







Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools

Unified Champion Schools is a program which seeks to create enriching and inclusive school climates through sports and youth leadership. There are three components which contribute to these desired outcomes: (1) Interscholastic Unified Sports: This is a fully-inclusive co-ed high school sports program which facilitates social inclusion. Students with and without intellectual disabilities train and compete together as equal peers, and these teams are regarded the same as any other varsity sports team at the school; (2) Unified Clubs where students with and without disabilities take on co-leadership roles and collaborate to improve their school's culture; (3) Whole School Engagement activities designed to promote inclusion, acceptance, and respect for all students.

The Issues:	Our Impact:	Our UCS Strategy Consists of 3 Components:
<p> Children with disabilities are two to three times more likely to be bullied than their peers without disabilities.</p> <p> There is a strong relationship between school connectedness and important outcomes such as regular school attendance and staying in school.</p>	<p> 97% of high school seniors say that Unified Champion Schools activities are changing their schools for the better.</p> <p> 86% of school staff feel that Special Olympics Unified Schools programs has made a big impact in reducing bullying and teasing in their schools.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1031 1102 1477 1207">1 Unified Sports <li data-bbox="1031 1228 1477 1333">2 Inclusive Youth Leadership <li data-bbox="1031 1354 1477 1459">3 Whole School Engagement

Our Focus and Approach

Special Olympics PA's (SOPA) currently partners with more than 225 schools throughout the state to offer Unified Champion Schools. These are located in 38 counties, including the cities of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, across all 12 districts of the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA). Through its Cities of Inclusion initiative, SOPA also seeks to bring Unified Champion Schools programming to all elementary, middle, and high schools in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Unified Champion Schools is endorsed by the PIAA and the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Currently three Unified Sports are offered: indoor bocce, track and field and soccer. Student athletes participate in 10-11 week long seasons with practices twice a week, 3-5 local competitions, regional championships, and state championships conducted with the PIAA. Partnerships with schools include funding, resources, and staff technical support provided by SOPA. Although demand from new schools continues to increase, expansion is limited due to our increased funding and capacity needs.

