

GOALS OF UNIFIED SPORTS

• **Friendship and socialization**

Participation in Unified Sports provides a forum for positive social interaction between teammates and often leads to long-lasting friendships.

• **Meaningful inclusion**

All teammates play important, meaningful and valued roles on the team.

• **Sport skills development**

Students develop sports skills to enable them to compete with greater proficiency and develop physical fitness.

• **Competition experience**

Students with and without intellectual disabilities benefit from physical and mental challenges by participating in a variety of competitive and non-competitive environments.

What is the Principle of Meaningful Involvement?

The principle of meaningful involvement is the most important foundational philosophy when developing inclusive school sports and activities. Students are provided a sports environment that ensures every player is given multiple opportunities throughout the school year to develop their unique skills and qualities.

Indicators of Meaningful Involvement

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

Meaningful involvement is not achieved when some team members:

- Display superior sports skills without involving their teammates.
- 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.



What distinguishes each of the Unified Sports Models from each other?



Competitive

- Students with and without intellectual disabilities train and compete on the same team.
- All teammates should be of similar age and ability levels.
- Teams adhere to training, competition and team composition requirements.
- School-based teams often compete within an interscholastic athletic league, an intramural setting, or through Special Olympics tournaments.

Player Development

- Students of higher abilities serve as mentors, assisting teammates of lower abilities in developing sport-specific skills and tactics.
- All teammates should be of similar age.
- There is a non-competitive, cooperative team environment.

Recreation

- This is the most flexible model because it does not follow any prescribed training or team composition requirements.
- Recreational sports opportunities are offered within a non-competitive realm.
- Recreation typically takes place solely on school property and does not advance into competitions.
- Examples of Unified Recreation activities in schools include Unified PE, Unified Field Day, or a Unified Walking Club.

Examples of Unified Sports Activities in Unified Champion Schools

Inclusive Sports

- The Unified Bocce team hosts a series of instructional sessions during lunch to offer students an opportunity to learn how to play.
- After the intramural flag football season ends, the Unified Sports teams join together to host a celebration and awards banquet to honor everyone who supported the teams.

Inclusive Youth Leadership

- Students with and without intellectual disabilities on the Unified Sports intramural ski team organize and speak at an assembly about student collaboration to enhance each other's skills.
- High school students lead a week long sports camp for elementary students to develop soccer skills in students with and without intellectual disabilities.

Whole School Engagement

- The Student Council organizes Fans in the Stands to engage the whole student body in supporting the Unified Sports teams.
- The Physical Education Department works with each of their classes to host a Unified Sports Day focused on one of the sports they've studied each semester.

Implementing Unified Sports

To initiate a Unified Sports opportunity in your school, you'll typically want to start with a planning meeting with your school's Unified Champion School Leadership Team and / or your Unified Club. You may also want to invite a Special Olympics staff member to the meeting. As you work through the implementation of Unified Sports in your school, be sure students are engaged as co-leaders throughout the process. Remember to always be on the lookout for opportunities to hand over decision-making and leadership to young people. Each step in answering the questions and completing the checklists found below will be completed by youth, youth and adults working together, or adults as appropriate for your particular school environment.



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.
- Get key Unified Sports expenses, such as transportation or coach stipends, included within the annual school budget.
- 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.



Helpful Resources

Unified Sports Coaches Training & Sport-Specific Courses: www.specialolympics.org/unifiedsports

Special Olympics Unified Sports® Resources: www.specialolympics.org/unifiedsports

Special Olympics Coaching Guides for each sport: www.specialolympics.org/unifiedsports

Seven Criteria for Unified Sports Success: www.specialolympics.org/unifiedsports

Student Guide: www.specialolympics.org/hsplaybook-resources