



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools**



Become a Unified Champion School and Start a Unified®Basketball Program at Your School

Goal: Create a Unified Champion Schools program in all Massachusetts High Schools

Partnership with MIAA and Special Olympics, MA: The Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association and Special Olympics have established a partnership and is focused on growing Unified Sports® in High School Athletics with an emphasis on growth at the Track and Field level.

What is the US DOE Guidance on Athletic Equity? In January, 2013, the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights announced guidance detailing school districts' legal obligations to provide students with disabilities equal access to athletics activities. The guidance letter clarifies existing law and encourages school districts to improve and expand upon athletic opportunities for students with disabilities (see http://www.specialolympics.org/Press/2013/Calls_for_Leveling_the_Playing_Field_for_Students_with_Disabilities.aspx for more information).

How Can Special Olympics help? Special Olympics can offer the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Program, a successful solution to this directive. This program has shown proven results in providing students opportunities to play sports together, enhance school climate and give students increased physical, social and educational skills.

What is Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Program? The Special Olympics Unified Champion School program is a comprehensive model of the Unified Schools strategy that combines Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership and Whole School Engagement to create the greatest impact.

The activities and opportunities provided through the program help to reduce bullying and exclusion, promote healthy activity and interactions, combat stereotypes and stigma, eliminate hurtful language in schools and engage people in social activities that lead to personal growth.

What is the Role of Unified Sports®? By bringing together people with and without intellectual disabilities, as teammates and competitors, on the field of play, Unified Sports breaks down the walls of social exclusion enabling all participants to gain a new appreciation for one another, dispel fear, misperceptions and low expectations, develop friendships and pave the way for broader social inclusion in the community.

SOMA Unified Sports® Basketball Leagues will be based upon successful Special Olympics programs using the principles and programs of the Unified Champion Schools Program, Unified Sports®, Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) rules and guidelines, and the support, backing and engagement of the

Massachusetts Association of Student Councils (MASC) as the core. Unified Sports® leagues will strive to help promote climates of dignity, respect, and inclusion in schools for students with and without intellectual disabilities.

Financial Implications for Starting a Unified Sports Program in your High School: As in any other program, there are costs to this program, but they are relatively minimal. Estimated cost is \$3000-\$4000* per sports season. Breakdown includes:

- 1 Coach for unified sports team
- Transportation for approximately 4 league meets and jamboree
- Uniforms
- Equipment (already have most if not all of the equipment)

*Special Olympics MA offers grant funding to schools who commit to a 3 year program, to help jumpstart the program with seed money for the school.

Recommended Timeline to start a Unified Sports Team:

- **April/May/June**
 - o Obtain school approval from principal/school committee
 - o Sign application and return to SOMA
- **August/September**
 - o Secure Unified Basketball Coach
 - o Recruit athletes and unified partners within your school
 - Send letter of interest to special needs population
 - Talk with teachers to target recruit athletes and unified partners
- **September**
 - o Get required training for coaches
 - o Determine any additional equipment needs and uniforms
 - o 1 faculty and 2 student athletes attend youth leadership conference at SOMA in the Winter
 - o Coordinate logistics of training times
 - o Secure gym, practice schedules
 - o Coaches League Meeting
 - o Signup athletes for season
- **October**
 - o Begin practices, inter-league meets
- **End of October/November**
 - o 4 to 6 Inter-league Meets
- **November (week before Thanksgiving)**
 - o Basketball Jamboree
 - o End-of-Season Banquet
 - o All-school unified assembly or r-word campaign (can be completed any time during the school year)