



## Unified Champion Schools® Whole School Engagement

Special Olympics New Hampshire aims to build a society of acceptance and inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities (ID) 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.

### WHOLE SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® provide opportunities for all students to learn and practice social inclusion through sustained engagement whether in the classroom, during an assembly, as part of a sports experience, or through engagement in planned activities that reach the whole school. Through whole school engagement, Inclusive youth leadership and Unified Sports opportunities, the school becomes a powerful community that represents new ways of thinking and acting.

Many possibilities exist for promoting social inclusion throughout the school such as assemblies and activity days, classrooms that nurture positive peer relationships between students of all abilities, and the expectation that respect and acceptance are the norm for the entire school environment. The result is a school where all students feel they play a meaningful part in school clubs, sports and even informal interactions that occur in the cafeteria or hallways.

## UNIQUENESS AND IMPORTANCE OF WHOLE SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

- Engages the entire staff and student body in building awareness and understanding of the benefits to all when the assets and contributions of each individual are recognized, honored and supported.
- Creates a socially inclusive school climate and expands ownership of the efforts beyond a passionate few, creating a ripple effect of actions and advocacy.
- Enhances the school climate by nurturing development, learning and achievement through engaging environments where students, teachers, administrators, parents and community members feel connected, safe and successful.
- Creates communities of acceptance where students with disabilities feel welcomed and valued as meaningful participants in school activities, classroom learning and leadership opportunities.
- Models to the larger community that inclusivity can and does have positive outcomes for all members of the school or community.

There is a place for every individual in the school community to contribute to achieving the school's goals. In the Unified Champion Schools® Program such contributions are realized when students and staff are involved as participants in a whole school activity, and when students with and without intellectual disabilities serve as teammates on a Unified team, are leaders or members of an inclusive school club, or actively serve on the school's leadership team.

Examples of Whole School Engagement include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Having a Unified Sports competition during the day in front of the student body who are “Fans in the Stands” (a project whereby students become spectators and cheer for the Unified Sports teams competing)
- Doing a “Spread the Word to End the Word” campaign (a campaign whereby pledges are taken acknowledging support of people not saying the word “retard” or retardation and advocating for people with intellectual disabilities as having different abilities)
- Disabilities Week
  - For Autism Awareness Day, the students create Autism Advocacy posters as well as have Autism Awareness pins for sale
  - For Down Syndrome Day, the students create posters; in addition, one new fact about Down syndrome is made during each day's announcements
- During Homecoming Week, if each of the sport teams are performing a skit in front of the student body, having the Unified Sports team(s) also performing a skit(s)

