

## Special Olympics Unified Sports®: The Pathway

### Young Athletes™

Students in pre-school through Grade 2 participate in the Young Athletes™ Program, which complements the gross motor skills taught in Connecticut's public and private primary grade schools. A kit of activity supplies, assistance and support, a curriculum guide with DVD and end-of-year culminating event are provided.

### Elementary School

At this level, students participate in sports activities that focus on skill and gross motor development.

Athletes and partners participate in basketball soccer, volleyball and track & field events with their peers from around the state. Schools are encouraged to organize several practice sessions locally and then come together for regional Unified Sports® events.

Practices and regional events provide a forum for sustained socialization among players and enhance the individual's sports skills.

### Middle School

At this point, participants begin to transition from focusing on individual sports skills and gross motor development to engaging in team-based competition, as they continue to build meaningful interpersonal relationships. Athletes and partners participate in intra-squad scrimmages, interscholastic meets and Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference tournaments. Sports include soccer, basketball, bowling, volleyball and track & field.

### High School

As students continue in the Program, they play as teammates. They engage in positive social interaction between students with and without intellectual disabilities, build new friends with different abilities on and off the playing field, gain confidence, and demonstrate positive changes in attitudes, behavior and performance. Their example even helps to inspire others, creating a more inclusive school climate.

**Special  
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The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities; giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills, friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.



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The CIAC believes that interscholastic athletic programs and competition are an integral part of a student's academic, social, emotional and physical development. The CIAC promotes the academic mission of schools and honorable competition. As such, the CIAC serves as the regulatory agency for high school interscholastic athletic programs and exists to assure quality experiences that reflect high ethical standards and expectations for fairness, equity and sportsmanship for all student athletes and coaches. The CIAC provides leadership and support for member schools through the voluntary services of dedicated school administrators, athletic directors, coaches and consultants.



Inspiring Acceptance and Inclusion through Sports

# MEDIA GUIDELINES

## What is Special Olympics Unified Sports®?

The Special Olympics Unified Sports® program in schools brings together students with intellectual disabilities (referred to as Athletes) and those without (Unified Partners) to play sports, gain physical fitness, and develop friendships. Not only does this powerful, transformative Program inspire inclusion and acceptance for students of all abilities in sports, but also creates a more positive school climate and challenges the misconceptions and misunderstandings students may have about people with intellectual disabilities.

Special Olympics Unified Sports® enriches the lives of its participants with intellectual disabilities, who might not otherwise have opportunities to play sports and does so in an environment where they feel supported, encouraged and respected by their teammates and coaches. And, it inspires students without disabilities to become more aware, accepting and compassionate. While Unified Sports® are played in accordance with game rules and with certified referees, it does not focus on competition and winning. Instead, it emphasizes on the collaboration, joy and personal achievements that make sports meaningful—and life-changing! Tournaments often are held with teams from several schools representing different towns taking part. Each begins with an Opening Ceremony that features a parade of athletes, ceremonial lighting of the Special Olympics cauldron, and the National Anthem and conclude with a medal presentation.

A leadership summit for participants to share exemplary practices and network is held in January. The Michaels Cup Banquet is held in May to honor outstanding student athletes' who demonstrate teamwork and sportsmanship.

## Special Olympics Unified Sports® Facts

Through Special Olympics Connecticut's partnership with the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC), Special Olympics Unified Sports® is offered in more than 190 elementary, middle and high schools across the state.

Special Olympics Unified Sports® School-aged Participants (includes elementary, middle and high school students and Young Athletes in pre-school through Grade 2)

- ◆ 1,964 Athletes (with Intellectual Disabilities)
- ◆ 3,689 Unified Sports® Partners (without Intellectual Disabilities)
- ◆ 5,653 Total

Special Olympics Unified Sports® currently offered in Connecticut schools:

- ◆ Track & Field
- ◆ Soccer
- ◆ Basketball
- ◆ Bowling
- ◆ Volleyball

Special Olympics Connecticut Participants Overall:

- ◆ 6,675 Athletes
- ◆ 7,392 Unified Sports® Partners
- ◆ 14,067 Total



## Media Terminology

- ◆ When referring to Special Olympics Unified Sports®, always precede it with the term “Special Olympics.” Special Olympics Unified Sports® .
- ◆ Always refer to the participants in this program as either Special Olympics Athletes (persons with intellectual disabilities), Special Olympics Unified Sports® Partners or a Special Olympics Unified Sports® team.
- ◆ Special Olympics Unified Sports® events offered are considered to be in the Unified Sports® division. (i.e., Girls 100m dash, Boys 100m dash; Unified Sports® 100m dash)
- ◆ It is acceptable to refer to both Special Olympics athlete and Unified Sports® Partners as student athletes.
- ◆ Refrain from referring to Unified Sports® participants as Special Olympians.
- ◆ Use “people-first” language, such as “John is an athlete with an intellectual disability” and NOT “John is an intellectually disabled athlete.”
- ◆ Do not use the word “the” in front of Special Olympics unless describing a specific Special Olympics event. Example: “Special Olympics formally began in 1968” instead of “The Special Olympics formally began in 1968.”

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