

What is Project UNIFY ?

Beginning in 2008, Special Olympics North America has been awarded a grant from the US Department of Education called Project UNIFY with a goal to *activate youth to promote school communities where all young people are agents of change – fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with cognitive disabilities by utilizing the programs and initiatives of Special Olympics.*



Project UNIFY.



Project UNIFY programs

Unified Sports® • Young Athletes™ • Camp Shriver • Get Into It™
Be a Fan™ • Spread the Word to End the Word™ • Fans Club • Fans in the Stands
Youth Activation Summit • Youth Activation Committee • Education Leaders Network

In the first three years of Project UNIFY, Special Olympics Wisconsin (SOWI) launched exciting inclusive initiatives like the Young Athletes Program (YAP) for children 2-7 years old, Camp Shriver (an inclusive summer day camp), and a Unified Sports basketball league in conjunction with summer enrichment activities. We now aim to move towards a whole school approach by building upon these initiatives.

A catalyst for change

Through data collected, Special Olympics has learned that in order to be transformative within schools, state Programs need to go beyond simply providing students the opportunity to engage in single, SO-specific initiatives. It is the connection between SO initiatives, along with the youth and school's involvement in the design and implementation of Project UNIFY that can foster a more inclusive and welcoming environment for students with cognitive disabilities. We also understand how important it is for the state Program to collaborate with educators in identifying what role Project UNIFY can play in meeting their state, district and individual school's strategic goals, whether it be promoting school climate, developing physical fitness, building character, preventing bullying, enhancing student engagement, or any other important school reform.

As a result, the following definition of a Project UNIFY School has emerged:

Project UNIFY School: A sustaining Project UNIFY School with a combination of at least three Project UNIFY components; sports, youth leadership/advocacy, and a school-wide activity. In a "Project UNIFY School" there is an understanding that Project UNIFY is not just an incident or event that happens for one day, or a single experience, but rather year-long or seasonal activities. In a Project UNIFY school there is an expectation that acceptance and inclusion are everyday occurrences that change entire schools and impact the whole student body.

Project UNIFY goals for 2011-12

- Recruit 20 schools to be Project UNIFY Schools
- Offer up to 20 Agencies an opportunity to do Unified Sports with their local school
- Recruit 10 new Young Athletes sites
- Develop a Statewide Youth Activation Committee and Education Leaders Network
- Host a Fall and Spring Youth Activation Summit
- Recruit 25 new schools and 15 community organizations to run an R-Word Campaign
- Recruit 1 new Camp Shriver and funding to support it
- Host Fans In the Stands tables at regional and state competitions with invitations out to schools
- Hold "Ultimate Fan in the Stands" competition at state competitions
- Utilize Social Media and create a promo video to bring awareness to Project UNIFY initiatives