



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools**



**Special
Olympics**
Pennsylvania



Special Olympics Pennsylvania Unified Champion Schools Overview

Special Olympics Pennsylvania Unified Champion Schools (UCS) is a fully-inclusive program which uses sports and youth leadership to successfully facilitate social inclusion and improve school climate. Students with intellectual disabilities, autism, and other disabilities come together as equal peers with students without disabilities to demonstrate and promote the values of inclusion, acceptance, teamwork, and empowerment for all.

In the 2023-24 school year, Special Olympics PA will be partnering with more than **450 schools** located in more than **55 counties** and the cities of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. It provides funding, resources, and a staff liaison to all of them. The Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) and Pennsylvania Bureau of Special Education endorse and support UCS and collaborate with Special Olympics PA.

Unified Champion Schools has three components designed to promote inclusion, develop leadership, increase awareness, and improve overall school climate.

1. Interscholastic Unified Sports High School Teams

- a. Composed of a proportional number of students who are Special Olympics eligible (intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities including many types of autism, or cognitive delay) and students without intellectual disabilities. This is a co-ed program.
- b. **Sports Offered:** Unified Indoor Bocce in the winter season; Unified Track and Field in the spring season; Unified Soccer (only in Philadelphia) in the spring season. Students with and without disabilities train and compete together meaningfully as equal peers.
- c. The team is regarded just like every other interscholastic sports team at the school.
- d. 10-11 week long season with after school practices a minimum of twice a week and a minimum of three competitions against other schools in the region.
- e. Team members wear uniforms with their school name and colors.
- f. There are regional championships with the opportunity to advance to state championships held in conjunction with PIAA state events.

2. Inclusive Youth Leadership

- a. Students with and without disabilities meet regularly as a structured inclusive group to determine goals and conduct activities which improve their school's overall climate.
- b. This can be a Unified Club or expansion of an existing school group (i.e., student council).
- c. Purposes of the club are to (1) conduct youth-led activities which promote acceptance, respect, and community throughout the school; (2) give students with disabilities a voice in their school along with their peers without disabilities; (3) help students develop leadership skills.

3. Whole School Engagement

- a. Students come together to organize and conduct activities designed to promote inclusion and respect, while making their school community better.
- b. **Spread the Word Inclusion** is a student-organized campaign which helps everyone understand the need for using respectful and unifying language.
- c. **Fans in the Stands:** Students show support for their Unified Sports team by promoting attendance at the competition hosted by their school.