasons/marketing periods.	Evidence is provided that students in all grade levels have multiple opportunities to participate in Special Olympics Unified Sports. Unified Sports are a norm for the school and reflected in all sports and fitness opportunities.
<p>2. Special Olympics Unified Sports participation <b>occurs regularly</b> over the course of each sport season or school term <b>and includes competition or culminating event</b> (For instance, multiple weeks of training prior to and during a sport season ending in a competition, or a Unified Field Day to culminate Unified Fitness Club activities.)</p>			
Below Standard	Approaching Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard
Unified Sports are offered as one-time events without training or practice sessions.	Evidence is provided that Unified Sports and/or activities occur regularly over the course of	Evidence is provided that Unified Sports and/or activities occur regularly over the course of the school	Evidence is provided that multiple Unified Sports and/or activities occur throughout the



	the school year, but there is no evidence of competition or culminating event.	year and include competitions and/or culminating events.	school year, like any other sport/activity the school offers and include competitions/ culminating events that engage the whole school.
<p>3. Each sport/activity has an adult coach who has received <b>state and/or National training on Unified Sports</b> (For instance, in-person training with Special Olympics state Program, or courses taken on the <a href="#">Special Olympics LMS</a> or <a href="#">NFHS Learn site</a>.)</p>			
<b>Below Standard</b>	<b>Approaching Standard</b>	<b>Meets Standard</b>	<b>Exceeds Standard</b>
No evidence is provided of adult coach(s) receiving any training on Special Olympics Unified Sports.	Evidence is provided that some, but not all, coaches have received training on Special Olympics Unified Sports.	Evidence is provided that each coach of each sport has received state and/or National training on Special Olympics Unified Sports. (For instance, the bocce coach completed the NFHS Coaching Unified course in Fall 2025).	Evidence is provided that each coach of each sport has received state and/or National training on Special Olympics Unified Sports and has taken additional training at the local, state, or national level.
<p>4. Special Olympics Unified Sports is <b>officially recognized</b> by the school in a <b>similar style</b> as other athletics/activities. (For instance, Unified Sports is listed in the activities section for students; transportation/equipment/uniforms/practice space is provided for Unified sporting events; information and recognition is shared over school announcements; the sports team is recognized during assemblies and school events; and/or a stipend is offered to coaches.)</p>			
<b>Below Standard</b>	<b>Approaching Standard</b>	<b>Meets Standard</b>	<b>Exceeds Standard</b>
No evidence is provided of official recognition of Special Olympics Unified Sports by the school.	Evidence is provided that Special Olympics Unified Sports programming is acknowledged by the school, but not on the same level as other sports. (For example, Unified Sports is the only sport in the school not a part of a pep rally.)	Evidence is provided that Special Olympics Unified Sports programming is officially recognized by the school in a similar style as other sports/activities.	Evidence is provided that Special Olympics programming is officially recognized by the school and the school district in a similar style as other sports/activities.

## Inclusive Youth Leadership

Inclusive Youth Leadership programming develops leadership skills\* in youth with and without intellectual disabilities (ID), preparing them to be champions of inclusion in their schools, communities, workplaces, and in the broader Special Olympics movement throughout a lifetime of inclusion. Students with and without intellectual disabilities work with adult guidance and support to learn about inclusion and to lead advocacy, awareness, inclusion and other Unified Champion Schools activities throughout the school year.

*\*IYL leadership skills are those that develop students' innovation, openness, empathy, bravery, accountability, and ability to lead collaboratively.*

<p>5. A Unified Club or similar student group made up of students with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) meets <b>at least monthly</b> throughout the school year to <b>offer leadership opportunities/training</b> for all members. (For instance, a Unified Club with co-leaders for each officer/leadership role/responsibility – one with an intellectual disability and one without; leadership skills training for all members of the club with and without intellectual disabilities; specific shared leadership roles for planning activities. Importantly, a club in which students without intellectual disabilities are the only leaders or function as “helpers” does not meet this standard.)</p>			
Below Standard	Approaching Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard
No evidence is provided of reoccurring Unified Club (or other) meetings throughout the school year.	Evidence is provided that Unified Club (or other) meetings occur occasionally over the course of the school year or are for social or sports purposes only.	Evidence is provided that Unified Club (or other) meetings occur regularly over the course of the school year and include leadership opportunities/training for students with and without intellectual disabilities.	Evidence is provided that Unified Club meetings occur regularly over the course of the school year and include leadership training with specific opportunities to apply and practice new skills (e.g. learning public speaking skills before making presentations in advisory classes.)
<p>6. Students with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) have opportunities to <b>build leadership skills and take leadership roles</b> during Unified Club meetings and events, sports/activity training sessions, planning of awareness activities, and/or while promoting inclusion throughout the school. The youth are all <b>valuable contributors</b> to the group and work collaboratively. One group of youth is not there to help the other group. (Examples include planning and leading whole school engagement activities about inclusion; Unified Sports teams planning and leading skill building sessions for the local elementary/middle school; Unified Club members collaborating with the Student Council to identify more opportunities for inclusion; an inclusive leadership class highlighting IYL skills through announcements/newsletters/school based social media.)</p>			
Below Standard	Approaching Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard
No evidence is provided of students with or without ID having leadership roles or training.	Evidence is provided that students without ID are given more leadership training and opportunities to lead	Evidence is provided that both students with and students without ID are given leadership training and	Students of all abilities are given frequent, varied opportunities to lead in meaningful

	than their peers with ID.	opportunities to lead.	ways (i.e., Unified Club leadership roles and responsibilities are co-shared by students with and without ID equally; students with and without ID lead Unified activities). Students act proactively to ensure all students in the club are able to share their strengths and meaningfully participate._
7. The inclusive club/group has an <b>adult liaison</b> who helps the group provide input to the school's UCS leadership team and other school leaders on school wide activities. The club is <b>officially recognized</b> by the school in a similar style as other clubs/activities. (For instance, the liaison meets with club members who serve on the UCS leadership team prior to each meeting to review the agenda; the club is included within the activities section and is highlighted in the yearbook; and/or stipends are offered to teacher leaders.)			
<b>Below Standard</b>	<b>Approaching Standard</b>	<b>Meets Standard</b>	<b>Exceeds Standard</b>
No evidence is provided of the adult liaison's support or recognition of the club by the school.	Evidence is provided that there is an adult liaison, but the club is not formally recognized by the school or included in the UCS leadership team's decision making.	Evidence is provided that there is an adult liaison who supports the club's interactions with the UCS leadership team, and the club has full recognition by the school.	There is an adult liaison who has received training through Special Olympics (such as the UCS Middle Level Implementation Course); club members regularly engage with the school's UCS leadership team, and the club has full recognition by the school.

## Whole School Engagement

Whole-School Engagement: Awareness and education activities that promote inclusion and reach the majority of the school population. Examples include such things as a Spread the Word Campaign, Pep Rallies or "Fans in the Stands" for Unified Sports teams, Respect Campaigns or student fundraising.

8. At least **two** whole-school engagement activities are implemented per school year. (For instance, a Spread the Word or similar campaign is held during the month of March; a student vs. staff Unified bocce game is held at the end of the semester with Fans in the Stands; a Cool School Plunge raises funds for Special Olympics and awareness about inclusion; a welcoming assembly at the beginning of the school year is held to spread inclusion and belonging.)

Below Standard	Approaching Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard
No evidence is provided of whole-school engagement activities during the school year.	Evidence is provided that one whole-school engagement activity occurred during the school year.	Evidence is provided that two or more whole-school engagement activities took place during the school year.	Evidence is provided that multiple whole-school engagement activities took place during the school year that integrated into related school priorities and supported inclusion as a norm for the school.
<p>9. Students with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) <b>plan and lead</b> the awareness activities. (For instance, students with and without ID work together to come up with events, timelines, and goals for a whole school engagement event; Unified pairs from the Unified Club develop and read promotion announcements encouraging others to sign the inclusion banner during Spread the Word week; Members of the Unified Fitness Club share activities with advisory period teachers to include on Wellness Wednesdays.)</p>			
Below Standard	Approaching Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard
No evidence is provided that students were engaged with adults in planning or leading awareness activities.	Evidence is provided that students had roles in whole school engagement activities (e.g. acting as hosts) but were not included in the planning process.	Evidence is provided that members of the Unified Club (or other) worked with adults to plan and lead awareness activities.	Evidence is provided that members of the Unified Club (or other) planned and lead multiple awareness building activities for their peers. Older students mentored younger students to prepare them to lead in future activities.

## Sustainability

Sustainability: Strategies and plans which ensure the 3 Unified Champion School components (Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership and Whole School Engagement) will continue and are part of the school culture. Examples include such things as fundraising, an active leadership team, professional development, integration with other school priorities, and family/community engagement.

<p>10 The school is currently <b>financially self-sustainable</b> or has a <b>financial plan</b> in place to sustain the 3 components into the future. (For instance, club sponsor/coaching stipends are included in the annual budget; a booster club supports Unified Sports team needs; the UCS school liaison is a designated staff position.)</p>			
Below Standard	Approaching Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard
No evidence is provided of financial	Evidence is provided of financial sustainability	Evidence is provided of future financial	Evidence is provided of future financial

sustainability.	for some, but not all, components.	sustainability for each component.	sustainability through school, community and district level financial planning.
<p>11 The UCS <b>leadership team (roster required)</b> regularly monitors and reports on social inclusion and plans for strategic improvement by completing all Special Olympics state Program and national <b>reports and surveys</b>. (For instance, using the <a href="#">Social Inclusion Scale</a> as part of school climate assessments; completing and returning the school liaison report.)</p>			
<b>Below Standard</b>	<b>Approaching Standard</b>	<b>Meets Standard</b>	<b>Exceeds Standard</b>
No evidence is provided of a school leadership team which plans, monitors, and assesses UCS strategy implementation.	Evidence is provided that the school leadership team coordinates implementation of the Unified Champion Schools strategy, but does not monitor results for improvement	Evidence is provided that the school leadership team evaluates its strategies and activities and reports results to the school, state Program, and National communities.	Evidence is provided that the school leadership team shares its results to advocate adoption of the Unified Champion Schools strategy by other schools.
<p>12 Unified Champion Schools is <b>integrated into the culture</b> of the school and <b>supported</b> by a wide range of staff and community members including a certified liaison. (For instance, general and special education teachers lead or participate in UCS opportunities; social inclusion is included in the school improvement plan; students with and without intellectual disabilities have numerous opportunities to connect socially and academically (lunch, advisory, electives); training and resources are available for adults; community partnerships are established.)</p>			
<b>Below Standard</b>	<b>Approaching Standard</b>	<b>Meets Standard</b>	<b>Exceeds Standard</b>
No evidence is provided that the Unified Champion Schools strategy extends beyond a limited number of participating students and adults.	Evidence is provided of a certified school liaison and broad awareness of the Unified activities.	Evidence is provided that the Unified Champion Schools strategy is embedded in the school culture and sustainable through adult and student commitment.	Evidence is provided that social inclusion is a school and community norm supported by implementation of the Unified Champion Schools strategy and other inclusion efforts.



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools®**