



Become a Unified Champion School and Start a Unified® Track and Field Program at Your School

Goal: Turn every high school in the Commonwealth into a Unified Champion School, utilizing Unified Track and Field as the platform.

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 [US DOE Guidance](#) for more information).

How Can Special Olympics help? Special Olympics can offer the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Program, which is 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 School 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.

How can my school become a Unified Champion School? It's simple . . . You can become a Unified Champion School by participating in all three components of the program: (1) Unified Sports (e.g.: Unified Track and Field, Unified Basketball, or Unified Bocce) (2) Youth Leadership/advocacy (e.g.: through having a leadership club such as Best Buddies, Student Council or Unified Club) (3) a school-wide activity that educates and promotes inclusion (eg Fans in the Stands at a Unified Sports Event, or an R-word campaign to eliminate hurtful language in the schools).

SOMA Unified Sports© Track & Field Team Leagues In the 2016 Spring school sports season, there were 2 Unified Track and Field Leagues and 33 schools who participated in Unified Track and Field. It only takes 5 schools in a

geographic area to create a league. It is a separate program from Varsity Track and Field, but follows the same MIAA rules and guidelines, with exceptions as needed. Athletes and Unified Partners train approximately 3 days a week, have 3-4 inter-league meets, a sectional meet and a State Championship.

Financial Implications for Starting a Unified Sports Track and Field 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, sectional and state championship
- Uniforms and Equipment (already have most if not all of the equipment)

*Special Olympics MA offers grant funding to schools who make a 3 year commitment to being a Unified Champion School and implementing the 3 criteria – Unified Sports, Youth Leadership and Whole School Engagement.

Recommended Timeline to start a Unified Sports Team:

- **September/October/November**
 - o Obtain school approval from principal/school committee
 - o Sign application and return to SOMA – **deadline: November 25**
- **December**
 - o Secure Unified Track and Field 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
- **January**
 - 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.
 - o Coordinate logistics of training times
 - o Secure fields, practice schedules
- **February**
 - o Coaches League Meeting
 - o Signup athletes for season
 - o School stipends distributed for year 1 and year 2 schools
- **March**
 - o Begin practices by end of month
- **April**
 - o 3 to 4 Inter-league Meets
- **May**
 - o League Championship meet
 - o State Championship meet (available to all 2nd year Unified Leagues and beyond)
 - o End-of-Season Banquet
 - o All-school unified assembly or r-word campaign (can be completed any time during the school year)

Testimonial from a Unified Track and Field Coach:

Two years ago we started Unified Track and Field in our school. I have seen the program double in size in those two years to now include Unified Basketball and Track with over 35 students participating in each sport. I have seen how the students interactions have impacted the lives of the athletes, partners and parents. The students, through their actions, have changed the culture of our school in a very short time. Our athletes have made enormous strides in their social development, especially their self-esteem. I want to share these experiences with schools so that the Unified Sports Program can continue to grow and impact many more students and parents throughout the state.