

Unified Champion Schools® Inclusive Sports and Fitness

Special Olympics New Hampshire aims to build a society of acceptance and inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities and, by extension, everyone. Students – with their energy, idealism, intelligence and creativity – are the leaders and change makers for creating a society of acceptance and inclusion.

Special Olympics New Hampshire's Unified Champion Schools® (UCS) Program consists of four interrelated parts:

- 1) **INCLUSIVE SPORTS AND FITNESS:** The concept of Unified combines an approximately equal number of students with ID (athletes) and without ID (partners). In Unified Sports® athletes and partners participate together as teammates. In Unified fitness classmates with and without ID share fitness experiences together.
- 2) **INCLUSIVE YOUTH LEADERSHIP:** Everyone wants their voice heard. Inclusive Youth Leadership provides the skills and opportunities for students with and without ID to take on leadership roles.
- 3) **WHOLE SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT:** Through Whole School Engagement, the entire school community is made aware of or participates in UCS activities.
- 4) **SUSTAINABILITY:** We want the UCS program to become part of the school's programming and continue forever.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED SPORTS®

Special Olympics Unified Sports® started in New Hampshire in 1989. It is a unique program that provides students with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) opportunities to meaningfully participate as teammates in sports activities.

Through Unified Sports® students come together where all teammates are challenged to improve their skills and gain a better understanding of each other's abilities. Unified Sports® can lead to new friendships, improved self-esteem, and positive changes in attitudes and behaviors.

In New Hampshire Unified student athletes with ID and Unified student partners without ID have opportunities to participate in Unified Sports® through three basic models. The Competitive Model is offered in the middle schools. The Player Development and Recreational Models are offered in the high schools.

Competitive

In the Competitive Model, teammates with and without ID have similar athletic abilities to train and compete on the same team. School-based Unified Sports teams in this model often compete against other middle school Unified Sports teams or in community-based Special Olympics Unified Sports tournaments. Coaches ensure that players (athletes and partners) **meaningfully participate**, are trained and in the appropriate positions where they can be successful and contribute to the team.

Player Development

In the Player Development Model, teammates (Unified student athletes and Unified student partners) of higher abilities play with teammates of lower abilities. Coaches need to help the team in developing sport-specific skills and tactics and in successfully participating in less structured, cooperative team environments. Unified student athletes and Unified student partners still need to meaningfully participate and contribute to the team.

Recreational

The Recreational Model provides inclusive recreational sports opportunities to Unified student athletes with ID and Unified student partners without ID. Athletes and partners are not required to be of similar ability. Examples of the Unified Recreational Model also include other opportunities such as Unified Physical Education, Unified Field Day, Unified Fitness Club, or a Unified Walking Club.

INCLUSIVE FITNESS

For many students, extending the Unified concept to fitness provides the opportunity to experience the joy of participation in an inclusive school activity, whether they represent their school or simply have an opportunity to be involved in other inclusive activities. Inclusive sports experiences include, but are not limited to, Unified Physical Education, Unified Fitness Club, Unified Zumba, President's Council on Fitness, etc.

UNIQUENESS AND IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSIVE SPORTS AND FITNESS

- Provides valuable social inclusion opportunities for all teammates to build friendships, on and off the playing field.
- Integrates athletes with and without intellectual disabilities in a setting where all teammates are challenged to improve their skills and become physically fit.
- Prepares students for participation in other school activities or community sports programs.
- Strengthens self-esteem and builds confidence as students take on leadership roles in the school and participate in inclusive activities.
- Models genuine inclusion for the entire school community.
- Increases community awareness of the spirit and skills of individuals with intellectual disabilities.