

Unified Sports & Inclusion: Partnering with Special Olympics

2025 National Athletic Directors Conference



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**

Unified Sports & Inclusion: Partnering with Special Olympics



Presenters

Thomas Baker

Director of Physical Education, Health and Athletics
Hendrick Hudson School District

Nathan Johnson

Executive Director, Unified Sports
Special Olympics New York

Brian Quinn

Director of Programming and Partnerships
Special Olympics North America

Why Unified Sports?



“This will be the most rewarding program you ever partake in!”





2 Minute Discussion Topic



Discuss with your neighbors:

What inclusive activities for students with disabilities are already happening in your school/district that you're proud of?



Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®



A *strategy* that engages schools in creating climates of social inclusion, acceptance, respect, and human dignity for all students with and without intellectual disabilities.

What is Unified Champion Schools?



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**



Inclusive Youth Leadership



Provides students *with and without intellectual disabilities* opportunities to take on *leadership roles* in *promoting inclusion, respect* and *positive climate* in their schools and in their communities.



Special Olympics Unified Sports®

Combines *athletes (players with intellectual disabilities)* and *partners (players without intellectual disabilities)* to create athletic teams for *training and competition*.

Who can participate? EVERYONE!!!



“Unified Sports = UNIFIED COMMUNITIES”

Whole School Engagement



Provides opportunities for ***all students*** to participate in ***school-wide campaigns*** and ***activities***.



What is Interscholastic-style Unified Sports?



Interscholastic Unified Sports is a ***school athletics/activities program*** that is co-supported by the ***State Special Olympics Program*** and the ***State High School Athletic/Activities Association***.

Interscholastic Unified Sports...

- is treated as an **officially sanctioned high school sport**
- teams **represent their school**
- teams **compete with other high schools**
- function as **any other interscholastic program**



Special Olympics Unified Sports®



- ***Sports as a catalyst for culture building and whole school impact, with the goal of social inclusion for all***
- This is ***part of your interscholastic program***, not a side show!
- Unified partners as ***teammates, not “helpers”***. Great way to get ***additional non-athlete students*** involved in your athletics program!
- ***Authenticity vs tokenism.***



NYSPHSAA/Special Olympics NY Partnership



- Established 2013 with 12 schools and one sport
- Currently 295+ schools
- NYSPHSAA adopts Special Olympics Unified Sports rules
- Officially recognized offerings:
 - Flag Football
 - Tennis
 - Soccer
 - Bowling
 - Bocce
 - Basketball
- Continued work
 - Additional Sport exploration
 - Modified (middle school level) Unified Sports

Building your Unified Sports Leadership Team



Who do you need to succeed?

- Meet with **Special Education Department** and **SEPTAs**
- Meet with **Physical Education** or **Coaching staff**
- Meet with **Special Olympics**



2 Minute Discussion Topic



Discuss with your neighbors:

Who would be on your Unified Sports Leadership Dream Team?

Budget Considerations?



- What is **athletic department** funded?
- **Other** school funding sources?
- Fundraising/Booster Club?
- Support from **Special Olympics Programs**

How Special Olympics Supports Schools



- **Training** & ongoing **local support** for: admin, coaches, staff, students
- Printed & electronic resources at **no cost**
- Seed funding may be available for startup costs such as:
 - Coach Stipends
 - Uniforms & equipment
 - Transportation
 - Competition & league play
 - Supplies for school-wide campaigns



What do the competitions offer?



- Teams supporting teams!
- Chance for school to come together
- Spotlight and recognition for often overlooked students
- Unifies the whole community!



What are they saying?



“I never ever thought I would see the day that my daughter wore a school uniform.”

-Parent of a
student with disabilities



What are they saying?



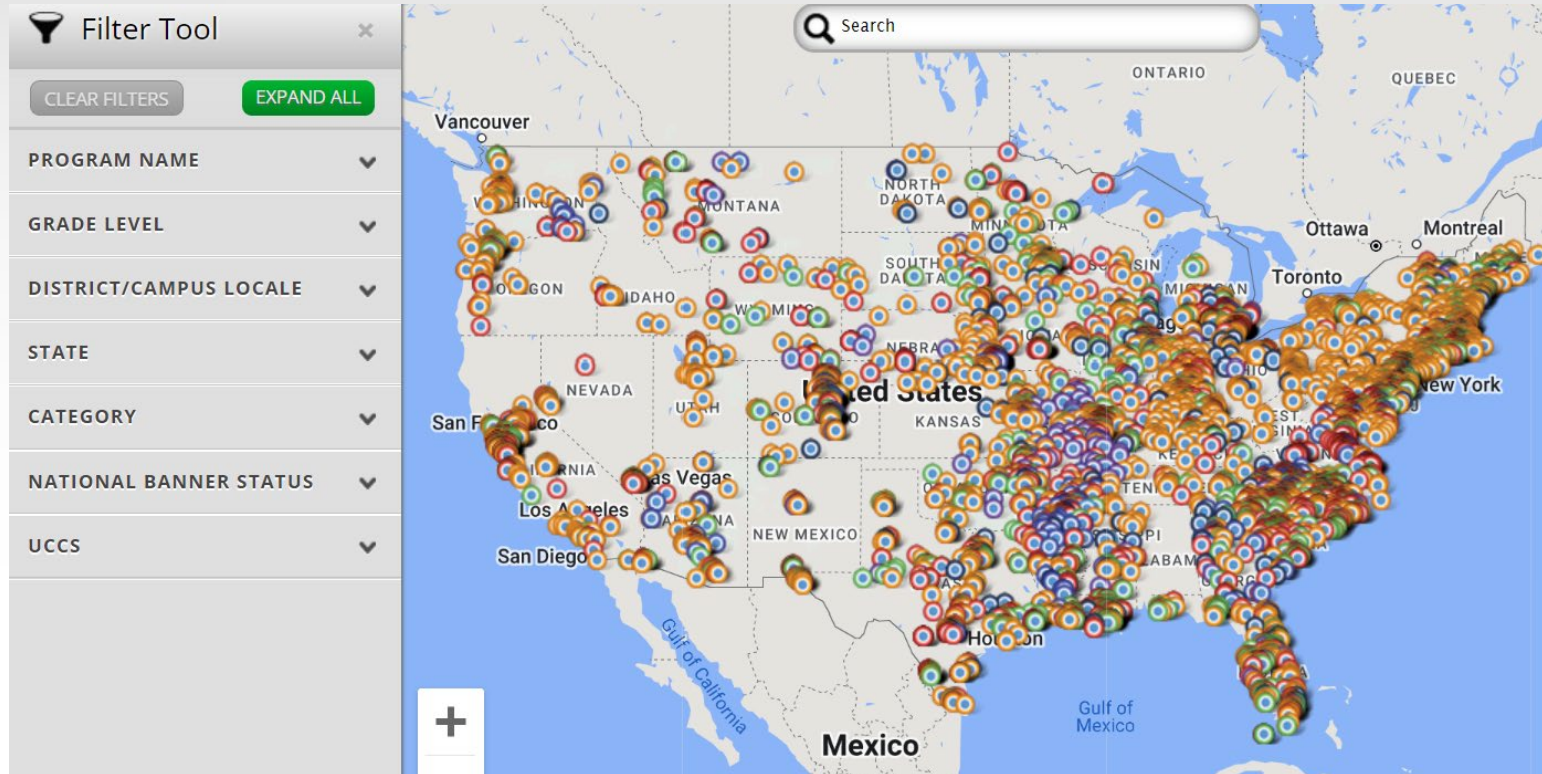
“I joined Unified Sports because I hurt my knee in football and could not play anymore. I joined this to be a student-coach and they all taught me about life.”

- Senior Partner Athlete



Here is what the athletes are saying:





Most common sports offered



Special Olympics Unified Sports® at the HS interscholastic level:

1. Track & Field
2. Basketball
3. Bowling
4. Soccer
5. Flag Football
6. Bocce
7. Competitive Cheer / Spirit
8. Volleyball



National Partnerships



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**

NIAAA since **2024**
since **2017**

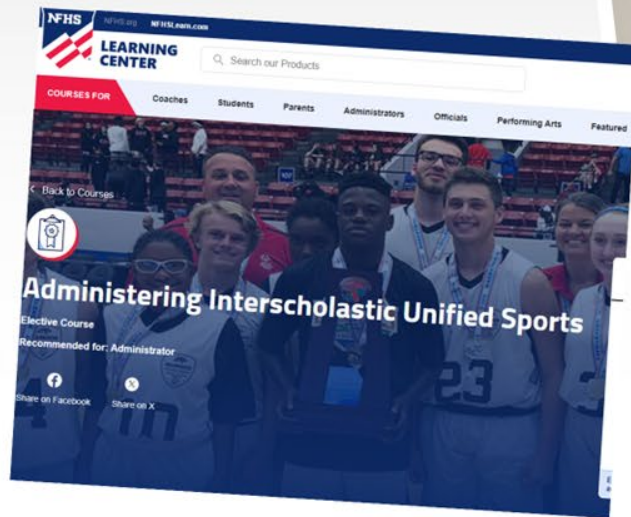
NFHS

Goals:

1. Increase **participation**
2. Support official state and local level **partnerships**
3. Increase the **quality** of inclusion programs

Key Resources (at no cost!)

- Coaching Unified Sports Course
- Admin Resource Guide
- Online Admin Course



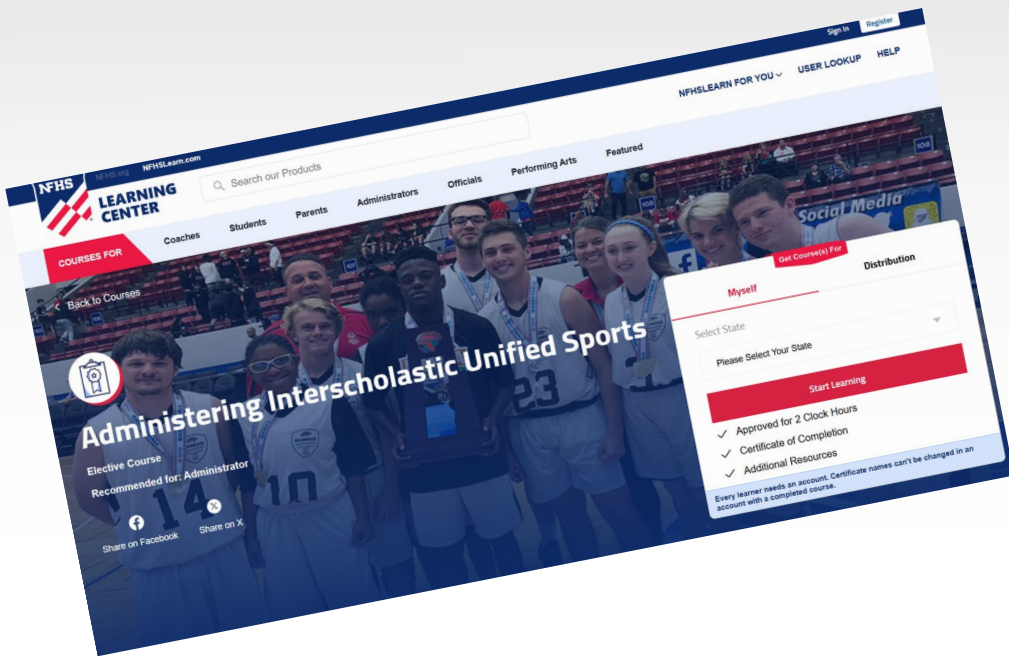
Resource Guide for
Administering Special Olympics
Unified Sports® at the
High School Interscholastic Level



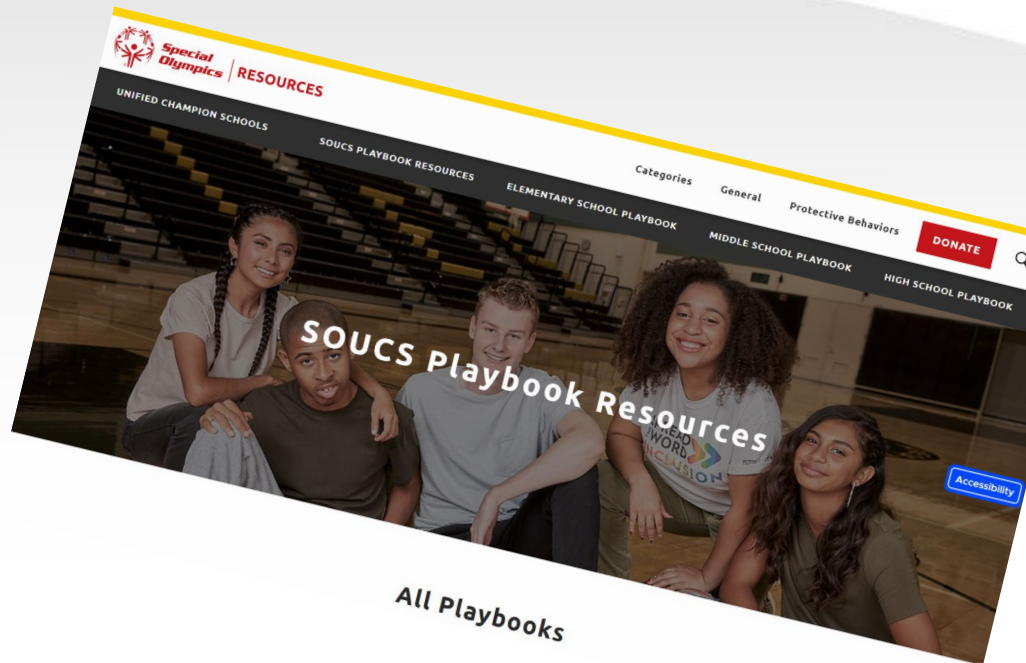
Special Olympics
Unified Champion
Schools®



Administering Unified Sports Course



Special Olympics Resources & Playbooks



Contact Us!



**Scan to be connected with your
state Special Olympics office!**



Thomas Baker

Thomaspatrickbaker@gmail.com

Nathan Johnson

npjohnson@nyso.org

Brian Quinn

bquinn@specialolympics.org

Q&A

