

Unified Champion Schools

Partnership between

Special Olympics Pennsylvania & the School District of Philadelphia

***Special
Olympics***
Pennsylvania



- Since inception in 2008, Unified Champion Schools has emphasized a focus on urban schools.
- With the events of spring and summer of 2020 in the U.S., UCS emphasized the need for more intentionality around inclusivity and representation.
- Special Olympics North America decided to redouble its efforts in underserved communities and introduced the City Schools initiative.
- At that time, twenty-nine Special Olympics state Programs made a commitment to expand their efforts and programming within the cities they serve.
- Today, 3 years later, the Initiative consists of 46 cities in 33 state Programs.

UCS History with SD of Philadelphia



- Started with 4 middle schools in 2008 doing Unified Basketball
- Program expanded to 10 high schools doing Unified Soccer in 2012
- Currently there are 48 Unified Champion Schools in Philadelphia participating in Unified Soccer, Unified Indoor Bocce, and Inclusive Young Athletes
 - High Schools
 - Middle Schools
 - Elementary Schools

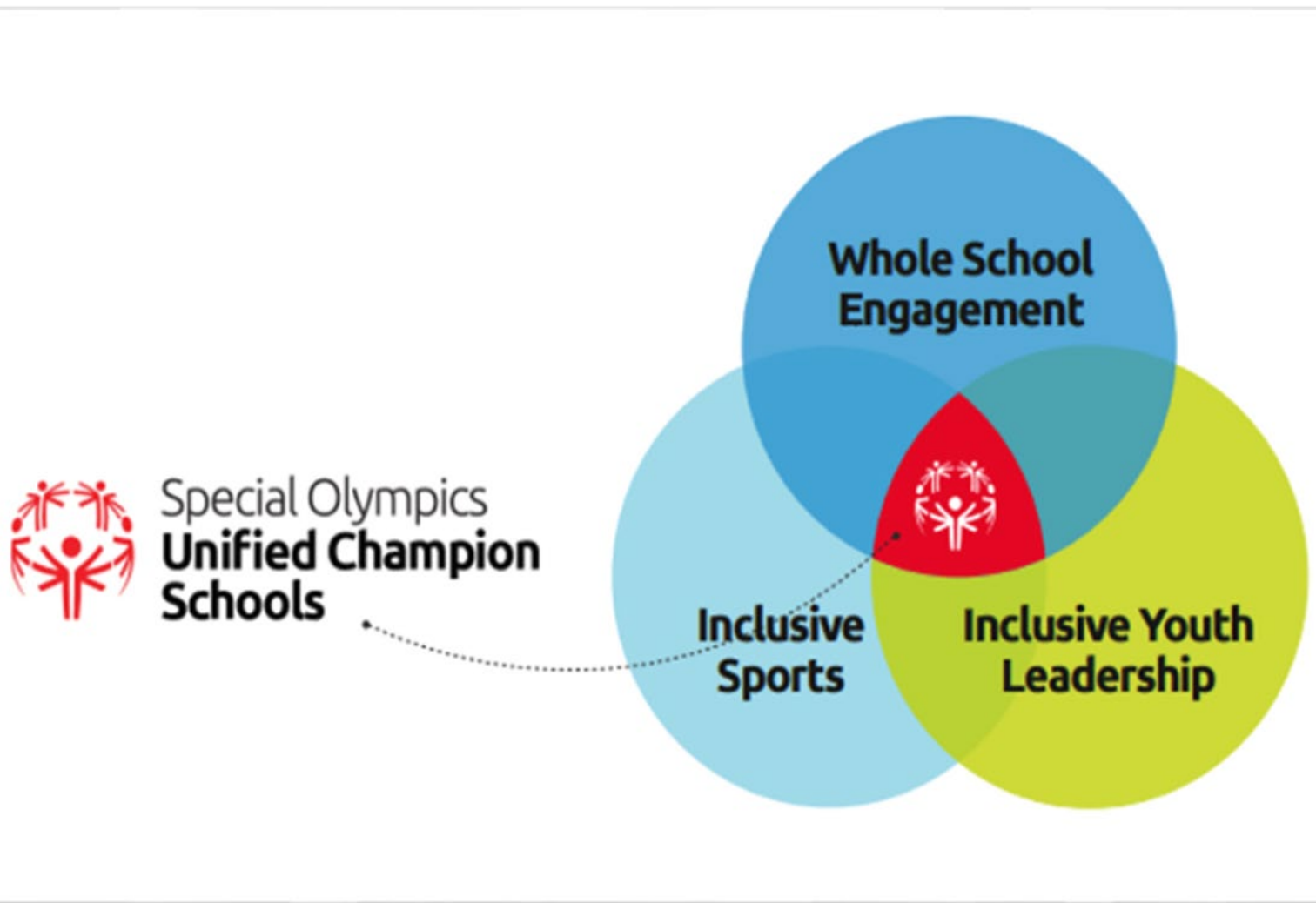
Planning for the Future



- Expand UCS to every Philadelphia Public School with a special education program
- Each high school participates in at least two Interscholastic Unified Sports throughout the year
- Build more community partnerships to support programming
- Transition students from UCS to free community -based Special Olympics programming following graduation
- Offer younger students additional free sports opportunities in Philadelphia's Special Olympics community program

Overview of UCS in Philadelphia

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Overview of UCS in Philadelphia



High School Interscholastic Unified Sports

Sports Offered

- Unified Indoor Bocce (winter season)
- Unified Soccer and Unified Futsal (spring season)
- Length of sports season matches the state high school association season
- Regular season, regional championships, and state championships
- **Team is treated exactly the same as every interscholastic sports team in the school**



Overview of UCS in Philadelphia



Middle and Elementary School Unified Programs

- Unified Indoor Bocce (elementary and middle schools)
 - Intramural program promoting meaningful inclusion that runs for 8 -10 weeks
- Inclusive Young Athletes (K-2 students)
 - Sport and play program for children with and without intellectual disabilities that introduces basic sport skills like running, kicking, and throwing



Overview of UCS in Philadelphia



Inclusive Youth Leadership Clubs



- Special education students and general education students **co-lead** and through this process, they learn to plan, work, communicate, advocate, and organize together.
- **PURPOSE:** Promote the values of inclusion and respect in the school community for a more nurturing and welcoming learning and social environment.

Whole School Engagement Activities

- Student-led and organized activities to promote inclusion, raise awareness, and improve school climate
- Collaboration by the inclusive youth leadership club with other student organizations around a common cause: Valuing inclusion, disability rights, respect, and diversity

Impact on Students and Schools



- Fosters Social Inclusion: Teammates with and without disabilities become friends
- Creates school climates that promote respect, acceptance, and diversity
- Reduces bullying through empowerment, awareness, and engagement
- Improves health and fitness, especially for students with disabilities facing higher risks
- Develops character, life skills, and enhanced self-esteem
- Effectively promotes social and emotional learning

Benefits of Partnership



- Established a “Unified Sports” Division within the District’s interscholastic Philadelphia Public League.
- Expanded League-wide support for Unified Sports programming, and elevated their visibility.
- Recognizing Unified Sports scholar-athletes on the same platform as other teams (same awards, same certificates, etc.).



Why is it Successful



- Buy-in from District Leadership and School Administration help keep this partnership front -of-mind.
- Monthly report out at our League Meetings to share ongoing updates with Athletic Directors.
- Continue to explore opportunities to expand programming in more schools.