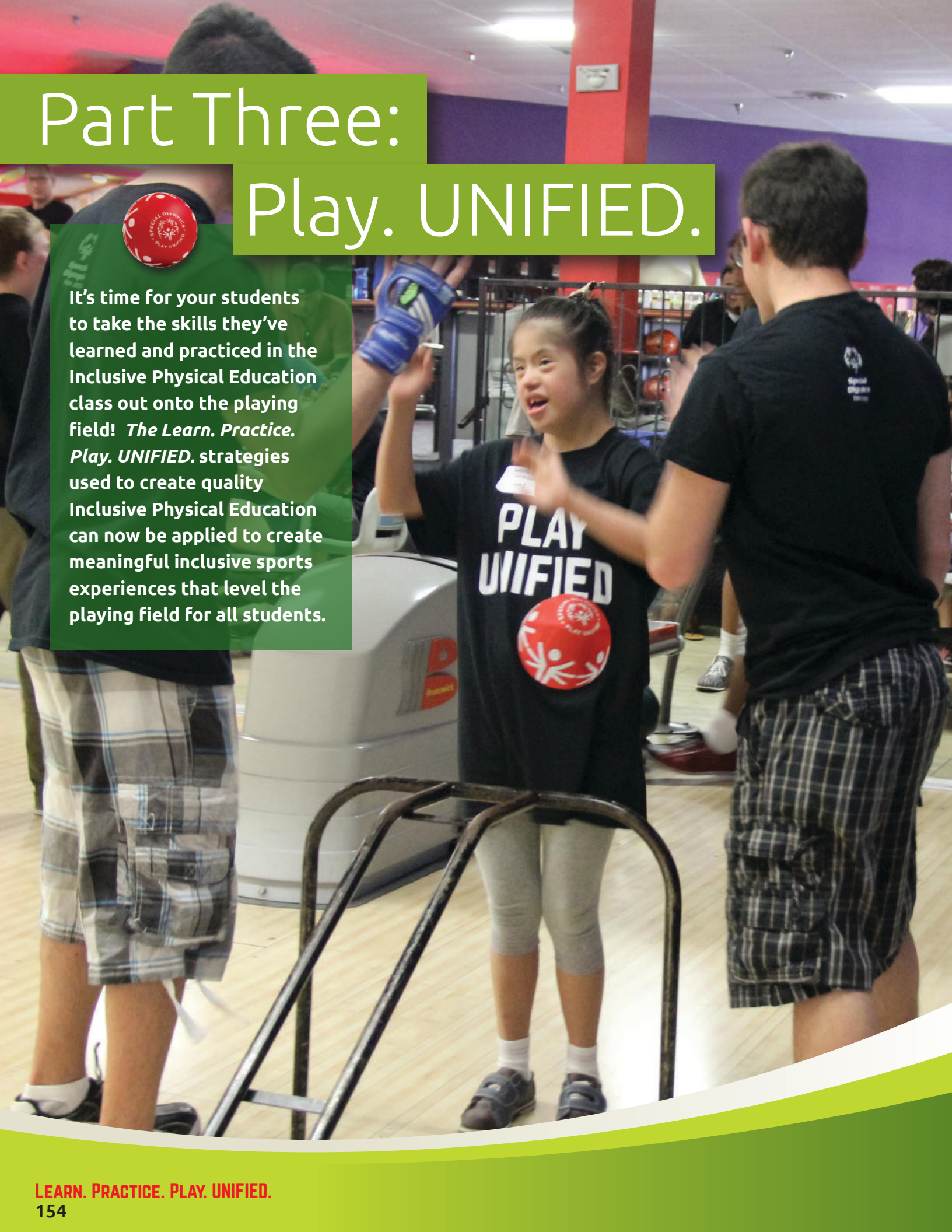


Part Three:

Play. UNIFIED.

It's time for your students to take the skills they've learned and practiced in the Inclusive Physical Education class out onto the playing field! *The Learn. Practice. Play. UNIFIED.* strategies used to create quality Inclusive Physical Education can now be applied to create meaningful inclusive sports experiences that level the playing field for all students.



SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED SPORTS® THREE LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

Play provides a road map to guide you in becoming a trailblazer and leader in utilizing sport and game play to create school communities where every student is an important and valued member of the team, and has the opportunity to discover his and her full potential.

Learn. Practice. Play. UNIFIED. uses the Special Olympics Unified Sports® model of three participation options – player development, recreation and competition – as a framework for creating a combination of game play opportunities that provide access to positive experiences for all students, whether they are playing for continued skill development, fun and exercise, or to compete and win.

TALENT MAKES PLAYS. TEAMWORK MAKES A STATEMENT. GAME ON!

Dedicated to promoting social inclusion through shared sports training and competition experiences, Unified sports joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding.

There are three Unified sports models, each with a different structure and function, but all three having social inclusion as a main goal.

To learn more about Special Olympics Unified Sports® see the Resources section of this book and visit Unified Sports at: www.specialolympics.org.

Beau Doherty, President and CEO of Special Olympics Connecticut introduced Unified Sports to the Special Olympics movement in 1989. In the 2006 Special Olympics Connecticut Annual Report, he wrote:

“With each day we are one step closer to showing the world what we’ve come to understand—our athletes are not “people with intellectual disabilities,” they are just ‘people,’ and like all people they should be judged by their abilities, rather than their disabilities.”

DESIGNING INCLUSIVE SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OPTIONS UTILIZING THE THREE UNIFIED SPORTS MODELS

Player Development

Approximately equal numbers of students with and without disabilities, not necessarily of similar abilities, play together as teammates. Teammates of higher abilities serve as mentors to assist teammates of lower abilities in developing sport-specific skills and tactics, and in successfully participating in a cooperative team environment. Students should all be of similar age, however, player development allows a greater age variance for mentors. For example, middle or high school students hosting Young Athletes, Unified Game Days or sport clinics for elementary or Pre-K students.



Examples of Unified Player Development activities include:

- **Inclusive PE** – Peer partners with and without disabilities play on the same teams for Unified scrimmage and/or modified game play. Peer partners without disabilities participate as both mentors and teammates in teaching drills and lessons.
- **Unified Game Days and Sports Clinics** – School athletic teams or students in higher grade levels run activities and events for younger students, such as Young Athlete programs, in either self-contained or inclusive classes.
- **Student Athlete Coaches** – Assist with practices for the schools’ Special Olympics teams, as mentors and teammates for training drills and scrimmage play.
- **Intramural** – Club sports programs can offer a player development option for students who benefit from more guided and modified game play.



Recreation

Students with and without disabilities play together with some modifications and mentoring. Recreational play does not follow any prescribed training, competition and/or team composition requirements. Recreational opportunities may take place in partnership with schools, sport clubs, the community and other private or public organizations as introductory one-day events, exhibitions or demonstrations, or ongoing activities such as physical education classes and intramurals.

Examples of Unified Recreation activities include:

- **Unified Game Days** – Unified teams of students from similar grades play one another in one or more sports stations along with fun games or activities.
- **Unified Recess** – Specific activities, areas or days are set up for students to interact and play together equally and meaningfully.
- **Intramurals, Pick-up Games** – Establish a Unified intramural club after or during school, or set days where courts or fields are open for Unified pick-up soccer or basketball. Try new sports like kickball or bocce.

- **3-on-3 Tournaments** and other modified game play activities. These can be part of the end of an Inclusive PE unit or practiced in PE and held as part of a school-wide event.
- **Unified Rec Night, Interscholastic Rec Games** – Organize an inclusive rec program in your district or with other schools in your area on a weekday night or weekend where students can play for fun. Teams can be set ahead of time, or games can be organized on the spot as students show up.
- **Unified Rec Night** – Declare one night a week Unified Rec night where students show up and play a sport. Fields or courts can be divided so one is for player development and the other for recreational game play.
- **Inclusive Recreation Programs** – Identify or work with your local recreation program, YMCAs and youth sports clubs to apply the Unified sports models to creating inclusive recreation programs that can serve your students.





Competition

Players with and without disabilities participate together as teammates on sports training and competition teams. Teams are comprised of approximately equal numbers of athletes with and without disabilities, of similar age and ability, and play games with no modifications or assistance.

Examples of Unified Competitive activities include:

- **Play Unified Shriver Cup Tournaments** – Register teams for the annual statewide Unified tournaments in soccer, basketball and bowling, organized through Special Olympics New Jersey Play Unified program.
 - **Add new Unified team sports** to your interscholastic competitions.
 - **Organize co-curricular competitions among school-based teams** as competitive and/or tournament style events that engage the school community as fans. Tie the competition to a school wide athletic, educational or social event.
- **Special Olympics College Unified Clubs** – Across the state, colleges sponsor College Unified Clubs that train and compete against one another in SONJ’s Shriver Cup Unified Tournaments. Special Olympics eligible athletes in your program, 16 years and older, are invited to come out and play on teams with college students and compete with other programs in the state. Learn more by visiting College Unified Clubs at www.sonj.org.
 - **Introduce New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association Unified events** – Work with your NJSIAA Conference and other schools in your area to create Unified teams or divisions as part of existing school-based interscholastic athletics. Suggest Unified relay teams in swimming and track, or Unified soccer, basketball, golf, tennis, bocce or bowling.



PLAY UNIFIED AND SPECIAL OLYMPICS TRAINING AND COMPETITION PROGRAMS WORK TOGETHER TO GIVE SCHOOLS MULTIPLE PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES

By combining the *Play Unified* school-based resources along with *Special Olympics Training and Competition* and *Young Athlete* programs, schools can offer robust and sustainable inclusive sports and physical activities for students of all abilities, from K-12.

Play Unified Co-curricular and Interscholastic Sports

Special Olympics New Jersey (SONJ) is excited to partner with schools and districts to create inclusive sports and social programs that ensure physical education, athletics and fitness, and co-curricular activities are accessible to all students. Across the globe, Special Olympics has shown that the transformative power of sports can create environments of acceptance, in which people of all abilities have the opportunity to achieve success and become teammates and friends, on and off the playing field!

The *Play Unified* school-based initiative is aimed at fostering social inclusion through Unified sports and inclusive leadership initiatives. It is designed to support individual schools in creating a variety of inclusive sport and social experiences customized to meet the needs, interests, abilities and resources of the school and the students.

Play Unified School Partners (Pre-K through high school) are eligible to receive grants, trainings, equipment and technical assistance to support them in utilizing Special Olympics sports, education and leadership initiatives to provide inclusive co-curricular, interscholastic and recreational activities in an environment that values and recognizes the gifts and contributions of every student.

As part of the *Play Unified School Partnership*, Special Olympics New Jersey organizes interscholastic recreational and competitive events that bring Play Unified Schools together to compete and make new friends. The Play Unified program is completely school-based. Unified teams participating in these events are only from *Play Unified School Partnership* schools and of similar age. Schools are invited to register teams for the events, and are not required to form a Local Training Program.

Learn more by visiting Unified Sports Resources at www.specialolympics.org



LEARN. PRACTICE. PLAY. UNIFIED.



SPECIAL OLYMPICS TRAINING AND COMPETITION PROGRAM

Special Olympics provides meaningful training and competition opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities to participate in 24 different sports in four seasons throughout the year. New Jersey offers sports training and competition through Local Training Programs, located in 13 regional Areas across the state. A Local Training Program (LTP) is a team or group of teams sanctioned by Special Olympics New Jersey to offer sports training programs to registered Special Olympics athletes. LTPs organize and manage all of the state's school and community-based teams.

School-based Special Olympics Training and Competition programs serve only athletes enrolled in their school/district, while community based programs are not affiliated with a school and are open to registered athletes from anywhere in the region and of any age, 8 and older. Your school's LTP can offer traditional and/or Unified training and competition programs.

Traditional Local Training Program: Start a school-based Special Olympics sports program for athletes with intellectual disabilities. Select one or more of the sports offered to meet your goals and resources, and identify a coach. These teams and independent athletes are eligible to compete with other Special Olympics teams throughout the state in area, sectional and state competitions.

Unified Training and Competition: Bring athletes with and without disabilities together on one team to train and compete against other Special Olympics Unified Sports® teams around the state.

All schools are encouraged to form a Local Training Program or become affiliated with a Local Training Program in your community to offer your students optimal opportunities to *Learn. Practice. Play. UNIFIED!*

To start a Local Training Program at your school visit Find a Local Program at: www.sonj.org or call Special Olympics New Jersey at 609-896-8000.



PLAY UNIFIED CLUB

Club sport structure

Solely school-based: only schools in the *Play Unified School Partnership* participate.

Schools participate in school-based and interscholastic activities organized through the *Play Unified School Partnership* program.

Unified only: all teams consist of students with and without disabilities playing on the same teams.

Students play against teams from other schools in their area that are of similar age.

Play Unified leagues offer regional competitions between schools and three state competitions in soccer, basketball and bowling.

Teams practice a minimum of three times to prepare for tournaments and state competitions.

Regional interscholastic events are organized among local schools, but not required.

SONJ TRAINING AND COMPETITION

Travel league sport structure

School and community-based: any school, community organization or independent group can start a Local Training Program for athletes 8 years and older.

Schools register to form a Local Training Program with Special Olympics New Jersey. They identify one or more coaches and choose to participate in one or more of 24 sports offered in 4 seasons (fall, winter, spring and summer).

Offers two types of training and competition: sport events where only athletes with intellectual disabilities train and compete together, and Unified teams of athletes with and without disabilities.

Teams play against teams from around the state that are divisioned by skill level. Students may compete against teams or athletes of different ages, but similar skill level.

Athletes/teams participating in SONJ Training and Competition train once a week for 8 weeks prior to competitions.

Team or league sports like soccer, floor hockey, basketball and volleyball require one league game a week, in addition to one practice a week for 8 weeks.

Teams/athletes are eligible to compete in area, sectional and state competitions. Teams are not obligated to advance beyond area competitions, if they prefer. Some state tournaments require overnight stays that provide wonderful opportunities for building independence, social skills and giving athletes a true travel sports experience.

PLAY UNIFIED IN SCHOOL

Special Olympics New Jersey is committed to assisting schools with developing sustainable inclusive sports, education and social opportunities that build self-confidence, and promote a culture of inclusion and acceptance. We partner with schools to ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to participate safely and successfully in physical education, athletic, co-curricular and recreational activities that lead to a healthy, active and fulfilling lifestyle.

The **Play Unified School Partnership** provides strategies and resources to assist schools with developing a variety of meaningful inclusive sports experiences for their students in response to the New Jersey Equity in Athletics and Physical Activities Act, P.L. 2014 c.10, signed into law by Governor Chris Christie on June 19, 2014. The law requires schools to provide students with disabilities equal access to physical education and athletic activities. The Play Unified club and interscholastic sports initiatives, and our Special Olympics Training and Competition programs offer schools a variety of sports and physical activity participation options to ensure that every student has the opportunity to experience and enjoy.

Over 30 states currently have partnerships with their interscholastic athletic associations to provide inclusive athletic competition opportunities as part of their sanctioned interscholastic athletic programs. New Jersey is on the way! Special Olympics New Jersey invites schools, coaches, athletic directors, administrators and all affiliated with the NJSIAA to join us in establishing an interscholastic partnership in New Jersey.

In the meantime, Special Olympics New Jersey offers interscholastic competitions in soccer, basketball, bowling and bocce through the **Shriver Cup Tournaments** and the **Play Unified program**.

To learn more about **Special Olympics Unified Sports®** programs across the country visit Unified Sports Resources at www.specialolympics.org

LET'S PLAY!

Here are some quick tips to get you started.

1. Develop a Game Plan

How does your school plan on making sports and physical activity programs accessible for all? You may already offer no cut sports opportunities, have all students included in physical education or, offer all students the opportunities to participate in intramurals. But, do all students feel welcome and are the activities fully inclusive? Explore how these programs can be made more accessible and how they can be used to encourage more students to come out and play.



2. Join the Partnership and Establish a Play Unified Inclusive Club

Students of all abilities can lead and have the power to positively impact their school communities. Schools participating in the Play Unified School Partnership establish student led, inclusive Play Unified Clubs, where students with and without disabilities work with educators and administrators to organize inclusive sports and social programs. These youth led clubs become the creative force and energy behind your inclusive sport and social initiatives.

3. Ensure that Every Student has the Opportunity to Experience the Joy and Benefits of Sports

Inclusive sports options do not have to be tied to interscholastic sports your school already offers. The students in your Play Unified Club can poll the student population to determine which sports they would like to see. Identify sports that are more accessible like bocce and bowling. Try fun events such as Unified kickball along with more traditional sports such as track, swimming, soccer, basketball, tennis and golf. Consider Unified fitness programs such as Unified weight training or yoga.





4. Organize Co-curricular and Extracurricular Sports and Fitness Activities

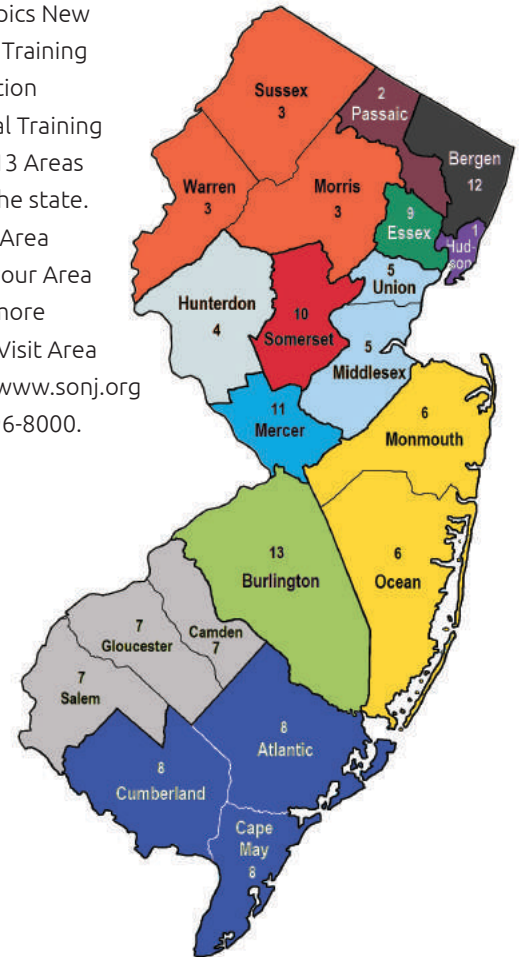
- It is important to have a Play Unified School Management Team in place that is comprised of representatives from special services, athletics, physical education and health, administration and other key areas to ensure that resources and facilities are available to support your programs.
- Develop a three-year plan. Start small and build on each year.
- Aim to incorporate one program from each participation option level: player development, recreation and competitive.
- Collaborate with other Play Unified Schools in your region to set up interscholastic practice sessions, games or tournaments.



5. Participate in Special Olympics New Jersey Play Unified League competition

Each year Special Olympics New Jersey organizes interscholastic competitions among **Play Unified** Schools that are participating in the **Play Unified School Partnership** program. High schools and middle schools field Unified teams in sports that include bowling, soccer, basketball, softball and bocce, and play one another in recreational and competitive events.

Special Olympics New Jersey offers Training and Competition through Local Training Programs in 13 Areas throughout the state. Identify your Area and contact your Area Director for more information. Visit Area Programs at www.sonj.org or call 609-896-8000.



6. Enter Shriver Cup Tournaments

Play Unified teams at the high school and college level are invited to compete for the **Shriver Cup** in a statewide championship tournament in Unified soccer, basketball and bowling (high school only) each year.

7. Establish a School-based Special Olympics Local Training Program

You can establish a school-based LTP with one or more coaches and a group of Special Olympics eligible athletes. Just identify a sport and Special Olympics New Jersey will assist you starting the program as well as provide resources for uniforms and equipment to get you started. Your LTP can offer traditional or Unified training and competition programs.

UNIFIED GAME DAY

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 and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.



Unified Game Days offer students of all interests and abilities, “an opportunity to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in the sharing of gifts, skills and friendship” in an environment of fun and celebration. **Unified Game Days** are an integral part of the **Learn. Practice. Play. UNIFIED.** program and all Play Unified Schools are asked to implement them as a part of their inclusive sports and physical activities offerings.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A FIELD DAY AND A UNIFIED GAME DAY?

A school-wide field day is not a Unified Game Day. At a Unified Game Day, students with and without disabilities play and learn alongside one another on the same teams.

A **Unified Game Day** builds off a school’s Inclusive Physical Education program as a culminating event to demonstrate skills and celebrate the friendships made in the class. Unlike a traditional field day, in which special needs students can be isolated from their peers and travel through stations in a segregated group, a **Unified Game Day** integrates all students on teams. Every activity is inclusive and fully inclusive and accessible to all. Students without disabilities play alongside students with disabilities as teammates, rather than as mentors or tutors.

Unified Game Days are skill demonstration “game days” that can include a variety of physical activity and fun fitness stations designed to bring young people together to:

- Apply all they’ve learned in Inclusive PE,
- Try something new they have not yet mastered or may be too shy to tackle in an educational setting, and
- Have a fun day of physical activity while making friends.

Unified Game Days are great ways to bring together an entire class, school, groups of schools and communities to celebrate the accomplishments of all students. They are designed to be:

- Festive and celebratory
- Teambuilding vs. Competitive
- Inclusive and accessible, with modified and adapted activities interwoven to benefit all students



UNIFIED GAME DAY MODELS

Although every school's *Unified Game Day* will be customized to meet the goals, interests, ability level of their students, and skills taught in their Inclusive PE classes, there are three basic models that can be used as a starting point for planning:

1. School/Professional sports team hosted *Unified Game Day*
2. Schoolwide *Unified Game Day* (Single Sport or Multi-Sport)
3. School hosted Unified Track & Field Meet

SPORTS TEAM/OLDER GRADE HOSTED UNIFIED GAME DAYS

These Unified Game Days are hosted by students older and of greater ability. They can be single or multi-sport game days, or Young Athlete Unified Game Days. This is an excellent activity to engage members of athletic teams and member of your Play Unified clubs. Students in the upper elementary, middle and high schools can be trained to hold Young Athlete Unified Game Days for the Pre-K through 1st grade students.

SCHOOL WIDE UNIFIED GAME DAYS

Single Sport: Choose a sport and offer multiple skill and scrimmage stations at player development and recreational levels. Mix in fun fitness stations with yoga, Zumba, warm-up/cool-downs and running games.

Multi-sport: Select two to six different sport skills stations that students move through with one or two dedicated to game play. Always target skills stations and games to accommodate the abilities of the students with greatest challenges so they can participate equally. Mix in fun fitness stations and try playground game stations such as kickball and four square.

SCHOOL WIDE TRACK & FIELD MEET

Work with the athletic department and track teams to set up a track & field meet. Inclusive teams will move from event to event and participate in Unified relays. Base the track & field meet on the events included in the *Learn. Practice. Play. UNIFIED.* Track & Field section.

Call Special Olympics New Jersey for more detail on planning your *Unified Game Day!*

PLAY UNIFIED IN THE COMMUNITY

1. Partner with Recreation Centers, YMCAs and Youth Sports Organizations

Introduce Unified sports to your local Recreation Centers, Ys and youth sports organizations in your area. Share information about programs that include young people with disabilities with your students. Be a coach or help them start a Unified team, recreational league or training program.



2. Share information on Community-Based Special Olympics Local Training Programs Near You

If you do not have a school-based Special Olympics Local Training Program, find one near you and share the information with families of students who are eligible to participate. Some LTPs may also have Unified teams or be interested in starting one with your help! Contact Special Olympics New Jersey or the Area Director in your region. For more information go to Find a Local Program at www.sonj.org.

3. College Unified Sports Clubs

Is there a College Unified program in your area? Across the state, students in 12 colleges and universities sponsor College Unified Sports Clubs that train and compete against one another in SONJ's Shriver Cup Unified Tournaments. Special Olympics eligible athletes, 16 years and older, are invited to come out and play on teams with college students and compete with other programs in the state.

UNIFIED SPORTS COACHING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To ensure coaches, partners and volunteers have the support, strategies and resources needed to develop and implement meaningful inclusive sports programs, Special Olympics New Jersey offers professional development, coaching and Unified partner trainings on social inclusion, inclusive sports coaching and physical education, disability awareness and being a Unified partner for teachers, students, coaches and parents at each participating school.

“Young people with disabilities don’t often get a chance to play on their school sports teams, but more and more U.S. states are adopting the unified sports approach that Special Olympics pioneered. The governor of New Jersey just signed a bill into law that encourages schools to make opportunities for sports participation available to all students. Special Olympics New Jersey, which championed the new law, is cited in the new law as a consulting organization. For almost 20 years, Special Olympics has offered sport teams that blend people with and without intellectual disabilities, and that is a model that encourages sports and fun, and which also gets people together to learn more about each other.” (“Unified Sports”, n.d.)

To learn more go to: <http://www.specialolympics.org/unified-sports.aspx>

SPECIAL OLYMPICS NEW JERSEY COACH EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAM

Throughout the year Special Olympics New Jersey offers sport specific training programs for coaches, along with general sessions and webinars on coaching athletes with different abilities. As a school-based Unified sports coach, all of these resources and supports are available to you.

To learn more about coaches certification and training call Special Olympics New Jersey. Review Special Olympics’ sport specific coaching handbooks at Coaching Resources at www.specialolympics.org

NFHS Coaching Unified Sports online course

“Coaching Special Olympics Unified Sports®” provides techniques and tools for coaches who work with these programs, where Special Olympics athletes with intellectual disabilities and individuals without intellectual disabilities (partners) train and compete together as a team. For more Information visit: <http://nfhslearn.com/courses/36000>



“By playing on Unified teams, it is easier for kids to connect and become friends without having the social anxiety of trying to start a conversation or approach someone that you have never seen or talked to before.

Kids connect simply by saying “pass the ball” or “great goal.” The friendships that are created on the field or court are often seen after the games too. Unified Sports is a call to action for all schools to try to create an environment where special education and regular education students can work together in a social environment.

The ultimate goal of Unified Sports is to create a totally unified atmosphere where everybody is included and accepted.”

Connor Bradley, Unified Partner
Montgomery High School, Team New Jersey
2014 USA Games



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