The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Program: Year 10 Evaluation Report 2017 – 2018

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Table of Contents

I. Executive Summary

A. Introduction[1]

Adolescents today face many challenges, foremost of which are feeling socially and emotionally connected, understood, and valued. In schools, these challenges can be compounded by the complex social relationships that adolescents must navigate, making it difficult for some students to feel included. For students with intellectual disability (ID), the obstacle of social exclusion looms large in their daily lives. Many students with ID experience social isolation, rejection, and bullying at school, which often leads to negative outcomes and challenges that follow them out of school and into adulthood. While numerous programs and interventions have been developed over the years to address the social isolation and exclusion that students with ID experience, the problem persists in many schools.

To address these problems, over the past ten years, Special Olympics (SO) has actively developed and implemented a Unified Schools strategy (the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program, or "the UCS program") for promoting and increasing the social inclusion of youth with ID in their school communities. Through its three core components (Inclusive Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement) the UCS program creates experiences to facilitate inclusion, challenges stereotypes and stigma, and engages young people in activities that lead to more positive perceptions and attitudes and more accepting school communities, through three core experiences – Unified Sports, Unified Club, and Whole School Engagement. By providing inclusive opportunities that many schools may not otherwise be able to provide for their students, the UCS program aims to create a unified school culture in which all students benefit.

The UCS program, along with its accompanying evaluation, have seen significant growth and expansion over the last decade. From an initial evaluation of 493 schools during the 2008-2009 school year to an evaluation of 2,822 schools in the 2017-2018 school year, the UCS program has brought inclusive schoolwide programming in sports and leadership to an ever-increasing number of schools and students across the United States. The Year 10 evaluation, which spanned the 2017-2018 school year, provides some of the strongest evidence yet of the benefits and impacts of the UCS program across school and age levels. As the findings below demonstrate, the UCS program creates socially inclusive school communities that highlight the value of all members, promotes social interactions between students with and without ID that facilitate positive attitudes and relationships, and provides all participants with new experiences and skills that build character.

[1] Some text in the introduction was taken from the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Case Statements:
Special Olympics International. (2017). *The problem.* Inclusion through youth activation: Case statement, 6-9. Washington, DC: Author.
Special Olympics International. (2017). *The solution.* Inclusion through youth activation: Case statement, 10-12. Washington, DC: Author.

B. Participants and Methods

The Year 10 evaluation continued to use a multi-source, mixed-methods approach. As in past evaluations, this approach provided a comprehensive picture of the implementation and impact of the UCS program across school communities. Data were collected through surveys, interviews, and site visits/observations. A total of 2,822 school liaisons (the person in each school responsible for implementing the UCS program) responded to an online survey (sent to 4,830 liaisons, 58% response rate), and the liaisons in three high schools participated in in-person interviews conducted during site visits to the schools. Twenty-seven school staff members (e.g., administrators, general education teachers, and counseling/guidance staff) also participated in in-person interviews during the site visits. Surveys were completed by 1,557 students without ID in eight middle schools, 824 students without ID in three high schools, and 133 high school freshmen[2] matched from their previous year in middle school. Fifty-one high school students with and without ID participated in in-person interviews conducted during the site visits. Phone interviews were subsequently conducted with parents of 12 students with ID who were interviewed.

C. Findings

Program Implementation

- One of the unique aspects of the UCS program is that it allows schools the flexibility to implement and expand program activities at a pace specific to their needs and abilities. In Year 10, implementation of the UCS program across schools was consistent with past years. Over half (57%) of schools implemented all three core experiences. However, there were some differences in the implementation of specific program activities. Unified Club implementation increased in Year 10 (57%, up from 48% in Year 9) driven in large part by increases at the middle and high school level. Additionally, implementation of Whole School Engagement activities at the elementary level increased from Year 9 to Year 10, specifically Spread the Word to End the Word (45% to 51%), Fans in the Stands/Unified Sports Pep Rally (21% to 30%), and Unified Sports Day/Festival (20% to 31%).
- Implementation of the UCS program is supported through many sources, and the Year 10 evaluation revealed the interconnections between sources of support for schools. When schools received support from their school district in Year 10, they met full-implementation Unified Champion School status (i.e., all three core components) more often than schools without district support (59% vs. 39%, respectively). Additionally, schools with district support reported implementing a Unified Champion Schools Leadership Team twice as often as schools without district support (44% vs. 18%, respectively). Furthermore, liaisons who reported that their State Special Olympics Program encouraged them to implement a Leadership Team utilized this support structure twice as often as liaisons whose State SO Program had not suggested forming a Leadership Team (67% vs. 34%, respectively). Although the directionality of these relationships remains difficult to parse out (i.e., which came first?), what is more apparent than ever in Year

[2] In one school, the survey was completed by sophomores instead of freshmen because freshmen were part of the middle school the previous year.

10 is that involvement from all levels of a school's support system is critical to implementing and achieving a well-rounded UCS program.

Impact on the School

- School liaisons continue to report the UCS program has unequivocally positive impacts on school climate and culture. In Year 10, liaisons indicated that the UCS program created a more socially inclusive school environment (95%), increased opportunities for students to work together (94%), raised awareness about students with ID (95%), increased the participation of students with ID in school activities (94%), and reduced bullying, teasing, and offensive language (94%). Encouragingly, liaisons have similarly positive perceptions of school impact regardless of whether they are at an elementary, middle, or high school. This consistency shows that regardless of school level and the corresponding nuances in program implementation that exist, the UCS program has a positive impact on all schools.

Student Participation

- A number of personal characteristics were examined for the first time in Year 10. Findings from these new analyses demonstrate that, when compared to non-participating students, students who participate in the UCS program feel more supported by their peers and teachers at school[3], have higher levels of grit[4], receive better grades[5], and are more empathetic/compassionate[6].
- For schoolwide, year-round programming in which students self-select to participate, there is a high level of engagement across the student body. In Year 10, two-thirds of high school students (69%) and three-quarters of middle school students (73%) participated in at least one UCS activity. In fact, these participation levels represent an increase of over 14% compared to previous years, driven in large part by increased student participation at the high school level and increased activities being offered at the middle school level.
- Sustained engagement with the UCS program is also high among middle and high school students. Over 75% of middle and high school students who reported participating in the UCS program in Year 10 also reported they had participated in Year 9, thus maintaining their involvement over two years. In fact, 36% of participating students who transitioned from middle school to high school over this two-year period (i.e., finished middle school in Year 9 and began high school in Year 10) participated in more UCS activities once they got to high school.
- Middle and high school students were motivated to join the UCS program based on their own interests and for altruistic reasons. Most middle and high school students who were surveyed (79% and 76%, respectively) chose to participate in the UCS program for social reasons, particularly to make new friends. The majority of middle and high school students also joined the UCS program to make a difference in their school or to help others (62% of surveyed middle school students, 75% of interviewed high school students).

[3] $t(1165) = 4.98$, $p < .01$
[4] $t(1150) = 5.59$, $p < .01$
[5] $t(1165) = 4.75$, $p < .01$
[6] Empathy: $t(656) = 5.75$, $p < .01$; Compassion: $t(420) = 6.23$, $p < .01$

Impact on Students

- Overall, 41% of middle school participants and 35% of high school participants reported becoming friends with a student with ID through the UCS program in Year 10. In examining the friendships developed through the UCS program, the evaluation found that level of involvement in the UCS program impacts the nature and extent of these friendships. Students who participated intensely (i.e., participated in two or more activities, including Unified Sports or Unified Club) were both more likely to develop friendships compared to students who participated moderately[7] (i.e., participated in one activity, or two or more activities not including Unified Sports or Unified Club) and their friendships were more likely to have higher levels of mutual support and companionship compared to friendships among students who participated moderately.[8]
- The UCS program provides adolescents at both the middle and high school level with a platform to develop positive perceptions of their school as a socially inclusive environment and positive attitudes toward the inclusion of their peers with ID at school.[9] In Year 10, structural equation modeling (SEM) confirmed that the pathway to positive perceptions and attitudes begins with positive social interactions between students with and without ID in Unified Sports, Unified Club, and Whole School Engagement activities.
- The UCS program also contributes to middle and high school students' social and emotional learning (SEL). In Year 10, students reported that they learned or enhanced SEL competencies in the domains of social awareness and relationship skills because of their participation in UCS activities. SEM demonstrated that the pathway to social and emotional development begins with positive social interactions between students with and without ID in Unified Sports, Unified Club, and Whole School Engagement activities.
- Interviews with high school teachers, as well as students with and without ID, illuminated the ways in which the UCS program helps facilitate the transition from middle to high school. All interviewed teachers (100%) believed the UCS program was instrumental in creating a positive transition experience by providing freshmen with opportunities to build relationships and engage in extracurricular activities. For students with ID, teachers described the impact of the UCS program in providing a sense of continuity and familiarity across the transition. Similarly, students described the benefits of being involved in the UCS program through their transition to high school, noting specifically that the sense of belonging and community that came from the UCS program played an important role in their successful transition.
- Examining youth leadership in Year 10 revealed the importance of the UCS program in providing leadership opportunities for students with ID. While a number of formal leadership opportunities (e.g., club president or sports team captain) are available to students at the high school level, students without ID tend to hold these positions. In Year 10, 47% of interviewed students without ID reported holding a formal leadership role at school, while just three

[7] X^2 (n = 1488) = 114.605, $p < .001$

[8] t (521.72) = -2.035, $p = .042$

[9] Siperstein, G. N., Summerill, L. A., Jacobs, H. E., & Stokes, J. E. (2017). Promoting social inclusion in high schools using a schoolwide approach. *Inclusion, 5*(3), 173-188.

students with ID (15%) reported the same (and all three positions were in UCS program activities).

D. Conclusions and Recommendations

After a decade of research and evaluation, it is clear that the UCS program is successful in providing inclusive schoolwide programming capable of effecting change across school communities. At the school level, the Year 10 evaluation demonstrated the multiple and varied factors that influence schools reaching full-implementation Unified Champion Schools status, including the UCS Leadership Team, school district support, and support and communication from the State Special Olympics Program. At the student level, the Year 10 evaluation provided insights from both middle and high schools, suggesting that the UCS program impacts students' perceptions and attitudes through its ability to bring students with and without ID together in meaningful ways and sustain their involvement across multiple years. Furthermore, the Year 10 evaluation showed that the developmental gains and social and emotional skills resulting from UCS participation are evident at all stages of adolescence. Participation in the UCS program provides schools with a novel approach to positive youth development, and it provides youth with opportunities to develop positive peer, school, and community connections. As Special Olympics embarks on the next decade of UCS programming, with an eye on 25,000 schools by 2025, the following recommendations are offered:

- Prioritize implementation at the district level and support quality implementation across school districts by focusing on expanded and consistent professional development/training for school staff and continuity in student involvement.
- Position Unified Club and the Unified Champion Schools Leadership Team as models for how schools can expand opportunities for students with ID to be meaningfully included in leadership roles thereby shifting the balance from a helper-helpee dynamic to a more reciprocal relationship with other youth leaders in the school.
- Promote the UCS program as a youth development program that uses the platform of inclusion to have positive developmental impacts in CASEL's five SEL domains and the "Five Cs" of positive youth development.
- Expand the reach of the UCS program through efforts to engage students who are not actively participating in school activities, particularly students with lower academic grades and little peer/teacher support.

II. The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Program

Since its founding, Special Olympics (SO) has provided quality sports opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) across the globe. Today, SO serves as a driving force for social inclusion, with the vision to create a world where "people with intellectual disabilities of all abilities are welcomed in their communities and join with others to learn, work, compete and play with the same rights and opportunities as others."[10] Central to this work is engaging youth, where SO focuses on school-based programming that provides equitable and quality opportunities for all.[11] Schools regularly face challenges in realizing the promise of full inclusion, and students with ID are still too often socially isolated from their peers without ID. By bringing youth with and without ID together outside of the classroom to engage with one another in typical experiences (i.e., extracurricular activities like sports), SO has helped address the challenge many schools face in engaging students with ID in normative school contexts.

Over the past nine years, SO has actively developed and implemented a Unified Schools strategy (the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program, or "the UCS program") for promoting and increasing the social inclusion of youth with ID in their school communities. With sports as the foundation, the UCS program creates experiences to facilitate inclusion, challenge stereotypes and stigma, and engage young people in activities that lead to more positive perceptions and attitudes and more accepting school communities. By providing inclusive opportunities that many schools may not otherwise be able to provide for their students, the UCS program aims to promote social inclusion through intentionally planned and implemented activities that effect system-wide change. The specific objectives of the program are to:

- Create Unified Champion Schools of acceptance where students with ID are routinely included in all school activities and functions and thus feel welcome in and part of the school;
- Promote positive attitudes and behavior among students without ID toward their peers with ID; and
- Communicate the value of SO as a community partner that offers programming to schools that benefits all students.

At its core, the UCS program is not just about including students with ID, but it is also about unifying and uniting all students. Built on the premise that in order to have the greatest impact change must start with young people, the UCS program does not intend for students to be simply recipients of programming, but rather, and most importantly, to be the driving force behind change in their schools and communities. Employing a framework of "educate, motivate, and activate," the UCS program offers all students opportunities to learn and work together toward goals of acceptance and inclusion within safe, equitable, and engaging school communities. At the crux of the UCS program are the personal

[10] Special Olympics International. (2017). *What is the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program?* Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools High School Playbook, 2-3. Washington, DC: Author.
[11] Special Olympics International. (2017). *Why do we need schools to be socially inclusive?* Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools High School Playbook, 4-5. Washington, DC: Author.

interactions and relationships that occur when youth participate together in inclusive sports activities or clubs, and the culture of acceptance that is promoted through school-wide activities.

The core experiences that make up the UCS program are:

- Inclusive Sports: opportunities that bring students with and without ID together to participate in inclusive sports activities (such as Special Olympics Unified Sports, Unified PE, Special Olympics Young Athletes, and Unified/Special Olympics Fitness);
- Inclusive Youth Leadership: opportunities for students with and without ID to take on leadership roles in promoting UCS program activities, or other socially inclusive events, in the school and community (such as Unified Club, volunteering with Young Athletes or Traditional SO Sports, or Youth Summit/Youth Activation Committee);
- Whole School Engagement: opportunities for all students in the school to participate in the UCS program (such as Special Olympics *Get Into It*® Education Resources, Spread the Word to End the Word, Fans in the Stands/Unified Sports Pep Rally, Unified Sports Day/Festival, "It's Our School, Too" Play, and fundraising events and activities).

To evaluate the impact of the UCS program, in the spirit of continuous improvement, SO has partnered with the Center for Social Development and Education (CSDE) at the University of Massachusetts Boston. For the past decade, CSDE has conducted an extensive evaluation at multiple levels (i.e., state, school, student) focused on understanding how the UCS program is implemented across schools and how it affects the school community members who are involved. The findings have continued to underscore the importance of providing multiple and varied inclusive activities to create a comprehensive program that is maximally beneficial for schools and students. In particular, past evaluations have found that Whole School Engagement activities are important for reaching the greatest number of students and have the most direct impact on students' perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion in school settings. However, the smaller team- and club-based activities (i.e., Unified Sports and Unified Club) can provide students with more intense, sustained, and meaningful social interactions with their peers with ID, thus resulting in the most personal gains for the students involved. Overall, UCS program activities have the biggest impact on students and schools when activities from each of the three core experiences are offered in concert with one another.

Building on the foundation set by previous evaluations, the Year 10 evaluation continued to examine the scope of implementation in different school settings, took a closer look at the core experiences that make up the program, and further explored the ways in which different types and levels of student participation contribute to the overall impact on, and value to, schools and students. The following evaluation design section will expand upon these broad goals of the Year 10 evaluation. As with past evaluations, the Year 10 objectives continued to complement and inform the overall goals of the UCS program as well as additional research objectives identified by SO that examine school environments and social inclusion.

III. Evaluation Design

The Year 10 evaluation of the UCS program had several objectives that built on and enhanced past evaluation findings. These objectives continued the expansion and forward momentum of the program in recent years and deepened the understanding of the value and impact of the UCS program on schools and students. The Year 10 evaluation objectives were as follows:

- To document how schools implemented the UCS program, with a specific emphasis on:
    - Programming taking place across school levels (elementary, middle, high), with a focus on the elementary level
    - Programming in schools implementing different combinations of the three core experiences (Inclusive Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement)
    - The connection between the Unified Champion Schools Leadership Team and the larger school community
    - School and community support systems for the UCS program
- To expand the understanding of how the UCS program impacts participants by examining middle and high school students':
    - Perceptions of inclusion
    - Attitudes toward peers with ID
    - Participation in the UCS program, including characteristics of participants, motivating factors for participation, and length of involvement
    - Friendship quality with peers with ID
    - Development of social and emotional learning (SEL) skills
- To capture the voices of students with ID participating in the UCS program
- To examine youth leadership at the high school level, including schools' culture of youth leadership, schools' implementation of Inclusive Youth Leadership, and student involvement in youth leadership opportunities
- To examine students' transitions from middle school to high school, including students' expectations for high school and whether they were met, the role of the UCS program during the transition, and students' continued participation in the UCS program after the transition

The evaluation methodology used in Year 10 retained many of the features of previous evaluations. The methodology included data collection from school liaisons (the person in each school responsible for implementing the UCS program), other school staff (e.g., general education teachers, administrators), students with and without ID, and parents. In addition to these multiple sources, the evaluation methodology included a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection such as large-scale surveys, site visits, and one-on-one and group interviews. This mixed-methods, multi-source approach allowed the evaluation team to confirm previous findings, explore new areas such as youth leadership in high school and SEL, and document in greater detail the value and benefit of the UCS program for all stakeholders, particularly students and schools. The following methods section describes the various Year 10 participant groups, evaluation instruments, and procedures.

A. School Liaisons

In overseeing the implementation of the UCS program in schools, school liaisons continue to be a critical source of information for the annual evaluation. In Year 10, liaison data addressed the following topics:

- The scope of UCS program implementation across the country, including:
  - The level of implementation across schools
  - The Unified Sports program (including Unified Sports teams and Young Athletes)
  - Unified Club
  - Support systems for liaisons/schools, including school districts, Unified Champion Schools Leadership Teams, community-based Special Olympics programs, and State Special Olympics Programs
  - Sustainability of the UCS program
- The value of the Unified Champion Schools program in creating a more socially inclusive school environment
- The link between the UCS program and SEL

Information about these evaluation topics was collected using the following methods and procedures:

Unified Champion Schools Liaison Survey

SO and State Special Olympics Programs ("State Programs") assisted with identifying school liaisons for the Year 10 *Unified Champion Schools Liaison Survey*. State Programs were required to provide SO with a list of all participating schools in their state, along with contact information for each of the designated school liaisons. SO submitted a compiled list to the CSDE in mid-March 2018, which included a total of 5,332 schools in 48 State Programs.[12] The CSDE cleaned this school list, removing preschools, colleges/universities, duplicate schools, and schools with incomplete contact information. In total, the CSDE contacted 4,830 schools to participate in the *Unified Champion Schools Liaison Survey*. Of those, 2,822 liaisons satisfactorily completed the survey (58% response rate). See Appendix A: Table A2 for liaison response rate by State Program, Appendix A: Table A4 for liaison demographic information, and Appendix A: Table A5 for demographic information on the 2,822 schools.

In mid-April 2018, liaisons received an online survey link via email for the Year 10 *Unified Champion Schools Liaison Survey*. Liaisons had until early June 2018 to complete the survey. Liaisons received bi-weekly, and later weekly, reminder emails to complete the survey. State Programs also received bi-weekly, and later weekly, updates notifying them of the response rates for the liaisons in their state. During this time, SO encouraged State Programs to follow up with liaisons who had not yet completed the survey.

In Year 10, the *Unified Champion Schools Liaison Survey* continued to assess the scope of implementation at the school level and deepen the understanding of program implementation across all schools. The 117-item survey consisted of questions about the UCS activities that took place in each

[12] Excluding AL, GA, TN, and WV, who did not receive U.S. Department of Education funding for the UCS program in Year 10. Also note that Washington, DC is a State Program, and California has two State Programs (Northern and Southern).

school during the 2017-2018 school year (in particular Unified Sports teams, Young Athletes, and Unified Club), the people involved in UCS program planning and implementation, and the impact of UCS programming on the school as a whole.

In-person Interviews

During late April and early May 2018, the CSDE conducted site visits to three high schools. Liaisons from these three schools participated in in-person interviews focusing on the UCS program, inclusion in general, SEL, youth leadership, and the transition from middle school to high school. Interviews with liaisons also helped to contextualize interview data collected from students with ID during the site visits. For more information about qualitative data collection in Year 10, see Appendix F.

B. School Staff

Beyond liaisons, other school staff (e.g., general education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, school counselors) are also important participants in the annual evaluation. In Year 10, school staff provided additional information about the schools in general as well as the impact of the UCS program on schools and students. The following methods and procedures were used to collect data from school staff.

In-person Interviews

In addition to the liaisons, the evaluation team held in-person interviews with 27 school staff members, including administrators, special education and general education teachers, athletics staff, and counseling/guidance staff, at the three high schools that participated in the 2018 site visits. Through these interviews, information was gathered about high school students' experiences, inclusive school practices, SEL, youth leadership, the transition from middle school to high school, and the impact of the UCS program on the school and students. For more information about qualitative data collection in Year 10, see Appendix F.

C. Students

As participants in the UCS program, students are perhaps the most important source of information about the impact of the program. In Year 10, student data addressed the following topics:

- The nature and extent of participation in the UCS program
- The impact of the UCS program on students without ID in the following areas:
    - Perceptions of school social inclusion
    - Attitudes toward classroom inclusion
    - SEL
    - Relationships with peers with ID
    - Youth leadership
    - The transition from middle school to high school
- The impact of the UCS program on students with ID in the following areas:
    - Relationships with peers with and without ID
    - Youth leadership

- The transition from middle school to high school

The following methods and procedures were used to collect data from students with and without ID.

Student Experience Survey

Eight middle schools and three high schools from seven State Programs (CO, IL, MN, NJ, OH, TX, NM) administered the *Student Experience Survey*. State Programs assisted in choosing these schools, and the majority of participating schools were chosen as part of a pair of schools in the same district that were implementing all three core experiences of the UCS program and utilizing a Unified Champion Schools Leadership Team. Two middle schools and one high school participated in the *Student Experience Survey* in partnership with a State Program that reached out to the evaluation team to conduct a research project on the UCS program in the state. See Appendix C for information about the student survey procedures.

There were separate versions of the *Student Experience Survey* for middle schools (49 items) and high schools (52 items). Schools were offered a choice between paper-and-pencil surveys and online surveys. School personnel administered the surveys during selected class periods between March 2018 and May 2018. In both middle and high schools, the *Student Experience Survey* assessed the impact of the UCS program at the student level, taking into account personal characteristics such as empathy/compassion, peer and teacher support, academic grades, and grit; student perceptions of school social inclusion; student attitudes toward including peers with ID in the classroom setting; student participation in the UCS program; SEL skill development as a result of UCS participation; and peer relationships formed while participating in UCS activities. See Appendix C for information about the instruments used in the *Student Experience Survey*. A total of 1,557 middle school students and 824 high school students responded to the survey. See Appendix C for student selection procedures and Appendix A: Table A6 for student demographic information.

Matched Student Experience Survey

The *Matched Student Experience Survey* tracked students from the end of their last year of middle school in Year 9 to the end of their first year of high school in Year 10. The survey assessed the impact of the UCS program at the student level, including student perceptions of school social inclusion, student attitudes toward including peers with ID in the classroom setting, student participation in and awareness of the UCS program, and peer relationships formed while participating in UCS activities. A total of 263 students responded to the survey in middle school (Year 9) and 133 of these students responded to the survey again in high school (Year 10). The 49-item paper-and-pencil survey was administered between April 2018 and June 2018.

In-person Interviews

Twenty students with ID and 31 students without ID participated in in-person interviews at the three high schools where the 2018 site visits were conducted. Through these interviews, information was collected about students' school experiences, including participation in the UCS program and peer relationships, their involvement in youth leadership, and their transition from middle school to high

school. For students without ID, interview questions also focused on their motivations for joining the UCS program, and, for older students, their purpose and post-secondary goals.

D. Parents

When possible, parents of students with ID participated in telephone interviews to contextualize and confirm what was learned from their children during the site visits. In total, 12 parents were interviewed. For more information on the qualitative data collection in Year 10, see Appendix F.

IV. Implementation of the Unified Champion Schools Program in Year 10

Because liaisons are the school staff most involved in implementing the UCS program at the school level, the Year 10 evaluation once again relied on their reports to examine how the UCS program was implemented. Overall, data were available from liaisons from 2,822 schools implementing the UCS program in Year 10. Schools evenly represented all regions across the US, with slightly more schools in the South. Liaisons indicated that these schools are mainly high schools in suburban areas with fewer than 1,000 students enrolled and fewer than 30 students with ID. Similar to nationwide school demographics, approximately half of these schools are Title I schools and over half had a majority White student body. See Appendix A: Table A5 for more information on these schools.

In Year 10, data collection from liaisons focused on the extent to which schools implemented programming that aligned with SOI guidelines (see Appendix B) and documented the specific initiatives that took place in each school. The evaluation included new areas of focus such as recruitment into Unified Sports/PE and Unified Club and a more detailed look at the Young Athletes program.

The following sections of the report examine the UCS program across schools, including whether and how individual school factors (e.g., school level, implementation level, support and collaboration) come into play. This information provides a picture of how the UCS program was implemented at the national level in Year 10 and how the program has grown and developed over the last decade, while also highlighting the intricacies of the program that impact individual schools and their students.

A. Implementation Across Schools

UCS program activities are grouped into three core experiences: Inclusive Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement (see Section II). Schools are allowed flexibility in which core experiences they choose to implement, and the activities within each core experience provide unique benefits for both the school and students. In Year 10, these activities include:

- Inclusive Sports—Unified Sports, Unified PE, Unified Fitness, or Young Athletes;
- Inclusive Youth Leadership—Unified Club, Special Olympics Youth Summit/Youth Activation Committee, or volunteering for Traditional SO sports events; and
- Whole School Engagement—Spread the Word to End the Word, Fans in the Stands/Unified Sports Pep Rally, Unified Sports Day/Festival, Special Olympics *Get Into It®*, "It's Our School, Too" play, or fundraising events.

Implementation of each of the three core experiences was high in Year 10. Encouragingly, Whole School Engagement has been implemented in over three-quarters of schools since the evaluation began monitoring its implementation in Year 4. Similarly, Inclusive Sports has been implemented at a consistently high level since Year 7. In Year 10, it was particularly popular among the 661 schools in their first year of programming, with 79% of new schools implementing Inclusive Sports. Implementation of Inclusive Youth Leadership has remained steady since Year 9 after seeing growth from Year 8 to Year 9

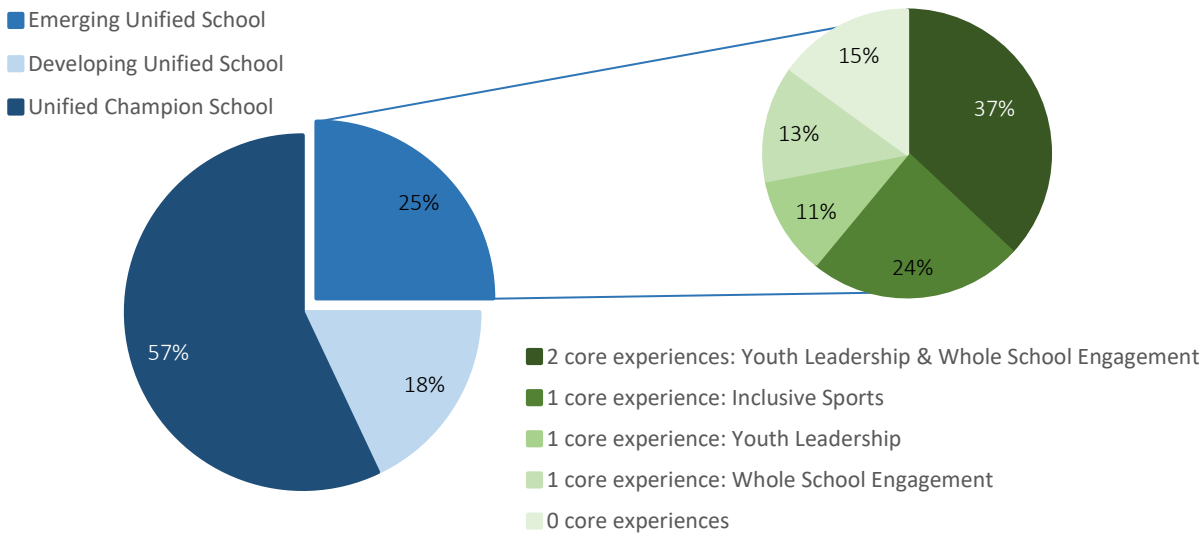
(from 53% to 73%, respectively). See Table 1 for the percentage of schools implementing activities in each of the core experiences in Year 10.

Table 1. Percentage of schools implementing each core experience in Year 10

Core Experience	All Schools n=2822	Elementary n=684	Middle n=484	High n=1511
Inclusive Sports	81%	69%	78%	87%
Whole School Engagement	80%	71%	83%	84%
Inclusive Youth Leadership	76%	65%	77%	81%

There are several combinations of how schools can implement the three core experiences. SO first introduced implementation levels in Year 4 (then referred to as "Category 1" and "Category 2" schools) to document program activities and highlight the range of implementation in schools. In Year 7, SO expanded the implementation levels to include the three levels currently used. Full-implementation Unified Champion Schools are those that implement activities from all three core experiences; Developing Unified Schools implement activities from Inclusive Sports and one other core experience; and Emerging Unified Schools implement activities from some other combination of core experiences (i.e., two core experiences but not Inclusive Sports, or just one core experience). Within the total sample of 2,822 schools in Year 10, over half (57%) were full-implementation Unified Champion Schools, one fifth (18%) were Developing Unified Schools, and the remaining quarter (25%) were Emerging Unified Schools. The percentage of schools within each implementation level remained very stable from Year 9 to Year 10. See Figure 1 for more information about the range of implementation in Year 10 and see Appendix A: Table A8 for the percentage of schools in each State Program that met each level of implementation.

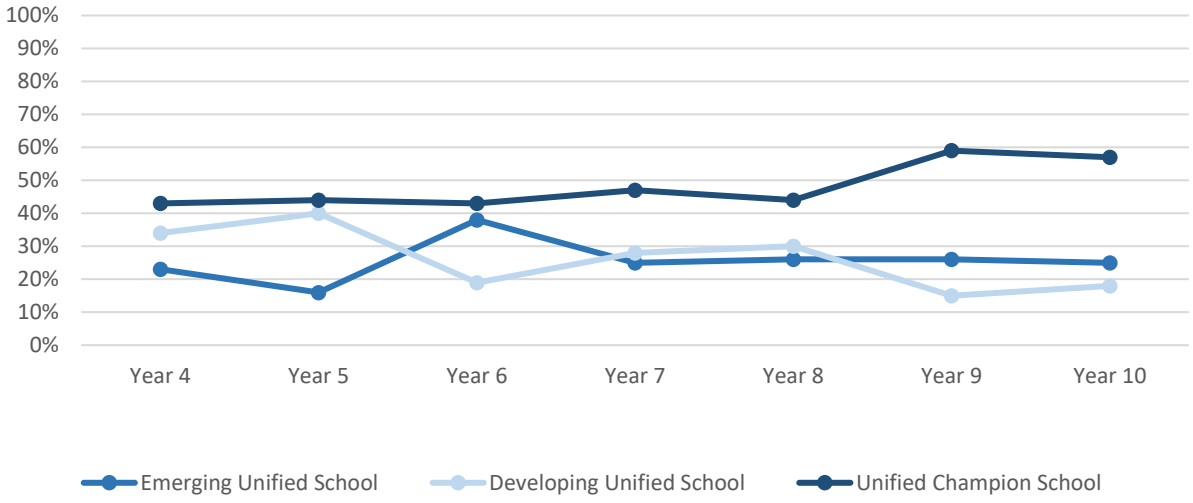
Figure 1. Range of implementation in Year 10



The primary goal of these levels is to allow for documentation of UCS program implementation in schools nationally. Beyond that, the levels also allow schools flexibility within the prescribed programming guidelines, ensuring all schools can participate in the program at some level while continuing to work toward higher levels of implementation. Schools can choose implementation goals based on their needs and abilities; some schools may have the goal of reaching full-implementation Unified Champion School status within a couple of years, while others may have the goal of sustaining implementation within the Developing or Emerging Unified level. In fact, the number of Emerging Unified Schools has remained consistent since Year 7. This may, in part, reflect the continued growth of the UCS program nationally. Since it can be difficult to reach the full-implementation Unified Champion Schools level in the first year of implementation, as the UCS program continues to expand into new schools, there will continue to be groups of Emerging and Developing Unified schools. Even after several years of implementation, it is likely that some schools are unable to reach the full-implementation Unified Champion Schools level due perhaps to a lack of resources or lack of prioritization in implementing all three core experiences.

While the full-implementation Unified Champion Schools level is considered the ideal model because participating in a range of activities maximizes gains for students,[13] the option to implement the UCS program at lower levels allows more students to benefit from at least some aspects of the program, even if their schools are unable to implement all three core experiences. This three-tiered model allows schools to stay engaged while building capacity for higher levels of implementation. See Figure 2 for more information about the percentage of schools reaching each implementation level in each year of the evaluation.

Figure 2. UCS implementation levels in each year of the evaluation



[13] Center for Social Development and Education. (2017). *The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Program: Year 9 Evaluation Report 2016-2017*, pages 41-51. Boston, MA: Jacobs, H.E., Osborne, K., Landis, K., Jang, Y., McDowell, E., & Siperstein, G. N.

Beyond providing schools with flexible guidelines for implementation, the use of implementation levels highlights the interconnectedness of the core experiences. With sports at the core of most SO programming, Inclusive Sports is central to the UCS program. Inclusive Sports is connected to the other core experiences through activities that bring the student body together to rally behind inclusion and inclusive activities. Many Whole School Engagement activities, such as Fans in the Stands/Unified Sports Pep Rally and Unified Sports Day/Festival, actively support a school's Inclusive Sports teams. Such activities are often planned and implemented by Inclusive Youth Leadership groups within the school, such as the Unified Club. These clubs also bring students with and without ID together to create a more inclusive school environment through activities like Spread the Word to End the Word and fundraisers to support the UCS program and other Special Olympics programming. Student participation data further exemplify and confirm the connection between the three core experiences, as the majority of middle and high school students who participated in the UCS program were involved in more than one UCS activity (63% in middle schools; 62% in high schools; see Section V.B.1).

1. Unified Champion Schools Activities

When examining the activities implemented as part of the UCS program, the Year 10 evaluation showed overall consistency or growth compared to recent years. Encouragingly, more schools implemented a Unified Club in Year 10 (57%) than in Year 9 (48%). Within each school level (i.e., elementary, middle, high), activity implementation remained fairly consistent, with middle and high schools continuing to implement the core activities (e.g., Unified Sports programs, Spread the Word to End the Word, and Unified Club) more often than elementary schools in Year 10. Among elementary schools, implementation of some Whole School Engagement activities increased from Year 9 to Year 10, such as Unified Sports Day/Festival, Fans in the Stands, and Spread the Word to End the Word. In fact, Year 10 was the second year in which implementation of Spread the Word to End the Word increased at the elementary level, from 35% in Year 8 to 51% in Year 10. See Table 2 for more information about the implementation of UCS program activities overall and at each school level.

Table 2. Percentage of schools implementing each UCS program activity, by school level

Activity	All Schools n=2813	Elementary n=684	Middle n=484	High n=1511
Unified Sports programs	81%	72%	80%	89%
Spread the Word to End the Word	62%	51%	66%	67%
Unified Club	57%	40%	58%	65%
Fans in the Stands/Unified Sports Pep Rally	43%	30%	39%	49%
Fundraising events	42%	21%	35%	49%
Unified Sports Day/Festival	23%	31%	22%	20%
Special Olympics Youth Summit/YAC	19%	5%	17%	25%
Young Athletes Program Volunteers	20%	36%	10%	16%
Get Into It Educational Resources	13%	15%	14%	11%
"It's Our School, Too" Play	1%	1%	2%	2%

Inclusive Sports

Inclusive Sports is a key aspect of schools' UCS programming. The evaluations in Year 8 and Year 9 provided an in-depth examination of the structure of Inclusive Sports programming, with an emphasis on Unified Sports teams and Unified PE. The Year 10 evaluation continued to document this core experience, once again looking closely at the specific types of activities, models, and sports that schools implemented. For the first time in Year 10, the evaluation began to document differences in Unified Sports program implementation across grade levels, as well as examining implementation of Young Athletes and its connection to other Unified Sports programming. Encouragingly, 81% of schools implemented Inclusive Sports in Year 10. Within the broader designation of Inclusive Sports, schools could choose from a range of activities including Unified Sports teams, Unified PE, Young Athletes, and Unified/Special Olympics Fitness. See Table 3 for more information about the individual activities that schools implemented as part of their Inclusive Sports program.

Interestingly, the Inclusive Sports activities that schools chose to implement varied by school level. High schools most often implemented Unified Sports teams, while elementary schools most often implemented Unified PE, and middle schools implemented both activities at similar rates. This likely reflects the reality that certain activities are better suited to meet the developmental needs of students at different school levels. For example, activities like Unified PE may be better suited for younger children, for whom getting exercise and having fun are the most age-appropriate goals. Notably, middle school students said they joined Unified Sports/PE to have fun more often than high school students (see Section V.B.1). It may also be easier for elementary and middle schools to implement Unified PE due to their structure and schedule—having a class during the school day may more effectively garner younger students' participation given that they are less likely to have independent transportation to stay after school. Meanwhile, competitive extracurricular activities like Unified Sports teams, which often practice and compete after school, may appeal more to high school students, who tend to join Unified Sports for social reasons and to improve their sports skills (see Section V.B.1).

Table 3. Percentage of schools implementing each Inclusive Sports activity, by school level

Activity	All Schools n=2295	Elementary n=472	Middle n=377	High n=1321
Unified Sports team	82%	54%	76%	92%
Unified PE	70%	81%	77%	64%
Young Athletes[14]	--	43%	--	--
Unified/Special Olympics Fitness	20%	23%	21%	18%

[14] Because Young Athletes is a program for children ages 2-7 years old, this question was only asked of schools with pre-K through 2nd grade.

Unified Sports Teams

Of the 2,295 schools implementing Inclusive Sports in Year 10, 82% had a Unified Sports team. Schools implement Unified Sports teams following the Competitive, Player Development, or Recreation model (see Appendix B for a detailed description of each model). The largest proportion of schools structured their teams based on the Player Development model (62%), followed by the Competitive model (52%) and the Recreation model (40%). From Year 9 to Year 10, there was an increase in schools implementing the Player Development model (49% to 62%) and the Competitive model (44% to 52%), while implementation of the Recreation model remained steady. Elementary and middle schools most commonly implemented the Player Development and Recreation models, while high schools tended to implement the Player Development and Competitive models. In the same way that some Inclusive Sports activities align better with certain school levels, schools may choose models of Unified Sports based on the differing needs and interests of their students. See Table 4 for more information about the Unified Sports models implemented across school levels.

Table 4. Implementation of Unified Sports models, by school level

Unified Sports Model	All Schools n=1820	Elementary n=241	Middle n=283	High n=1185
Competitive	52%	34%	38%	58%
Player Development	62%	51%	65%	64%
Recreation	40%	49%	48%	37%

Schools typically formed one (43%) or two (26%) Unified Sports teams, with the most popular sports being Unified Basketball (57%), Unified Track and Field (40%), and Unified Soccer (26%). Overall implementation of these three Unified Sports has remained fairly steady since this information was first documented in Year 7, although implementation of Unified Track and Field increased modestly from Year 7 to Year 10 (32% to 40%). In Year 10, Unified Basketball was implemented far less often by elementary schools than their middle and high school counterparts (37%, 64% and 59%, respectively), and elementary schools were more likely to implement just one Unified Sports team compared to middle or high schools (52%, 39% and 42%, respectively).

Young Athletes

A primary objective of the Year 10 evaluation was to focus more closely on how elementary schools implement the UCS program. In order to fully capture the implementation of Inclusive Sports in elementary schools, the Year 10 evaluation explored the implementation of the Young Athletes program. By providing younger students (ages 2 to 7 years old; pre-K to 2nd grade) with the opportunity to learn basic sports skills, Young Athletes fills a need for Inclusive Sports programming in early elementary grades.

While one-fifth of elementary schools implemented the Young Athletes program in all four grades (20%), most schools implemented the program in kindergarten (68%) or 1st grade (68%), and fewer implemented it in pre-K (55%) or 2nd grade (50%). Program activities were typically held at the school

(88%), though sometimes they were held at other locations in the community (21%) such as nearby schools, universities, or community centers. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the age group, the program was almost always implemented during the school day (95%).

Although the number of schools with both Unified Sports teams and a Young Athletes program was small, the two activities were often connected at these schools. In the 110 schools implementing both activities, one-third of liaisons (35%) indicated that when students aged out of Young Athletes, they were given the opportunity to join a Unified Sports team. In fact, some programs were intentionally connected, facilitating a more seamless transition from Young Athletes to Unified Sports for students. One-fifth of liaisons (20%) noted that there was some continuity of skill development between the two programs. For example, many Young Athletes programs intentionally worked on practicing skills that would later be useful for the schools' Unified Sports team(s). Unified Sports players and Young Athletes participants interacted in a quarter of the schools (28%), whether through attending one another's events or through a mentorship model in which older students on Unified Sports teams mentored Young Athletes participants.

Even in elementary schools that did not have a Unified Sports team in Year 10, most liaisons (63%) indicated that there was some program in place to continue teaching sports skills to students after they aged out of the Young Athletes program. These schools indicated that there was other Special Olympics programming (e.g., Unified PE, Traditional Special Olympics Sports) available to older students (40%), or that their PE classes provided continued sports skill development (33%).

Unified Club

As the primary platform for Inclusive Youth Leadership and student engagement in schools, the Unified Club gives students both with and without ID a voice and provides youth of all abilities with opportunities to become advocates for a more inclusive school community. The UCS annual evaluation has extensively documented the structure, function, and overall contribution of the Unified Club to the UCS program and the school. In Year 10, the evaluation further documented the connections between the Unified Club and other Inclusive Youth Leadership activities, including the Youth Summit and volunteer opportunities.

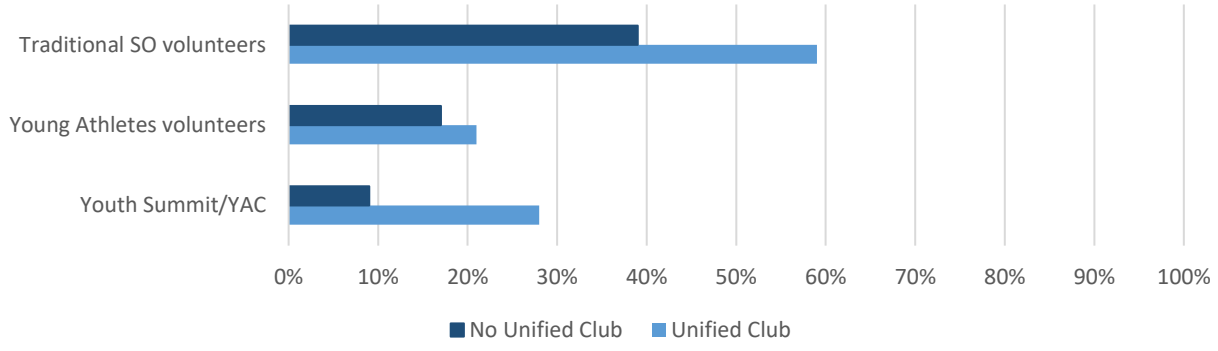
The number of schools which implemented a Unified Club increased from Year 9 to Year 10 (48% to 57%, respectively). In Year 10, Spread the Word to End the Word continued to be the most common activity implemented by schools' Unified Clubs, followed by social events (such as dances or group outings) and fundraising events. There was an increase from Year 9 to Year 10 in Unified Clubs planning and implementing Spread the Word to End the Word (66% to 72%) and social events (53% to 61%). See Table 5 for more information on the activities implemented by Unified Clubs.

Table 5. Activities implemented by Unified Clubs in Year 10

Activity	Unified Clubs n=1090
Spread the Word to End the Word	72%
Social events	61%
Fundraising events	49%
Fans in the Stands/Unified Pep Rally	41%
Community service	36%
Mentoring program	29%
Leadership activities	29%
Unified Sports Day/Festival	25%
School play/performance	11%

In previous years, the evaluation documented the connection between having a Unified Club and the extent to which schools implemented Whole School Engagement activities. The Year 10 evaluation began to document the connection between having a Unified Club and implementing other Inclusive Youth Leadership activities. As noted in Year 9, Unified Club acts as "the hub…of a broader conceptualization of youth leadership."[15] By exploring the interconnectedness of Unified Club and other Inclusive Youth Leadership activities, the Year 10 evaluation offers a preliminary look at how schools can provide a range of opportunities for leadership for students with and without ID. Notably, and perhaps as expected, schools that implemented a Unified Club also implemented other Inclusive Youth Leadership activities more often than schools without a Unified Club. Half of schools without a Unified Club (50%) implemented other Inclusive Youth Leadership activities, while three-quarters of schools with a Unified Club did the same (72%), which suggests that implementing a Unified Club may open a pathway to participation in additional Inclusive Youth Leadership activities. See Figure 3 for more information about the difference in implementing Inclusive Youth Leadership activities in schools with and without a Unified Club.

Figure 3. Implementation of Inclusive Youth Leadership activities, by presence of Unified Club



[15] Center for Social Development and Education, 2017

2. Crossover in Student Participation in Unified Sports Teams and Unified Club

Unified Sports teams and Unified Club provide students with two distinct, intensive ways to be involved in the UCS program. Both activities offer opportunities for a small group of students with and without ID to interact regularly, whether through playing a sport together or planning inclusive activities. There is often crossover in the students who participate in these activities. In fact, data from the Year 10 *Student Experience Survey* revealed that one-quarter of middle school students (25%) and one-fifth of high school students (20%) who participated in either Unified Sports or Unified Club participated in both activities. This may be due to students having a personal interest in the UCS program overall, staff members encouraging students to participate in both activities, or the interconnection of the two activities sparking students' interest in participating in both activities. For example, a Unified Club member might be inspired to join Unified Sports while planning and/or attending a Fans in the Stands event. The Year 10 evaluation began to explore the extent to which students participate in both Unified Sports teams and Unified Club, as well as the recruitment and application processes for each activity.

In order to assess the crossover in student participation in these activities, the liaisons who knew the most about both activities (i.e., those who coached a Unified Sports team *and* advised a Unified Club; 54%) were asked how many Unified Sports team participants were also involved in the Unified Club. The majority of these liaisons (52%) noted that over three-quarters (i.e., 76%-100%) of students on a Unified Sports team also participated in a Unified Club, illustrating the strong connection between the two. This connection was clearer in elementary schools, where 64% of liaisons reported that over three-quarters of Unified Sports participants also participated in Unified Club. This may be due to different styles of implementation at different school levels; elementary schools may be more likely to implement UCS activities in congruence with one another, intentionally involving the same students. It is also possible that elementary schools more frequently implement UCS activities in the classroom or as required activities, rather than after school or as optional extracurricular activities. It is also important to consider that the crossover of student participation in Unified Sports and Unified Club may be due, in part, to the liaisons themselves. In schools where one staff member oversaw both activities, this staff member likely had personal connections with students and asked them to participate in both activities.

3. Recruitment into Unified Sports and Unified Club

Unified Sports coaches and Unified Club advisors were asked to specify how students were recruited into those activities. For Unified Sports, actively targeting specific students or groups of students was the most common recruitment method (73%). For Unified Club, making announcements over the school PA system or in classrooms was the most common recruitment tactic (67%). Holding information/interest meetings was also a common method for both activities (56% Unified Sports, 64% Unified Club). See Table 6 for the recruitment tactics used by Unified Sports coaches and Unified Club advisors. Through techniques such as making announcements and distributing flyers, it is possible for schools to reach a broader audience, like students involved in other school clubs, while by targeting students and holding interest meetings, it is possible to more effectively reach students with specific interests, such as playing on a certain sports team.

Table 6. Recruitment tactics used for Unified Sports and Unified Club

Recruitment Tactic	Unified Sports n=1136	Unified Club n=1119
Actively target specific students or groups of students	73%	58%
Make announcements over the school PA system or in classrooms	56%	67%
Hold information/interest meetings	56%	64%
Hang flyers around the school	38%	50%
Make announcements via school media outlets (e.g., school newspaper, social media, school website)	37%	43%

Further examination of how specific groups of students are targeted revealed a focus on students involved in similar school activities (see Table 7). For example, Unified Sports coaches often recruited students already involved in sports (55%), and Unified Club advisors often recruited students already involved in other school clubs (56%). This is perhaps unsurprising given the students involved in these activities; in Year 9, the evaluation revealed that 76% of Unified Sports/PE participants played other sports within the school/community, and 63% of Unified Club participants belonged to other clubs.[16] Interestingly, however, for both Unified Sports and Unified Club, the recruitment pool typically contained students not involved in any other school clubs or groups (52% Unified Sports, 59% Unified Club). Unified Sports coaches and Unified Club advisors may see the UCS program as an avenue to engage these typically disengaged students. Interviews with school staff in Year 10 revealed that, indeed, some staff recognize the benefits of the UCS program for "fringe students" (see Section V.B.6). While coaches and advisors did not specify whether the targeted students were students with or without ID, by targeting these disengaged students, coaches and advisors may be able to offer students a pathway to engagement through Unified activities, regardless of whether those students have ID.

Table 7. Students targeted for recruitment in Unified Sports and Unified Club

Groups targeted for recruitment	Unified Sports n=790	Unified Club n=613
Students involved in other school clubs/groups (e.g., leadership clubs, special interest clubs)	58%	56%
JV or Varsity athletes	55%	49%
Students not involved in any other school clubs/groups	52%	59%
Student Council/Government members	43%	49%
National Honor/Junior Honor Society members	37%	41%
Students who tried out for JV/Varsity teams but were not selected	35%	25%
Students who play intramural sports	33%	26%

[16] Ibid.

4. Applications for Unified Sports and Unified Clubs

After a period of recruitment, some Unified Sports teams and Unified Clubs require prospective members to complete an application before joining. The Year 10 evaluation began to explore whether there were application processes in place for Unified Sports teams and Unified Club, which students were required to go through such a process, and what was required to apply.

Approximately one-third of Unified Sports teams (34%) and Unified Clubs (37%) required an application to join. Most schools required both students with and without ID to apply to join Unified Sports teams (68%), while fewer schools required only students without ID to apply (30%). High schools required both students with and without ID to apply more often than middle or elementary schools (74%, 58%, and 54%, respectively). This may be due, in part, to the types of sports implemented at different school levels. More high schools implement the Competitive model of Unified Sports compared to middle and elementary schools, and this model has the most rigid requirements regarding skill level; thus, try-outs and physical exams may be standard for both students with and without ID. Indeed, more high schools frequently required physical exams/medical records as part of the application than middle or elementary schools (62%, 48%, and 36%, respectively).

In regard to Unified Club, half of schools required both students with and without ID to apply to join Unified Club (52%), and half required only students without ID to apply (47%). Notably, Unified Sports teams more frequently required applications from both students with and without ID than Unified Club. As mentioned above, the difference in whether these activities required applications from both students with and without ID or only students without ID may stem from a unique requirement for Unified Sports teams: 55% of liaisons indicated that the application process for Unified Sports involved a a physical exam or medical record submission, which is likely required for both students with and without ID. Interestingly, Unified Club more often required a personal statement/essay (50%) or letters of recommendation from teachers (39%) than Unified Sports teams (23% and 24%, respectively). Once again, this may indicate that Unified Club functioned, at least in part, as a tutoring or mentorship program, highlighting the helper-helpee dynamic that sometimes arises in Unified Clubs.[17] See Table 8 for more information about application requirements for Unified Sports and Unified Club.

Application requirements may shed light on the reasons that some schools require applications from students without ID while automatically admitting students with ID. It may have to do with the size of the club; if the goal is to have a similar number of students with and without ID involved, and many more students without ID are interested (or are enrolled in the school, as only 1% of students enrolled in public schools have ID[18]), implementing an application process allows staff to control the size of a Unified Sports team or Unified Club. It is also possible that schools use applications to seek out students without ID who can act as mentors to students with ID. While an inclusive peer-to-peer model is a gold

[17] Ibid.

[18] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2016* (NCES 2017-094), Table 204.30.

standard for UCS activities, helper-helpee dynamics are not uncommon in inclusive activities.[19,20] In Year 9, the evaluation profiled four middle schools and found that some schools' UCS programs had a helper-helpee dynamic, especially in the Unified Club. In these Unified Clubs, students without ID submitted applications with essays and teacher recommendations to be peer mentors and assisted students with ID with homework or projects.[21]

This dynamic is further highlighted when examining the application materials required for students with and/or without ID (see Figures 4 and 5). When applications were required for both students with and without ID, they were oriented toward permissions. For example, both Unified Sports teams and Unified Club most frequently required parental permission forms, and Unified Sports teams additionally required physical exams or medical records. In contrast, application materials required for only students without ID were meant to gauge students' personalities and motivations for joining, such as personal statements, letters of recommendation, and interviews. These more subjective measures may be intended to identify empathetic students who could be considered more well-suited to help students with ID. For example, in Year 9, one school began requiring teacher recommendations for students interested in joining Unified Club, in part due to teachers' beliefs that students were previously joining the program just to get out of class or for similarly self-serving reasons.[22]

Table 8. Application requirements for Unified Sports and Unified Club

Application requirement	Unified Sports n=382	Unified Club n=416
Parental permission form	81%	72%
Physical exam/medical records	55%	--*
Grades/transcript	27%	26%
An in-person interview	25%	28%
Letters of recommendation from teachers	24%	39%
A personal statement/essay	23%	50%
Release/certification forms (e.g., Special Olympics release forms, athletic release forms, protective behavior volunteer certifications)	9%	5%

**This question was only asked of Unified Sports teams*

[19] Siperstein, G. N., Leffert, J. S., & Wenz-Gross, M. (1997). The quality of friendships between children with and without learning problems. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, *102*(2), 111-125.
[20] Staub, D., Schwartz, I. S., Gallucci, C., & Peck, C. A. (1994). Four portraits of friendship at an inclusive school. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, *19*(4), 314-325.
[21] Center for Social Development and Education, 2017
[22] Ibid.

Figure 4. Unified Sports team application requirements for students with and without ID

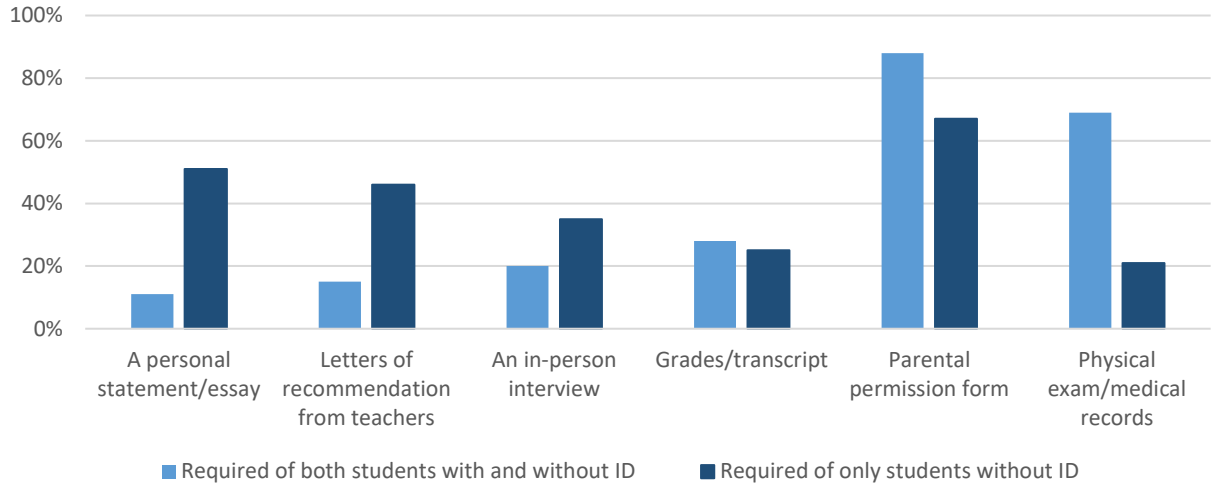
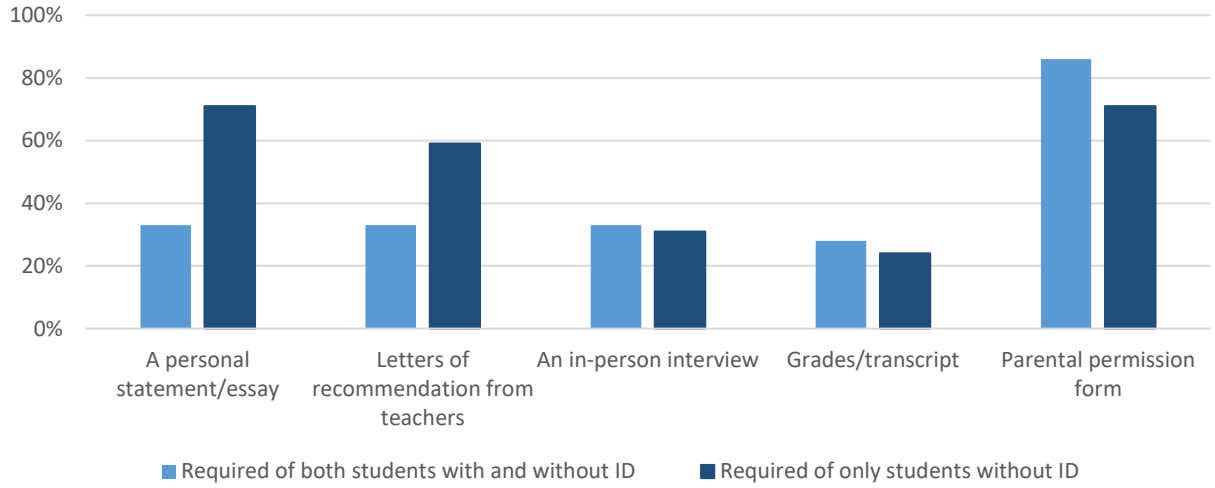


Figure 5. Unified Club application requirements for students with and without ID



5. Summary

An examination of how schools implemented the UCS program in Year 10 demonstrated continued consistency with past evaluation findings, particularly in the percentage of schools meeting the different levels of implementation from Year 9 to Year 10. Encouragingly, there were increases in the number of schools implementing Unified Club and the number of elementary schools implementing several Whole School Engagement activities. Beyond overall implementation, the Year 10 evaluation once again closely examined implementation of Inclusive Sports and found that elementary schools frequently chose to implement Unified PE, while high schools more often implemented Unified Sports teams. When elementary schools did implement Unified Sports teams, they typically utilized the Recreational model, while high schools utilized the Competitive model. These implementation trends are likely due to differences in logistics and interest across grade levels. The evaluation also confirmed that in many elementary schools, Young Athletes is intentionally connected with Unified Sports teams, providing

continuous Inclusive Sports opportunities for students as they get older, and explored how schools linked the two activities.

For the first time, the evaluation explored the relationship between implementing Unified Club and implementing other Inclusive Youth Leadership activities, and it was found that having a Unified Club was positively associated with greater Inclusive Youth Leadership opportunities. The evaluation also explored new topics such as the extent to which students participate in both Unified Sports and Unified Club, and recruitment and application requirements for these activities. Interestingly, findings showed that schools have different application requirements and recruitment strategies for Unified Sports and Unified Club, and that application content was dependent on whether both students with and without ID were required to apply.

Continuing to examine the implementation of the UCS program in Year 10 provided a clearer picture of the interconnectedness of the program's core experiences. By connecting Young Athletes to Unified Sports, Unified Sports to Unified Club, and Unified Club to other Inclusive Youth Leadership activities, and by having youth leaders plan and implement Whole School Engagement events, the UCS program can provide comprehensive inclusive programming for a range of schools and students.

B. Support and Collaboration

To fully understand how schools implemented the UCS program in Year 10, it is necessary to understand the supports available to liaisons in planning and implementing activities. Previous evaluations of the UCS program have examined various forms of support available to liaisons, including school-based support (such as the UCS Leadership Team, school clubs, and other school/student groups) and community-based support (such as other schools and community-based Special Olympics programs). The Year 10 evaluation once again explored the types of supports and collaboration available to liaisons, such as the UCS Leadership Team and community-based SO program support, but also focused on school district-level support, State Program support, and national SO resources. Furthermore, the Year 10 evaluation provided insight into the type of training and support liaisons have and would like to receive from their State Program.

1. School District Support

A major source of support for liaisons in Year 10 was their school district. Liaisons almost universally indicated that their district supported the UCS program at their school (90%), and many indicated that their district supported the UCS program at other schools in the district as well (63%). District support came in many forms, including financial support (29%), event permissions (24%), helping with planning/implementation (14%), and encouraging other schools in the district to implement the UCS program (14%). A smaller number of liaisons indicated that the district was involved with the UCS program at their schools through advertising events (8%), approving time off, or providing substitute teachers (6%).

As shown in past evaluations, a support system for the UCS program beyond school liaisons is positively related to more robust implementation at the school level. This trend continued in Year 10, as more schools with district support for the UCS program met full-implementation Unified Champion School status than schools without district support (59% and 39%, respectively).[23]

Additionally, support systems appear to beget support systems: schools with district support were more than twice as likely to report implementing UCS Leadership Teams, a school-based support initiative, than schools without district support (44% and 18%, respectively; see Section IV.B.2 for more details about the UCS Leadership Team). Although the directionality of these relationships remains difficult to parse out (i.e., which came first?), what is more apparent than ever in Year 10 is that involvement from all levels of a school's support system is critical to implementing and achieving a well-rounded UCS program. Liaisons agree that this network of support is important; the large majority of liaisons (83%) reported that they relied on support from their school district in order to successfully implement the UCS program in Year 10, with one-quarter of liaisons (24%) relying on this support "a lot."[24]

2. Unified Champion Schools Leadership Team

The Unified Champion Schools Leadership Team was another source of support for liaisons in Year 10. The UCS Leadership Team is a group of school and community members such as teachers, students, parents, and other school staff who come together to promote the UCS program and implement UCS activities. The concept of the Leadership Team was first introduced by SO in Year 7 as a best practice to support and sustain UCS programming in schools. In previous years, the evaluation has documented the prevalence, structure, and goals of Leadership Teams within and across schools. The Year 10 evaluation continued to document the goals of the UCS Leadership Team, and for the first time, explored the reasons why a large number of schools have yet to form a Leadership Team.

Encouragingly, after three years with little to no growth in the number of schools with a UCS Leadership Team, Year 10 saw an increase in the number of schools implementing this support structure (41%) compared to past years (ranging from 31%-34%). Over two-thirds of liaisons (70%) reported that their school utilized the Leadership Team prior to Year 10, indicating that most schools have used the team structure to support UCS programming for multiple years.

The increase in implementation of Leadership Teams, albeit modest, is likely due to the push from SO in Year 10 for State Program staff to promote the Leadership Team with the schools in their state. In fact, one-third of liaisons (32%) reported that their State Program had suggested they form a Leadership Team. Notably, a majority (67%) of these liaisons did implement a Leadership Team in Year 10. Liaisons who reported that their State Program had not suggested forming a Leadership Team used this support structure less often (34%). Clearly, input from State Programs has a tangible impact on schools' decision whether to implement a UCS Leadership Team.

[23] A Pearson chi square test of independence was used to determine the significance of these findings: X^2 (2, N = 2743) = 55.50, p < .001.

[24] Liaisons responded on a four-point scale from "not at all" to "a lot."

For the first time, the Year 10 evaluation examined schools' reasons for not forming a Leadership Team. A common reason was that the school was new to the UCS program and did not yet have the capacity to form a Leadership Team (23%). As expected, this was an especially common response from schools in their first year of implementation (57%). While new and established schools implemented Leadership Teams at similar rates, it is clear that many schools viewed their relative newness to the program as a barrier to implementing a Leadership Team. Another common reason that schools gave for not having a Leadership Team was that they had some other structure providing support for the UCS program (21%). These alternative leadership structures were similar to the UCS Leadership Team—such as strong student leadership within the school or two staff members leading the program rather than a larger team—but they were not formally called a "Leadership Team." Another common reason that schools did not form a Leadership Team in Year 10 was because liaisons were unaware of the option (15%). This, again, demonstrates the need for State Programs to educate liaisons about Leadership Teams and the associated benefits for their UCS programs.

For schools that did implement Leadership Teams, these groups served a range of purposes. One-third of Leadership Teams facilitated a deeper connection between the UCS program and the school by creating a strategy to engage the broader school community (37%). Other Leadership Teams focused on developing a school improvement plan to improve the social inclusion of students with ID (27%), which was often part of their school's broader continuous improvement plan (66%), thereby aligning the goals of the Unified Champion Schools program with the school's larger mission. A smaller percentage of liaisons noted that the Leadership Team conducted an assessment of social inclusion at the school (14%). See Figure XX for more information on the functions of Leadership Teams in Year 10. Overall, whether by creating engagement strategies, school improvement plans, or assessing social inclusion, Leadership Teams served to more deeply connect the UCS program with the school as a whole.

3. Support from Special Olympics

In addition to support from the school and school district, liaisons reported that they also received a large amount of support from SO. This support came from several levels, including community-based SO program collaboration, national SO implementation resources, and State Program trainings.

Community-Based Special Olympics Support

Since Year 8, the UCS evaluation has documented interaction and collaboration between schools and community-based SO programs. The Year 10 evaluation continued to document this relationship, focusing on the involvement of students with and without ID in community-based SO programming and their continued involvement after high school. Approximately half of liaisons (53%) reported that there was an SO program in their town/city, and schools were connected to the community-based SO program mainly through student engagement in events. Nearly three-quarters of liaisons (72%) reported that students from their school competed in community-based SO sports events, and half (46%) reported that students volunteered at such events. Encouragingly, both students with and without ID were engaged at the local level through competition (43%) and volunteering (36%). As expected, there were some differences in student engagement, with students with ID mainly involved in competition (49%)

and students without ID mainly involved in volunteering (57%). In contrast with the Unified structure of school-based activities, Special Olympics primarily offers community sports for individuals with ID, so it is expected that community-based SO programs provide different opportunities for students with and without ID.

In some cases, the UCS program acts as a springboard for students' continued SO involvement upon graduation from high school.[25] Nearly half of liaisons (43%) reported that their community-based SO program provided them with information on how students can stay involved with Special Olympics after graduation. Interestingly, schools that implemented the Inclusive Youth Leadership component more often received this information than schools not implementing this component (46% and 28%, respectively), highlighting an important connection between student leaders in high school and continued engagement in the UCS program. Information about staying involved was typically provided for both students with and without ID (56%), but one-third of liaisons reported that this information was provided only for students with ID (35%), which may reflect the targeted nature of community-based SO programming or the lack of Unified Sports in many communities.

Special Olympics Resources

At the national level, SO has developed several resources to help schools implement the UCS program, including implementation playbooks for each school level (i.e., elementary, middle, and high), the *Unified Physical Education Resources*, and the *Young Athletes Activity Guide*. Half of all liaisons (51%) reported using SO resources (print or online) to implement the UCS program in Year 10. Of the high school liaisons who reported using SO resources, over one-third (42%) used the *Unified Champion Schools High School Playbook*. Most of the high schools that did not use the *High School Playbook* in Year 10 (58%) were not aware of this resource (90%). A similar trend emerged with schools implementing Unified PE, where the majority of liaisons who did not use the *Unified Physical Education Resources* (64%) reported that they did not know SO had released this resource (88%). In contrast, the majority of elementary schools implementing Young Athletes used the *Young Athletes Activity Guide*, with only one-quarter reporting they did not use the guide (26%).

The *Unified Champion Schools Middle Level Playbook* was the newest resource SO released prior to data collection for the Year 10 evaluation. Unsurprisingly, not many middle schools were aware of this resource. Of all the middle schools liaisons who reported using SO resources, only 15% were aware of the *Middle Level Playbook*, though, encouragingly, when liaisons were aware it existed, half used it (44%). This follows similar trends documented in past evaluations after SO released new resources for schools. Clearly, when liaisons do not use Special Olympics resources, it is usually because they are unaware that such resources exist.

Special Olympics State Program Trainings

The Year 10 evaluation explored the types of UCS training that State Program offered to liaisons. Half of all liaisons (53%) indicated that they were aware of UCS trainings offered by their State Program. These

[25] Center for Social Development and Education, 2017

trainings most often focused on coaching Unified Sports (70%), providing general information about Special Olympics (66%), and implementing Whole School Engagement activities (54%).

In Year 9, a recommendation was made to expand training and resources related to Inclusive Youth Leadership, in order to support a broader definition of youth leadership including students with ID as leaders.[26] In Year 10, one-third of schools (35%) reported that their State Program offered training on Inclusive Youth Leadership. High schools and middle schools were more frequently offered training pertaining to inclusive youth leadership (38% and 37%, respectively) than elementary schools (26%), continuing to demonstrate the trend seen in past evaluations that Inclusive Youth Leadership is emphasized more for older grade levels. See Table 9 for more information on the types of trainings State Programs offered to schools in Year 10.

Liaisons were also asked what trainings they would like to receive in the future. They most commonly requested training on how to implement the UCS program or specific UCS activities (24%), with a smaller number of liaisons wanting training on topics such as how to get people involved in the program (8%) and logistics (8%).

Table 9. State Program Trainings

Training	Percentage of schools n=1421	Elementary Schools n=280	Middle Schools n=248	High Schools n=814
Unified Sports coaching	70%	45%	64%	79%
General information about Special Olympics	66%	72%	63%	65%
Whole School Engagement activities	54%	53%	57%	53%
Inclusive youth leadership	35%	26%	37%	38%
How to create a socially inclusive school	30%	26%	29%	31%
Unified PE	28%	34%	33%	27%
Young Athletes	27%	54%	23%	18%
UCS Leadership Team	25%	22%	28%	25%

4. Summary

To more fully understand the scope of support for schools implementing UCS programming, the evaluation continued to examine the specific supports and resources available from the school, community, and SOI in Year 10. Schools often benefited from district-level support, whether it was financial, approving or directly supporting implementation, or encouraging other schools in the district to implement the UCS program. Unified Champion Schools Leadership Teams continued to provide

[26] Ibid.

much-needed support within schools, and the Year 10 evaluation revealed that whether schools choose to implement Leadership Teams often depends on whether their State Program recommended they form one. This demonstrates the importance of communication from State Programs to schools and the value of State Programs guiding schools to implement more well-rounded, sustainable UCS programs.

Schools continued to receive support and resources from SOI at the local, state, and national levels in Year 10. At the local level, SO programs continued to collaborate with schools, mainly through student engagement in local events. Importantly, this support often extended beyond graduation, with nearly half of liaisons reporting that information about staying involved in SO was provided to graduating seniors with and without ID. Liaisons also benefited from training at the state level, which often focused on Young Athletes implementation, Unified Sports coaching, or Inclusive Youth Leadership. At the national level, many liaisons utilized SOI resources when implementing the UCS program, and those who did not use these resources were typically unaware of their existence. From as close as their own school building to as far as the national Special Olympics office, liaisons have a comprehensive network of support available to help them sustain their schools' UCS programming.

V. Impact of the Unified Champion Schools Program in Year 10

Examining the impact of the UCS program occurs at multiple levels across multiple contexts and involves mixed-methods data collection from a number of stakeholders within the school community. The Year 10 evaluation examined the impact of the UCS program on the school as a whole, as well as on individual students with and without ID.

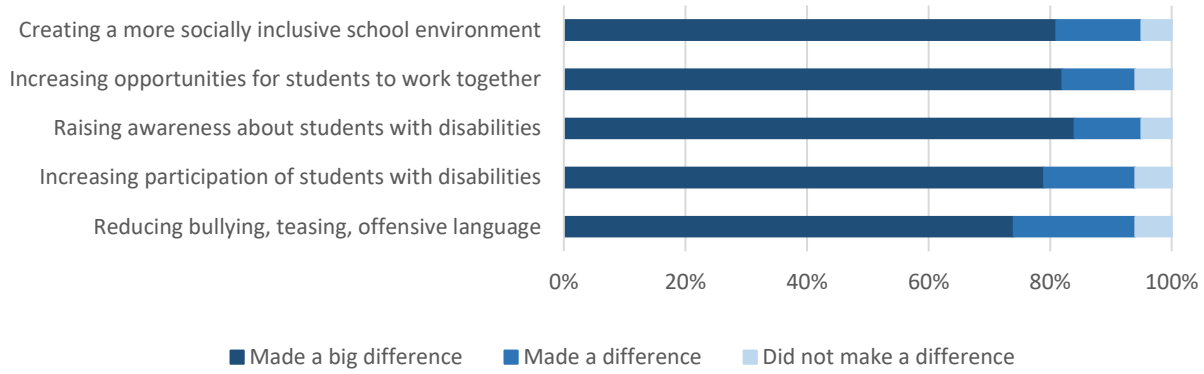
In examining the impact on the school, the Year 10 evaluation continued a longstanding focus on how the UCS program creates a socially inclusive school climate. Survey data from liaisons, as well as auxiliary interviews with school community members conducted as part of the Year 10 site visits to high schools, provide the basis for this examination. Exploring the impact of the UCS program on middle and high school students with and without ID focused on youth leadership at the high school level, the transition from middle school to high school, and, for students without ID, their attitudes toward and perceptions of inclusion, their motivations for participating in the program, their social and emotional development, and the friendships they developed with peers with ID.

A. Impact on the School

The Unified Champion Schools program aims to facilitate school-wide cultural change through the implementation of inclusive activities. As such, one focus of the annual evaluation is the extent to which the UCS program reaches and impacts the school as a whole. To document the program's impact on and value for schools, an objective that has been carried out over the past nine years, the Year 10 evaluation again relied on reports from the 2,822 liaisons who responded to the *Unified Champion Schools Liaison Survey*. In addition to the quantitative data collected from these liaisons, qualitative data were collected through interviews with students and school staff at three high schools implementing the Unified Champion Schools program.

As in past years, liaisons provided insight into how schools value and embrace the UCS program beyond simply implementing activities. Consistent with the positive perceptions documented in past years, almost all liaisons (95%) felt that the UCS program created a more socially inclusive school climate. Liaisons resoundingly felt that the UCS program raised awareness about students with ID (95%) and increased opportunities for students with and without ID to work together (94%). Liaisons also felt that the program increased the participation of students with ID in school activities (94%) and reduced bullying, teasing, and offensive language (94%). Encouragingly, liaisons have similar positive perceptions of school impact regardless of whether they are at an elementary, middle, or high school. This shows that regardless of school level, and the associated nuances in UCS implementation, the UCS program has a positive impact on all schools. See Figure 6 for how liaisons felt the UCS program impacted the social environment of their school.

Figure 6. Impact of the UCS program on aspects of the school social environment, as reported by liaisons



In addition, liaisons from full-implementation Unified Champion Schools reported more significant impact on the school environment than liaisons from schools with less robust programming.[27] Moreover, liaisons from Developing Unified Schools reported a stronger impact than liaisons from Emerging Unified Schools. See Table 10 for more information on the impact of the program across implementation levels.

Table 10. Impact scores based on level of UCS program implementation[28]

Implementation Level	n	Impact Score Mean (SD)
Unified Champion School	1553	35.41 (6.13)
Developing Unified School	496	32.86 (7.08)
Emerging Unified School	618	29.30 (9.78)

Site visits to high schools provided an additional perspective. Interviews with school staff and students expanded upon the impact of the UCS program captured in the *Unified Champion Schools Liaison Survey*. Students without ID expressed the importance of schoolwide awareness of the UCS program, as they described the importance of getting "the whole school cognizant…of what's going on" and "seeing everyone show up." Students explained how they desired the UCS program to become "widespread" and something "that the whole school is pretty much involved in." In garnering schoolwide recognition, students without ID recognized their role as social referents to other students without ID in promoting inclusivity within their school. In particular, they viewed their participation in the UCS program as a way to encourage their peers to become more welcoming toward students with ID because, as one student noted, "It helps you to…show other people that they can be friends with them too and just say hi to them in the hallways."

[27] A one-way ANOVA was used to determine the significance of these findings: $F(2,2664) = 157.08$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc analyses revealed that all three groups (Unified Champion Schools, Developing Unified Schools, and Emerging Unified Schools) were significantly different from each other.

[28] Impact on the school was measured using an 8-item *Impact Scale* developed for the annual evaluation. Liaisons responded to statements such as those presented in Figure 6 on a six-point scale (0 = *The Unified Champion Schools program did not make a difference*, 5 = *The Unified Champion Schools program made a big difference*). The scale was sum-scored with possible scores ranging from 0 to 40, with higher scores indicating greater perceptions of impact on the school.

Students without ID also acknowledged the importance of schoolwide recognition of the UCS program for their peers with ID. One student without ID described how his teammates with ID felt when students not involved in the UCS program showed up to a Unified Sports game, stating, “The [students with ID] were just like, ‘Whoa. All these people are here to see me and all my friends play these awesome sports.’”

Similarly, school staff discussed how the UCS program impacted their school by raising awareness about students with ID, encouraging relationships, and creating a “community-wide…sense of inclusion.” See Table 11 for staff perspectives on the UCS program’s influence on the larger school culture.

Table 11. Staff perspectives on the impact of the UCS program on the social environment of the school

Perspective	Example Comment
Special Education Teacher	“I just have been really impressed with the growth of [the UCS program]…the ability for our students in the general ed to take classes alongside of students with intellectual disabilities has just really shifted the culture of the building in general, I think, with raising awareness and establishing those connections and relationships. …And it just has really created a community-wide feeling and sense of inclusion.” “And I've really seen a difference in the way that the social relationships with the way that our regular kids are interacting with our disabled peers and they get to know them not just as, "Oh hey, that's so-and-so," but they know them and they can tell you that kid's likes, and dislikes, and personalities, and you see them high-fiving in the hallways, and I mean it's been a huge positive change.”
General Education Teacher	“I think [the UCS program] had a huge impact on inclusivity across the school, and I think it's wonderfully beneficial to all students. And even those, as I just think about the willingness to be open-minded about all students…I think that the atmosphere created by it helps people be open-minded or at least cognizant a little bit that everyone's not coming from their background.”

1. Summary

School staff continue to be a valuable source of feedback in examining the impact of the UCS program on the whole school. In Year 10, liaisons continued to believe that the UCS program impacted their schools by creating a more socially inclusive school environment, increasing opportunities for students to work together, raising awareness about students with ID, increasing participation of students with ID, and reducing bullying, teasing, and offensive language toward students with ID. As found in previous years, the greatest impact was reported in schools meeting the full-implementation Unified Champion Schools implementation level. Interviews with school staff and students elaborated upon the impact of the UCS program, providing additional context to better understand how the UCS program influences

the broader school culture. Overall, these findings bolster the body of evidence that demonstrates the value of the UCS program in facilitating positive school-wide change.

B. Impact on Students

1. Participation and Engagement in the UCS Program

By continuing to uncover how participation in the UCS program impacts students, the annual evaluation documents the reasons and ways students get involved in the program. Understanding why and how students choose to participate is key in sustaining and growing involvement in the program, especially when implementing the program in new schools. The Year 8 and Year 9 evaluations individually examined student participation and engagement at the middle school (Year 9) and high school (Year 8) levels, including student awareness of the UCS program and motivations for joining activities. Results revealed that, on average across schools, at least half of the student body participated in the UCS program, but awareness of individual program activities, or lack thereof, was a major contributor to students not participating in core activities like Unified Sports and Unified Club. Notably, past evaluations have found that the UCS program attracts middle and high school students who are already heavily engaged in their schools and communities, and students are motivated to join the core UCS activities for skill development, to make a difference in their school, and to simply have fun with their peers. Building on these findings, the Year 10 evaluation further explored participation at the middle and high school levels, with a new focus on the characteristics of participating students and the extent to which these students were involved in the UCS program in a given year and over time. Corroborating these findings, qualitative data explored why students initially became involved with the UCS program, as well as their reasons for maintaining involvement.

Characteristics of Middle and High School Participants

To enhance what is known about participation in the UCS program, the Year 10 evaluation explored students' personal characteristics related to participation. With past evaluations documenting various factors that motivate students to join the UCS program in the first place, the Year 10 evaluation aimed to provide a more complete answer to the question, "Who participates in the UCS program?" In Year 10, new measures were added to the *Student Experience Survey* to assess the personal characteristics of students (see Appendix C) and how these qualities relate to the areas of interest for the evaluation. Previous evaluations have shown that students who choose to get involved in the UCS program tend to be more prosocial (e.g., empathetic, compassionate) than students who choose not to participate. Measures of peer and teacher support, grit, and academic achievement were added in Year 10 to provide a more complete picture of UCS participants as compared to non-participants.

Examining students' personal characteristics in relationship to their participation was done at two levels:

1. Comparing participants (i.e., any involvement in the UCS program) to non-participants, and
2. Comparing "intense" participants (i.e., involvement in two or more UCS activities, one of which is Unified Sports or Unified Club) to "moderate" participants (i.e., involvement in one UCS program activity, or two or more activities that are not Unified Sports or Unified Club)

Building on the results of the Year 8 and Year 9 evaluations, the Year 10 evaluation again confirmed that middle and high school students who chose to participate in the UCS program reported significantly higher levels of empathy/compassion than students who were not involved in the UCS program.[29] Specifically in high school, students who participated intensely were found to be even more compassionate than students who participated moderately.[30] Thus, as expected, students who are more prosocial are more likely to participate in the UCS program, and at higher levels.

The Year 10 evaluation results also support research showing that participating in extracurricular activities is associated with better academic performance.[31] In both middle and high school, students who participated in the UCS program reported having significantly higher grades than students who were not involved.[32]A key character trait in predicting academic success and performance is grit. Grit is a characteristic that encompasses an individual's persevering effort towards and commitment to personal goals. Both middle and high school students who engaged in the UCS program had higher levels of grit than non-participants.

Finally, to gain a fuller picture of the type of student involved in the UCS program, the evaluation considered how socially supported students feel at their school because research has shown that students who feel more supported by their peers and teachers are more likely to be involved in extracurricular activities.[33] The Year 10 evaluation confirmed this in relation to the UCS program. That is, in both middle and high school, students who chose to be involved in the UCS program felt more supported by their peers and teachers than students who did not choose to participate.[34] One student described the support she felt from her peers during a pep rally for the Unified Sports team: "We got a standing ovation and a lot of support from the student body, and I know that everyone after was telling me how great it was…it was really cool." As highlighted in both survey and interview data, the UCS program creates a positive feedback loop for students—it promotes feelings of support among students, which, in turn, increases students' level of engagement in both the program and the school.

Student Characteristics Predicting Participation

The Year 10 evaluation further considered how student characteristics impact the decision to participate in the UCS program. Using structural equation modeling (SEM),[35] the evaluation examined which

[29] Middle school: $F(2,1480) = 19.672$, $p < .001$; High school: $F(2,792) = 26.462$, $p < .001$

[30] Bonferroni post-hoc, $p < .05$

[31] Cooper, H., Valentine, J.C., Nye, B., & Lindsay, J. J. (1999). *Relationships between five after-school activities and academic achievement.* Journal of Educational Psychology, *91*(2), 369-378.

[32] Middle school: $F(2,1554) = 7.996$, $p < .001$. High school: $F(2,810) = 6.404$, $p < .01$

[33] Wang, M. & Eccles, J.S. (2012). *Social support matters: longitudinal effects of social support on three dimensions of school engagement from middle to high school.* Child Development, *83*(3), 877-895.

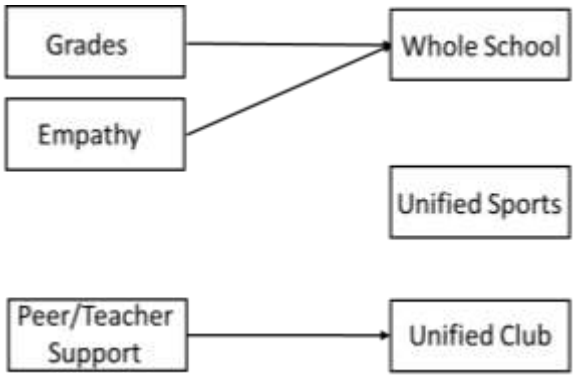
[34] Middle school: $F(2,1506) = 7.908$, $p < .001$. High school: $F(2,808) = 9.195$, $p < .001$

[35] SEM is an advanced statistical technique that involves the simultaneous estimation of a complete conceptual path model, explicitly testing both direct and indirect effects. See: Schumacker, R. E. & Lomax, R. G. (2004). *A beginner's guide to structural equation modeling* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.

student characteristics predicted participation in the three core UCS experiences in both middle and high schools.

In middle school, empathy and academic grades both predicted participation in Whole School Engagement activities (see Figure 7 for details).[36] Additionally, peer and teacher support predicted participation in Whole School Engagement activities.[37] Similar relationships were observed at the high school level. Compassion, peer and teacher support, and grit each predicted participation in Whole School Engagement activities.[38] Additionally, compassion and academic achievement both predicted participation in Unified Club.[39] Clearly, students who are more prosocial (e.g., empathetic/compassionate), have higher levels of grit, perform better academically, and feel more supported at school are drawn to the UCS program. Gaining a better understanding the characteristics of UCS program participants is important, both for recruitment and implementation purposes.

Figure 7. Middle school student characteristics predicting UCS participation



Participation in the UCS Program across Schools

With a better understanding of the type of student who chooses to participate in the UCS program, the Year 10 evaluation next examined the nature and level of student participation in the UCS program in middle and high schools and the resulting impact that participation has on students. Encouragingly, both middle and high school participation in the UCS program were higher in Year 10 compared to previous years. Of the 824 students surveyed across the three high schools, over two-thirds (69%) participated in at least one UCS program activity. This rate of participation reflects an over 15-point increase in student engagement from Year 8 (50%) and Year 7 (53%).[40] This spike in overall participation largely reflects the higher percentage of students participating in Spread the Word to End the Word at these schools than at other high schools in previous years (50% in Year 10 vs. 27% in Year 8). See Table 12 for the percentage of high school students participating in each UCS activity in Year 10.

[36] Empathy, $B = .01$, $p < .001$; grades, $B = .02$, $p < .01$.
[37] Peer/teacher support, $B = .01$, $p < .05$.
[38] Compassion, $B = .02$, $p < .001$; grit, $B = .01$, $p < .01$; peer/teacher support, $B = .01$, $p < .01$.
[39] Compassion, $B = .01$, $p < .05$; grades, $B = .02$, $p < .01$.
[40] Data from high school students were not analyzed in Year 9.

Student participation in middle schools also increased in Year 10. Of the 1,557 students surveyed across the eight middle schools, 73% participated in at least one UCS activity—an increase of 14% from Year 9. This increase reflects both a rise in the number of schools offering activities to students, such as Unified Sports Day in Year 10, and overall growth in the number of students who participated in at least one UCS activity. See Tables 12 and 13 for the percentage and intensity of middle school students participating in each UCS activity in Year 10.

Table 12. Student participation in Unified Champion Schools activities in Year 10[41]

Activity	Percentage of Students High School	Percentage of Students Middle School
Spread the Word to End the Word	50%	50%
Fans in the Stands/Unified Sports Pep Rally	47%	42%
Unified Sports/PE	10%	20%
Fundraising events and activities	8%	18%
Unified Club	8%	13%
Unified Sports Day/Festival	--*	13%

**None of the high schools surveyed offered Unified Sports Day/Festival*

Table 13. Intensity of middle school student participation in the Unified Champion Schools program[42]

Participation Level	Percentage of Students Year 10	Percentage of Students Year 9
No participation	27%	41%
Moderate participation	50%	42%
Intense participation	23%	17%

Consistent with previous evaluation findings, Whole School Engagement activities (specifically Spread the Word to End the Word and Fans in the Stands) had the most student involvement in schools in Year 10, with approximately half of middle and high school students participating (see Table 12). Of note, while high school students appear to be just as likely to participate in the UCS program as middle school students in Year 10, twice as many middle school students participated intensely compared to high school students. See Table 14 for the intensity of high school students' participation. This difference in participation intensity likely reflects the larger student enrollment in high schools.[43] Because activities like Unified Sports/PE and Unified Club involve a limited number of students, schools that are smaller in size (such as middle schools) will have a larger percentage of their student body represented on Unified teams and clubs.

[41] These percentages are out of the students whose school offered the activity.
[42] Ibid.
[43] U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics.

Table 14. Intensity of high school student participation in the Unified Champion Schools program

Participation Level	Percentage of Students Year 10	Percentage of Students Year 8
No participation	31%	50%
Moderate participation	57%	39%
Intense participation	12%	11%

Sustained Engagement in the UCS Program

Previous Participation

Past evaluations have also documented student participation over time, taking into account the various factors that may lead to sustained student engagement. The Year 10 evaluation continued to examine these trends at both the middle and high school levels. To ensure that these analyses only reflected students who had the opportunity to participate in the UCS program the previous year, students who indicated Year 10 was their first year at their current school, including all 6th grade students at the middle school level, were excluded. Though 9th graders students were in their first year of high school, all high schools surveyed had the program available at the "feeder" middle school in Year 9 and, thus, 9th grade students had the opportunity to participate the year prior.

Almost two-thirds of students in middle (64%) and high school (58%) reported participating in at least one UCS program activity the previous school year. Among those students, there was nearly universal participation in at least one activity again in Year 10 (91% middle school, 92% high school). Clearly, once students get involved in the UCS program, they stay involved. Interviews with students revealed that some students are motivated to remain in the program so they can continue the relationships they have made within the program. For example, one students stayed involved because she wanted to "continue seeing all of [her] friends who [were] in the program." Other students talked about remaining involved because of their interest in helping others. For example, a sophomore who began participating in the UCS program in seventh grade explained how she has simply "always liked helping people" and knew that staying in the program would be "a good way for [her] to help [peers with ID] in [her] school."

Encouragingly, the rate of sustained participation was the same for both middle and high school students in Year 10. As a further step in examining sustained participation in the UCS program, data were analyzed from the *Matched Student Experience Survey*, which aimed to document students' transition from middle school (Year 9) to high school (Year 10). Of the 133 students who were followed from three middle schools to their respective high schools, three-quarters (77%) maintained their involvement in the UCS program across the transition.

Notably, the Year 10 evaluation found a trend in terms of student participation over time—the longer students stay involved in the UCS program, the more involved they become (i.e., they are more likely to participate intensely). Students who previously participated in the UCS program were more likely to participate in general in Year 10, and they were also more likely to participate intensely. Of the students

followed from middle to high school, 36% increased their involvement over the transition by participating in more UCS activities in high school than they had in middle school. Students who responded to the Year 10 *Student Experience Survey* also reported increased engagement over time; in middle school, 36% of returning participants engaged in more than one UCS activity, compared to 16% of students who just participated in Year 10.[44] A similar pattern was found among high school students.[45]

For Unified Club specifically, sustained involvement impacted the degree to which students expanded their leadership roles in the club over time. High school students who reported holding formal leadership roles (e.g., club president) in the club in Year 10 were more likely to have been involved in Year 9.[46] In the interviews conducted with high school students in Year 10, one student reflected on how he became a leader, sharing, "I was really involved last year, and so [teacher's name] just asked me to step up and be an officer this year." Having more experience with the UCS program and the people connected to the program seem to be important for high school students to become formal leaders. For more information on youth leadership in the UCS program see Section V.B.5.

Future Participation

To further expand the understanding of sustained engagement in the UCS program, in addition to reporting on participation the previous school year, students were also asked to indicate their interest in staying involved next school year. In middle school, slightly more than half of students reported wanting to participate in Unified Sports/PE (56%) or Unified Club (48%) the following school year. In contrast, fewer high school students[47] indicated interest in being involved in Unified Sports/PE (37%) or Unified Club (38%) in the next school year. This difference among grade levels could reflect older adolescents' tendency to join extracurricular activities less often in general (46% high school vs. 80% middle school),[48] as extracurricular participation typically decreases as students enter high school.[49] For the UCS program, this decrease in engagement could be due to increased responsibilities as students get older. For example, the Year 8 evaluation found that common obstacles to high school students' participation in the UCS program were school and work commitments (where work commitments would not be a factor for middle school students). Despite the typical decline of extracurricular participation among high school students,[50] those who previously participated in the UCS program were more likely to both stay with the program and become more intensely involved over time. Thus, increasing the level of involvement of high school students may require getting them to join the UCS program earlier.

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[44] Middle school students who previously participated in the UCS program were more likely to intensely participate, X^2 (1, N = 1104) = 32.996, $p < .001$

[45] High school students who previously participated in the UCS program were more likely to intensely participate, X^2 (1, N = 561) = 11.004, $p = .001$

[46] High School students who previously participated in Unified Club were more likely to hold formal leadership positions: X^2 = 6.653, $p = .036$

[47] These analyses exclude 12th grades. 12th graders were removed due to uncertainty about program availability after graduation.

[48] Percentage of students who reported participating in a non-UCS extracurricular activity in the *Student Experience Survey*.

[49] Baumeister, R. F. & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*(3), 497-529.

[50] Ibid.

Motivating Factors for Participation

With the Year 10 evaluation findings confirming that students who become involved in the UCS program tend to remain involved, examining why students choose to join the program in the first place may help with understanding how to reach more students. Internal and external motivating factors, including social reasons, altruism, skill development, friend or teacher recruitment, and current extracurricular involvement, influenced middle and high school students to join Unified Sports/PE and Unified Club in Year 10.

Many participants get involved in the UCS program as a result of internal motivating factors, such as having a purpose beyond the self (e.g., wanting to make a difference in their school). Most high school students who were interviewed (75%) described this altruistic orientation. As one student noted, "I have quite a bit of privilege in the world, and I would just like to use that to better other people's lives instead of containing it to myself." Another student explained, "I just always want to be the person who stands up for everybody and cares for everybody, especially if they don't have anybody else to care for them." The reasons students gave for this outlook were rooted in a desire to help others, with an acknowledgment of the personal benefits derived from service. As expressed by one student, "If you can improve everyone around you, that brings everyone else up and also brings you up." Like high school students, most middle school students (62%) cited altruistic reasons (e.g., wanting to make a difference in their school or wanting to help students with ID) as their motivation to join the Unified Club.

Students involved in the UCS program with this sense of purpose also tended to have a personal connection to someone with a disability. Nearly 71% of students without ID who were interviewed identified a link to disability as a precipitating factor for their involvement. See Table 15 for student perspectives on their personal connections to disability that prompted them to join the UCS program at their schools.

Another factor contributing to student involvement in the UCS program is students' social motivations. Middle and high school students cited social reasons as one of their primary motivations for joining both Unified Sports/PE (67% and 64%, respectively) and Unified Club (79% and 76%, respectively), underscoring the fact that the UCS program has an impact on students mainly through the social relationships and interactions it facilitates between students.[51] See Figure 8 and Figure 9 for more information on students' reasons for joining Unified Sports/PE and Unified Club.

Notably, social reasons were more common in Unified Club than Unified Sports/PE, which is perhaps expected given that social events are typically a common activity/focus for Unified Clubs (in Year 10, 61% of Unified Clubs reported planning and implementing social events; see Section IV.A.1). The social motivation for joining—for students both with and without ID—centered on wanting to make new friends. Of the high school students without ID who were interviewed in Year 10, two-thirds (65%) stated that the strong relationships they developed with their peers with ID was one of the best parts of

[51] Siperstein et al., 2017

participating in the UCS program. As one high school student with ID described, the UCS program is a place where he can "meet lots of new people" and "be friendly." In fact, the majority of high school students with ID who were interviewed (53%) named a peer without ID from the UCS program as a friend (see Section V.B.2).

Table 15. Personal connections to disability for students without ID

Personal connection	Example Comment
Family	"My cousin has Down syndrome…I'm thinking all these kids are exactly like her, and I would want her to feel included." "I first started participating because both of my brothers have special needs, and I wanted to help other kids with that." "I first started in the seventh grade because…my brother is diagnosed with autism, and so I felt like I needed to."
Friend	"I met one of my friends that had a disability, and they weren't really in any of my classes, so I was like, 'It would be kind of cool if I could hang out with you.' And then [Unified Club] helped me with that." "Because my best friend…he's in special needs, and people made fun of him, and I was just like, 'Okay, I'd like to get involved.'"
Self	"Starting in fifth grade, I started helping around our different special ed services because I was there, because I have dyslexia."

Figure 8. Student motivations to join Unified Sports/PE in Year 10

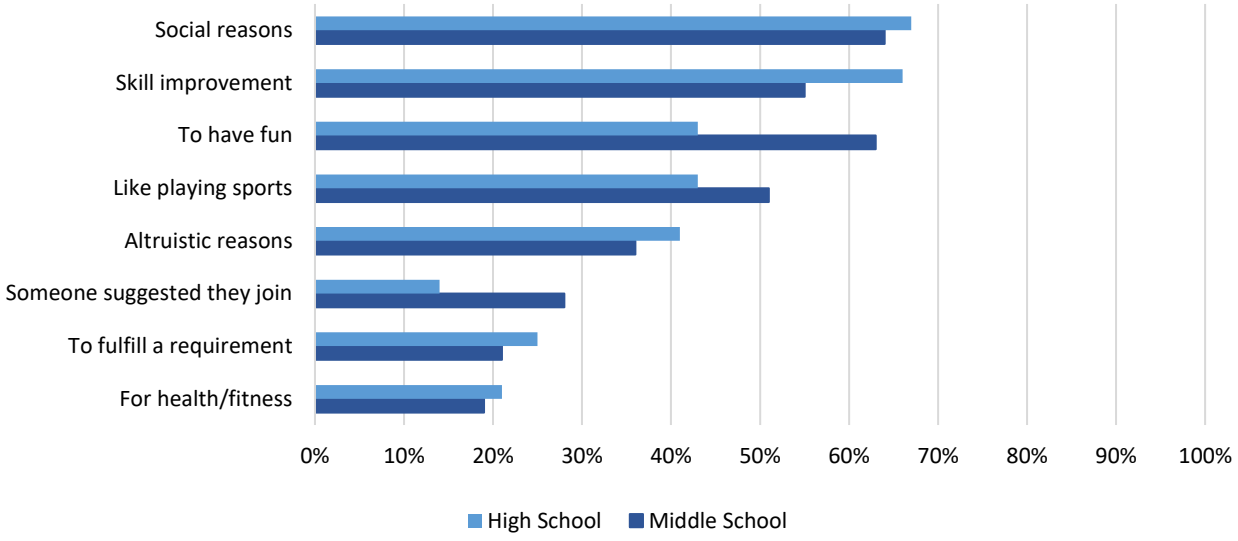
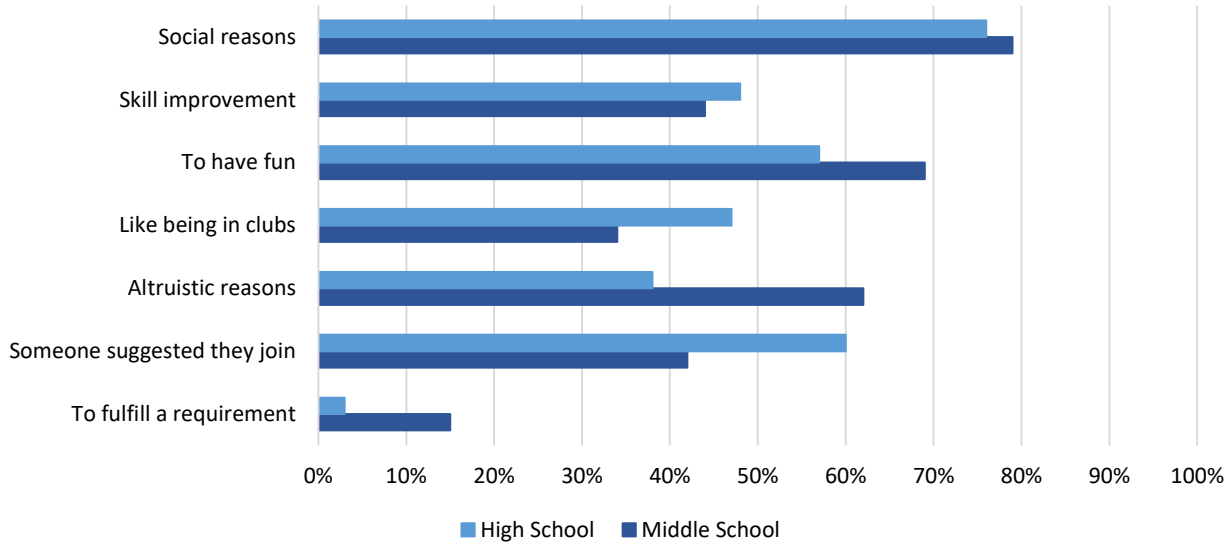


Figure 9. Student motivations to join Unified Club in Year 10



Beyond social factors and altruistic motivations, middle and high school students also joined the UCS program to have fun and develop their sports or leadership skills, albeit to differing degrees. While middle school students joined more often to have fun than high school students (63% and 43%, respectively), high school students joined more often to improve their skills (either athletic or leadership) than middle school students (66% and 55%, respectively). This difference in motivations can be explained, in part, by the fact that all the high schools surveyed in Year 10 had Unified Sports teams following the Competitive model, while only one of the eight middle schools had a Competitive Unified Sports team.[52] The model of Unified Sports teams that schools implement likely influences students' motivations for joining Unified Sports, with more competitive teams attracting students who see it as an opportunity for skill building.

Although most students join the UCS program based on their own interests or goals, some become involved as a result of external factors, such as a teacher or peer suggesting they should participate. Interestingly, twice as many middle school students as high school students reported this as one of their reasons for joining Unified Sports/PE (28% vs. 14%, respectively). For Unified Club, rates of joining because of a suggestion from a teacher or peer were two to three times higher (60% high school, 42% middle school) than for Unified Sports/PE. Since this strategy of recruitment is used intentionally by teachers (see Section V.A.3), it is encouraging to see that it works.

Summary

In examining student participation in the UCS program in Year 10, there was overall consistency with past evaluation findings in this area. Whole School Engagement activities continued to have the highest participation rates across schools, and students continued to report joining activities like Unified

[52]This sample represents the overall pattern in the *Unified Champion Schools Liaison Survey* implementation data (see Section IV). More high schools used the Competitive model than middle schools (58% vs. 38%, respectively).

Sports/PE and Unified Club for social reasons. New findings in Year 10 centered on the intensity of student participation, especially over time. Importantly, students who get involved in the UCS program usually maintain their involvement over time, with those who reported participating in the UCS program the previous school year almost universally reporting that they participated in Year 10 as well. Moreover, the data revealed a tendency for students to get more involved the longer they stay involved.

The most notable characteristic about students who join the UCS program is their capacity for empathy and compassion. Results from the Year 10 evaluation suggest that there is a positive relationship between students with the highest levels of empathy/compassion and intense involvement in the UCS program. Students who join the UCS program also have higher levels of grit/perseverance, which is seen in their better academic performance (compared to students who choose not to participate). Students who choose to participate in the UCS program also feel more supported at school by both their peers and their teachers. As interviews with participating students have revealed, this comes, in part, from the friends they make through the UCS program. Overall, understanding the types of students that are drawn to the UCS program helps inform strategies for recruiting new students to the program, as well as areas in which the program can evolve to better serve a more diverse group of participants and the wider school community.

2. Impact on Friendship

Social support, and friendship in particular, is necessary for all people, perhaps especially for people with ID.[53,54,55] With social inclusion as a key goal of the UCS program, and interpersonal relationships as integral to realizing social inclusion, a primary focus of the evaluation for the past several years has been the development of friendships between participants with and without ID. One of the most consistently cited personal benefits of participation in the UCS program is the development of friendships. Both survey and interview data have shown how the UCS program provides opportunities for students with and without ID to work together and, over time, helps to facilitate and sustain friendships. Beyond continuing to document the link between participation in the UCS program and friendship development, the Year 10 evaluation used data from the *Student Experience Survey* and interviews with high school students and staff to examine the context and nature of friendships among students with and without ID who participated in the UCS program.

Participation in the UCS Program and Social Interaction

As previous evaluations have demonstrated, social interaction between students with and without is the driving factor in changing students' perceptions of and attitudes towards inclusion, demonstrating that increasing the visibility of and social interactions between students with and without ID is at the core of how the UCS program positively impacts schools and students. In Year 10, visibility and social interaction were measured using the *Student Social Interactions Scale* and the *Perceptions of School Social Inclusion*

[53] Baumeister & Leary, 1995

[54] Cummins, R. A. & Lau, A. L. (2003). Community integration or community exposure? A review and discussion in relation to people with an intellectual disability. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, 16*(2), 145-157.

[55] Parker, J. G. & Asher, S. R. (1993). Friendship and friendship quality in middle childhood: links with peer group acceptance and feelings of loneliness and social dissatisfaction. *Developmental Psychology, 29*(4), 611-621.

Scale, consistent with prior evaluations. See Appendix C for more information about these scales. Results revealed that the more involved students were in the UCS program, the more contexts in which they saw and interacted with students with ID (e.g., in the hallways, in the cafeteria; see Table 16 for more information).

Table 16. Social Interaction by Participation in Unified Champion Schools activities

Participation Level	Middle School M (SD)	High School M (SD)
Intense participation	3.5 (2.0)	3.7 (2.2)
Moderate participation	2.2 (1.7)	2.5 (2.0)
No participation	1.7 (1.8)	1.2 (1.6)

Promoting Friendships

Similar to previous years, in Year 10, 41% of middle school students and 35% of high school students who participated in the UCS program reported becoming friends with a student with ID through the program. The evaluation has also consistently demonstrated that bringing students together in normative school contexts—especially in settings that promote collaboration and teamwork—facilitates the development of friendships between students with and without ID through increased opportunities for social interaction. Therefore, it was encouraging to find in Year 10 that friendships were more likely to develop when students were consistently involved in the UCS program and in multiple activities. For example, students who participated more intensely in the UCS program in Year 10 (i.e., participated in two or more activities, including Unified Sports or Unified Club) reported becoming friends with a student with ID more often than students who participated moderately, at both the middle and high school levels.[56] Findings also indicated that students who participated in the UCS program (at any level) in both Year 9 and Year 10 (i.e., for two consecutive years) reported making friends with a student with ID more often than students who participated only in Year 10 (i.e., for one year).[57]

As in past years, interviews conducted with school staff and students in Year 10 showed the same pattern of friendship development seen in the survey data. Two-thirds (65%) of high school students stated that the strong relationships they developed with their peers with ID was one of the best parts of participating in the UCS program. The program's role in fostering relationships is obvious to staff as well, with more than half (57%) making explicit mention in their interviews of the impact of the UCS program on friendship development. Students with ID reiterated this impact in their responses—the majority of students with ID (53%) named a peer without ID from the UCS program as a friend. By taking advantage of the opportunities the UCS program offers them, students without ID have the chance to build friendships with their peers with ID.

[56] Intense participants were more likely to report friendships than moderate participants: Middle School: X^2 (1, N = 1488) = 114.605, $p < .001$ and High School: X^2 (1, N = 482) = 11.369, $p < .001$

[57] Returning participants were more likely to report friendships in Middle School: X^2 (1, N = 1488) = 17.58, $p < .001$ and High School: X^2 (1, N = 488) = 10.894, $p = .001$

In this way, the nature and structure of the UCS program seems to provide a space, or a "social opportunity," as one school staff member described it during an interview, for students with and without ID to interact and develop friendships. Staff viewed this "social opportunity" as particularly salient for students who "wouldn't normally have directly had a personal relationship with the students that have intellectual disabilities." The nature of the UCS activities themselves, particularly Unified Sports and Unified Club, facilitates the formation of cross-disability friendships. In Unified Club, for example, students with and without ID unite over common interests, a key component of adolescent friendship.[58] As one student without ID reflected about his friendship with a student with ID in Unified Club, "We…just bonded over being outdoors guys and whatnot...it was just a ton of fun." Similarly, the structure of Unified Sports requires students with and without ID to work together to achieve a goal, which likely fosters friendships among team members. One student without ID put it simply: "Being paired up with the [students with ID] …we just form this bond." While in Year 9 there appeared to be a helper-helpee dynamic between students with and without ID in UCS activities at the middle school level, many of the interviews at the high school level in Year 10 portrayed relationships that resembled typical adolescent friendships. One staff member described the type of relationship she observed between students with and without ID as one where students "can hang out together…can be silly together…can do fun things together." Similarly, one student without ID, when talking about his relationships with peers with ID, noted, "[The] students I hang out with have become some of my really good friends…I really like spending time with them."

Intensity of Friendships

Defining friendship can be challenging, as people often apply the label of "friend" to a wide-ranging group of people, from new acquaintances to life-long confidants. Deeming someone a "friend" is an individual decision, influenced by factors such as proximity, time spent together and shared experiences, mutual interests and shared values, and one's age.[59] In the transition from childhood to adolescence, these factors start to shift in importance and influence. While there are overall differences in the qualities that children and adolescents value in their friendships,[60,61] there seems to be a less distinct separation in the features that middle school students and older adolescents prioritize. Across early and late adolescence, young people rank trust, support, and intimacy as the most important qualities in a friendship. By assessing the characteristics of friendships developed through participation in the UCS program, the annual evaluation aims to provide a more complete understanding of these relationships, including how meaningful these connections are and whether they resemble typical friendships among adolescents without ID.

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[58] Berndt, T. J. & McCandless, M. A. (2008). Methods for investigating children's relationships with friends. In K. H. Rubin, W. M. Bukowski, & B. Laursen (Eds.), *Handbook of peer interactions, relationships, and groups* (pp. 63-81). New York: Guilford Publications, Inc.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Berndt, T. J. (1986). Children's comments about their friendships. In M. Perlmutter (Ed.), *Cognitive perspectives on children's social and behavioral development. The Minnesota Symposia on Child Psychology* (Vol. 18, pp. 189– 211). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

[61] Clark, M. L. & Bittle, M. L. (1992). Friendship expectations and the evaluation of present friendships in middle childhood and early adolescence. *Child Study Journal, 22*, 115– 135.

In building on previous evaluations that examined peer relationships promoted through the UCS program, the Year 10 evaluation considered the intensity of cross-disability friendships at the middle and high school levels. Rather than continuing to examine the qualities that students without ID reported were present in their friendships with peers with ID, each relationship was categorized as either a "high intensity friendship" or a "low intensity friendship." Mean scores from the *Friendship Scale* were used to determine which students had higher intensity friendships and which had lower intensity friendships with peers with ID, simultaneously taking into account the characteristics of the relationship and the strength of each characteristic[62] (see Appendix C for more information on the scale). The high and low intensity labels serve to further distinguish between surface-level friendships and deeper connections between participants with and without ID. As such, friendships higher in intensity represent the reciprocal, voluntary companionship found in typical adolescent friendships, which is what the UCS program intends to promote.

The Year 10 evaluation confirmed previous research showing that both middle and high school students characterize their friendships in similar ways. Both age groups primarily defined their friendships in terms of helpfulness (e.g., "I would help this person as best I can"; 81% for middle school; 84% for high school) and companionship (e.g., "I enjoy the time I spend with this person"; 62% for middle school; 70% for high school). Continuing the trend of similarity in friendships developed at the middle and high school levels, the Year 10 evaluation also found that the rate of high intensity and low intensity friendships did not differ between middle and high school students.[63] That is, the intensity of friendships developed at the middle and high school levels were equivalent—high school students were no more or less likely to have a high intensity friendship with a peer with ID than middle school students (and the same goes for low intensity friendships). This finding suggests that friendships between students with and without ID that are developed through the UCS program have similar qualities and depth from early to late adolescence.

Previous evaluations have consistently demonstrated that social interaction is key in the development of friendships between students with and without ID. All three components of the UCS program are designed to provide students with opportunities to meet, interact, and participate in activities together. As such, it is encouraging to see a trend in Year 10 that the intensity of friendships is related to level of involvement in the program, with students who intensely participated reporting more intense friendships with their peers with ID compared to students who participated moderately.[64] Taken together with the finding that students who participate intensely are more likely to become friends with a peer with ID, these results suggest that by intensely participating, students are not only more likely to develop friendships, but the friendships they do form are likely to have higher levels of mutual support and companionship than the friendships among students who only participate moderately. Clearly, the more opportunities students have to interact with their peers with ID, especially in settings that promote collaboration and teamwork, the more meaningful friendships are formed.

[62] Students with "high intensity" friendships had a mean score ≥ 3, while students with "low intensity" friendships had a mean score < 3.
[63] In middle school, 61% of friendship were high intensity. In high school, 61% of friendships were high intensity.
[64] t (535) = -1.987, $p < .05$

Summary

In Year 10, the evaluation confirmed the findings from previous evaluations and examined friendship in a new, more complex manner. Consistent with the Year 8 and Year 9 evaluations, regardless of school level, being involved in the UCS program (especially more heavily involved) led to students without ID seeing and interacting with their peers with ID more often. Both interview and survey data confirmed previous evaluation results showing that the UCS program is a strong mechanism for cross-disability friendship development. Indeed, returning UCS participants and students who participated intensely in Year 10 were both more likely to make friends with students with ID.

As part of the Year 10 evaluation, friendships stemming from the UCS program were examined through the lens of intensity. By considering the intensity of friendships between students with and without ID, the evaluation findings now reflect the quality of social connections that the UCS program fosters at all levels. It is encouraging to find that both middle and high school students were equally likely to develop intense connections with their peers with ID through participation in the UCS program. Moreover, intense participation in the UCS program appears to influence how meaningful these friendships become, with greater UCS involvement being associated with more intense friendships. Moving forward, it will be important to explore additional student characteristics that impact cross-disability friendship development and the intensity of these relationships. The more information that can be collected about factors influencing students' friendships, the more apt the UCS program can be at fostering social inclusion.

3. Impact on Students' Perceptions and Attitudes

Beginning in Year 7, the annual evaluation of the UCS program has examined the impact of UCS participation on the perceptions and attitudes of the student body within and across schools. Through statistical analyses like SEM, the findings have consistently shown that participation in the UCS program leads to students without ID having more positive perceptions of and attitudes towards inclusion in their schools by increasing the number of opportunities they have to socially interact with their peers with ID across a variety of school settings and contexts. Importantly, such findings have been documented at both the middle and high school levels, demonstrating that UCS participation has a similar impact throughout adolescence. The Year 10 evaluation continued to examine how students view inclusion, expanding on what is known about students' personal characteristics, and again using SEM to analyze how participation in the UCS program impacts students' perceptions of and attitudes towards inclusion. Peer and teacher support at school, grit/perseverance, and academic achievement were measured for the first time in Year 10 (see Appendix C), along with empathy/compassion, which has been measured in the past. With additional data on student characteristics, the Year 10 evaluation aimed to deepen the understanding of how school and student factors intersect to shape how students view their schools' climate and how they feel about inclusion.

Before investigating the relationship between the newly-measured student characteristics and students' perceptions and attitudes, it is important to understand the context surrounding these personal characteristics, or what the overall student sample looked like in terms of these qualities. Middle and

high school students had similar distributions of all the characteristics measured (i.e., peer and teacher support at school, grit/perseverance, academic achievement, and empathy/compassion). The vast majority of the students surveyed felt well-supported by their peers and teachers. There was no significant difference found between the items related to peer support and the items related to adult support, suggesting that students at both school levels feel just as supported by their peers as by the adults in their school. Most students also had a moderate to high degree of grit, meaning that they reported "often" or "always" working hard or staying dedicated to a goal during the past school year. These higher levels of grit reflect the academic performance that was also measured, with the majority of students surveyed reporting getting good grades (either "mostly As" or "about half As and half Bs"). Of note, students who chose to participate in the UCS program tended to feel more socially supported, have more grit, receive better grades, and be more empathetic/compassionate than students who chose not to be involved.[65]

Over the past several years, the evaluation has repeatedly shown the impact of UCS participation on students' perceptions of and attitudes towards inclusion at the high school level. In Year 9 the evaluation expanded its scope to show how participating in the UCS program improved middle school students' attitudes toward and perceptions of inclusion and their peers with ID. As in past years, the Year 10 evaluation used SEM[66] to examine the impact of participation on these outcomes. SEM accounts for both the direct and indirect effects of participation in the UCS program. A *direct* effect indicates that participation in the UCS program leads directly to positive perceptions or attitudes. An *indirect* effect indicates that participation in the UCS program leads to positive perceptions or attitudes through the effects of other aspects of participation, namely how often students socially interact with their peers with ID. That is, students come to view their school as a more inclusive place or develop a more positive attitude toward inclusion after socializing more with peers with ID as a result of participating in UCS activities. For example, Unified Club members will, by nature of the activity, socially interact with students with ID more frequently than non-participants. Thus, these students without ID develop more positive attitudes toward inclusion not simply by joining the club, but through the increase in interactions with their peers with ID while participating in the club. Both types of effects, direct and indirect, are equally valuable in understanding the varying levels at which the UCS program has an impact on participating students without ID. Because the Year 9 evaluation was the first year to focus specifically on middle school students, the Year 10 evaluation continued the emphasis on the middle school level to provide a second year of data for this specific population of participants.

[65] Independent samples t-tests were used to determine the significance of these findings: grades $t(2340) = -4.92$, $p < .001$, social support $t(2318) = -5.37$, $p < .001$, grit $t(2313) = -5.76$, $p < .001$, empathy $t(1481) = -6.09$, $p < .001$, and compassion $t(793) = -6.69$, $p < .001$

[66] Structural equation modeling (SEM) is an advanced statistical technique that involved the simultaneous estimation of a complete conceptual path model, explicitly testing both direct and indirect effects. See: Schumacker, R. E. & Lomax, R. G. (2004). *A beginner's guide to structural equation modeling* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.

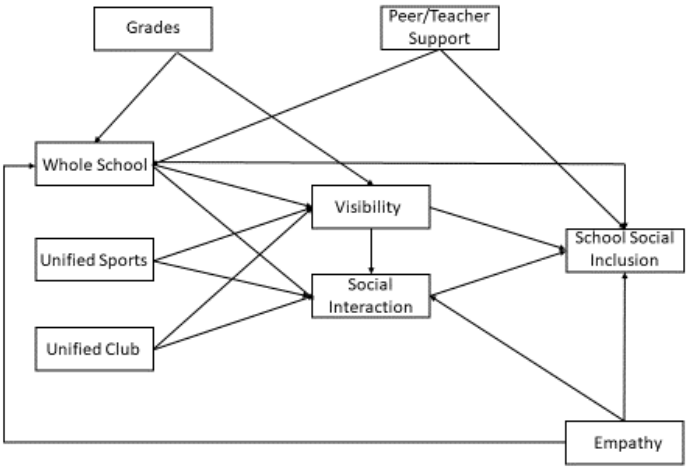
Perceptions of Inclusive School Climate

In order to connect the annual evaluation of the UCS program to other UCS research and evaluation projects happening at SO, the Year 10 evaluation replaced the *Perceptions of School Social Inclusion* scale used in previous evaluations with the *Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) Social Inclusion Scale* (See Appendix C).[67] This change helped to unify the evaluation work across multiple projects and organizations, forming a foundational set of measures that SO can use to systematically assess the impact of the UCS program on schools and students.

Participation Predicting Perceptions of Inclusive School Climate

Similar to Year 9, participation in the UCS program directly and indirectly impacted the extent to which middle school students perceived their school's climate as inclusive. Through participating in any of the three core experiences of the UCS program (Unified Sports, Unified Club, and Whole School Engagement), students talked to their peers with ID more often than students who did not participate in the UCS program, and that increase in social interaction led students to have more positive perceptions of their school's inclusive climate. As more students have the opportunity to participate in schoolwide activities and events compared to sports teams and clubs, it was encouraging to find that participation in Whole School Engagement activities also had a direct effect on students' perceptions,[68] meaning that simply being involved in a Whole School Engagement activity led students to view their school as more socially inclusive. This means, for example, that after being part of the Spread the Word to End the Word campaign, students come to see their school as a more inclusive place for students with ID. Of note, and consistent with previous evaluations, participation in the UCS program also had similar positive effects on high school students' perceptions of social inclusion at their schools. See Figure 10 for more information on the pathways from participation to positive perceptions of an inclusive school climate for middle school students.

Figure 10. Middle School SEM Predicting Perceptions of Inclusive School Climate



Note: All shown pathways were positive and significant. Gender and grade level (not shown here) were included in the analysis.

[67] Thapa, A. (2015). *Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) Social Inclusion Scale v. 2.0.* National School Climate Center, New York, NY.

[68] Direct effect of WSA, $B = .87$, $p < .001$.

Student Characteristics Predicting Perceptions of Inclusive School Climate

After confirming what previous evaluations have shown regarding the impact of participation in the UCS program on students' perceptions, the evaluation examined the roles of the new student characteristics measured in Year 10. Findings revealed that empathy, peer and teacher support, and academic grades all impact the degree to which middle school students perceive their school's climate as inclusive. Empathy had both a direct and indirect effect on students' perceptions.[69] More empathetic students felt that their school's climate was more inclusive, but more empathetic students also socialized with their peers with ID more, which, in turn, led them to have more positive perceptions of their school's inclusive climate. The level of support students felt from their peers and teachers also directly impacted how inclusive students found their school.[70] Academic grades had an indirect effect on students' perceptions of their school's inclusive climate,[71] such that students with better grades saw peers with ID more often and, subsequently, interacted with them more. Through this increased visibility and social interaction, these students had more positive perceptions of their school as a socially inclusive environment. See Figure 10 for more information on the pathways from personal characteristics to positive perceptions of an inclusive school climate.

Attitudes toward Classroom Inclusion

As in prior years, students' attitudes toward inclusion in the school were measured using the *Attitudes toward Classroom Inclusion Scale* (for more details about the scales used, see Appendix C). In Year 10, the evaluation replicated the findings from Year 9, confirming that participation in the UCS program positively impacts middle school students' attitudes toward inclusion. Similar to perceptions of school social inclusion, the evaluation first examined the impact of participation in the UCS program, and then student characteristics, on students' attitudes toward inclusion.

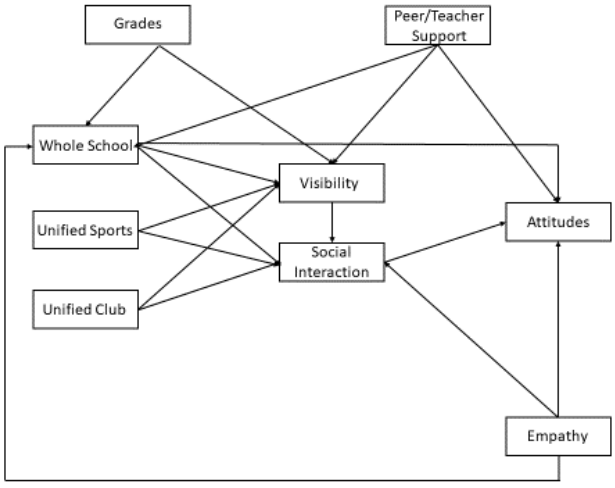
Participation Predicting Attitudes toward Classroom Inclusion

Confirming findings from Year 9, participation in Unified Sports, Unified Club, and Whole School Engagement activities had indirect effects on middle school students' attitudes toward classroom inclusion.[72] Students who participated in any of the core experiences of the UCS program saw and interacted more with peers with ID than non-participants. This increased social interaction, in turn, positively impacted their attitudes toward inclusion. Whole School Engagement activities also had a direct effect on attitudes,[73] meaning that simply being involved in a Whole School Engagement activity led students to have more positive attitudes about including students with ID in the classroom. At the high school level, similar direct and indirect effects were observed.[74] Overall, the Year 10 evaluation

[69] Direct effect of empathy, $B = .10$, $p < .001$; indirect effect of empathy, $B = .02$, $p < .01$
[70] Direct effect of peer/teacher support, $B = .30$, $p < .001$
[71] Indirect effect of academic grades, $B = .02$, $p < .01$
[72] Indirect effect on attitudes, via both visibility and interactions: WSA, $B = .13$, $p < .01$; Unified Sports, $B = .12$, $p < .01$; Unified Club, $B = .17$, $p < .01$
[73] Direct effect of WSA, $B = .94$, $p < .001$
[74] Direct effect of WSA: $B = 1.51$, $p < .001$; indirect, mediated by social interactions, WSA, $B = .52$, $p < .01$; indirect, mediated by both visibility and interactions, $B = .17$, $p < .01$. Indirect effect, mediated by interactions: Unified Sports, .70, $p < .01$. Indirect effect, mediated by both visibility and interactions: Unified Club, $B = .16$, $p < .01$.

replicated previous evaluation findings demonstrating that being involved with any aspect of the UCS program provides both middle and high school students with more opportunities to get to know their peers with ID and, through this increase in social interaction, causes them to develop more positive attitudes toward inclusion.

Figure 11. Middle School SEM Predicting Attitudes towards Classroom Inclusion



Note: All shown pathways were positive and significant. Gender and grade level (not shown here) were included in the analysis.

Student Characteristics Predicting Attitudes toward Classroom Inclusion

After confirming what previous evaluations have shown regarding the impact of participation in the UCS program on students' attitudes, the evaluation examined the roles of the new student characteristics measured in Year 10. Findings revealed that empathy, peer and teacher support, and academic achievement all impact how positive middle school students are about including students with ID in the classroom. Empathy had both a direct and indirect effect on students' attitudes,[75] meaning that more empathetic students had more positive attitudes about inclusion, but also that more empathetic students socialized with their peers with ID more, which, in turn, led them to have more positive attitudes. The degree to which students felt supported by their peers and teachers also directly impacted students' positive attitudes toward classroom inclusion, as students who felt more supported at school had more positive attitudes about their peers with ID being included in class.[76] . Academic grades also had an indirect effect on students' perceptions of their school's inclusive climate,[77] such that students with better grades saw peers with ID more, interacted with them more, and through this increase in visibility and social interaction, had more positive attitudes about classroom inclusion. Of note, the analyses included students' demographic characteristics (e.g., grade level, gender), and, as seen in previous years, students in higher grades reported seeing students with ID more often than those in lower grades, and female students had more positive attitudes than male students. Similar

[75] Direct effect of empathy, $B = .25$, $p < .001$; indirect effect of empathy, $B = .03$, $p < .01$.
[76] Direct effect of peer/teacher support, $B = .09$, $p < .05$.
[77] Indirect effect of grades, $B = .04$, $p < .01$.

findings were observed in high school students.[78] See Figure 11 for more information on the pathways from personal characteristics to positive attitudes toward classroom inclusion.

Summary

Continuing to confirm the findings of prior evaluations, the UCS program clearly has a demonstrated impact, both directly and indirectly, on students' perceptions of and attitudes towards inclusion in their school. The Year 10 evaluation documented this for both middle and high school students, suggesting that the UCS program has a reliable effect on how students view their school climate and their perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion throughout adolescence.

The Year 10 evaluation expanded on what was previously known about participation in the UCS program by looking into the impact of students' personal characteristics on their perceptions of and attitudes toward inclusion, and on participation itself. The unique combination of student characteristics examined in Year 10 demonstrated how empathy, peer and teacher support, and academic grades play a role in students' participation in the UCS program, perceptions of inclusive school climate, and attitudes toward classroom inclusion. Learning more about how personal characteristics influence these outcomes helps strengthen what is known about why and how the UCS program impacts adolescents.

4. Impact on Students' Social and Emotional Learning

Over the past decade, findings from the annual evaluations have consistently documented that, on an individual level, students who participate in the UCS program gain or enhance skills in the areas of Identity Experiences (e.g., self-awareness and self-management), Initiative Experiences (e.g., problem-solving), Interpersonal Relationships (e.g., forming diverse friendships), and Teamwork and Social Skills (e.g., relationship-building and perspective-taking).[79] These areas directly align with five social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies identified by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a leading organization in the SEL field.[80,81] See Figure 12 for CASEL's SEL framework. These five competencies are:

- Self-awareness: the ability to recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior
- Self-management: the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively
- Social awareness: the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from different backgrounds
- Relationship skills: the ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships with diverse individuals
- Responsible decision-making: the ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions

[78] Direct effect on attitudes: WSA, $B = 1.51$, $p < .001$; grades, $B = -.28$, $p < .01$; peer/teacher support, $B = .13$, $p < .05$; compassion, $B = .42$, $p < .001$. Indirect effect on attitudes: compassion, $B = .05$, $p < .01$.
[79] Center for Social Development and Education, 2017
[80] www.casel.org
[81] Ibid.

Previous annual evaluations have provided preliminary evidence that the UCS program facilitates SEL for middle and high school students. For example, two of the core activities of the UCS program, Unified Sports and Unified Club, promote cooperation and teamwork by encouraging students to practice group decision-making, social skills, and self-management techniques. These positive developmental outcomes suggest that the UCS program goes beyond fostering a socially inclusive school environment and provides a pathway for improved social and emotional competencies ("SE competencies") among participants.

Figure 12. CASEL SEL Framework

Building on previous evaluations, the Year 10 evaluation sought to more directly measure the SE competencies students gain or develop through their participation in the UCS program. The goal of more intentional measurement of the UCS program's impact on students learning or enhancing SE competencies is to begin to document the evidence-based impact that the UCS program has on SEL and to explore the potential of the UCS program being an experiential learning component of classroom-based SEL instruction. Given the growing recognition of the value of SE competencies for success in the classroom and other school settings,[82] the UCS program may not only be a facilitator of SEL but could also play a unique role in the SEL field by providing opportunities for students to learn SE competencies in normative extracurricular activities like sports, clubs, and schoolwide assemblies/events. These activities represent a natural portal to integrate SEL throughout the school community by utilizing the reach that the UCS program already has within a school.

To more directly measure the impact of the UCS program on students' social and emotional development, the Year 10 evaluation collected data from three sources: middle and high school students without ID participating in the UCS program who responded to a survey at the end of the school year, high school students and staff in UCS schools that participated in site visits and interviews

[82] Jones, S. M. & Bouffard, S. M. (2012). Social and emotional learning in schools: From programs to strategies. *Sharing Child and Youth Development Knowledge, 26*(4), 1-33.

at the end of the year, and Unified Sports coaches and Unified Club advisors who responded to a survey at the end of the year. As the annual evaluation shifts its focus to documenting the UCS program's impact beyond changing attitudes and perceptions, a multi-source, multi-method approach can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of UCS programming in promoting SEL.

Student Perspectives on SEL within the UCS Program

To measure the SE competencies that students gained or enhanced through participation in the UCS program, new measures were introduced in Year 10. An adapted version of the Washoe County School District's *Social and Emotional Competency Survey* was used to assess the impact of the UCS program on students' SE competencies (see Appendix C for more details on this measure). Additionally, as described earlier (see Section V.B.1), the Year 10 evaluation expanded student characteristics to include not only empathy/compassion but also peer and teacher support, grit, and academic grades. Past evaluations have consistently documented that higher levels of empathy/compassion are associated with higher levels of personal growth that students attributed to their participation in the UCS program. Measuring additional student characteristics provides a more comprehensive understanding of how the personal characteristics of UCS participants play a role in their personal growth as a result of participation in the program.

It is important to point out that the following analyses focus only on students who participated in the UCS program (i.e., participated in at least one UCS activity). This is because the *Social and Emotional Competency Survey* measured the impact on students' SE competencies as a result of participating in the UCS program, so only participants were asked those questions. The selectiveness of the sample is also noteworthy because past evaluation findings have documented that students who choose to participate in UCS activities are different from the general student body in a school (e.g., are more empathetic). Therefore, the findings focus on differences among UCS participants (rather than differences between participants and non-participants) and cannot be generalized to the entire student population in middle and high schools.

Participation Level and Core UCS Experiences

While the UCS program offers opportunities for all participants to practice SE competencies, the Year 10 evaluation found that the degree to which students learn or enhance these competencies is contingent upon their level of participation. Students' scores on the *Washoe County SEL Scale* were compared by participation level (i.e., moderate or intense participation). Middle school students who intensely participated had higher scores than students who moderately participated.[83] For example, students who were involved in both Unified Club and Spread the Word to End the Word reported greater development of their relationship skills (e.g., communication, teamwork) and social awareness (e.g., perspective-taking, respect for others) than students who participated only in Spread the Word to End the Word. This pattern was also seen among high school students.[84] Thus, regardless of age or school

[83] An independent samples t-test was used to determine the significance of the findings: $t(827) = -3.830$, $p < .001$
[84] An independent samples t-test was used to determine the significance of the findings: $t(426) = -2.805$, $p < .01$

level, the more intensely students were involved in the UCS program, the more they reported gaining or enhancing SE competencies. See Table 17 for more information.

Table 17. SEL Domains by Participation Level

SEL Domain	Middle School		High School	
	Moderate Participation	Intense Participation	Moderate Participation	Intense Participation
Social Awareness	11.9 (3.5)	12.7 (3.3)	12.1 (3.5)	13.1 (4.0)
Relationship Skills	20.5 (5.7)	21.6 (5.8)	20.9 (5.9)	22.6 (6.6)

Pathways to SE Competencies

For a more comprehensive understanding of how the UCS program affects students' SE competencies, the Year 10 evaluation used SEM[85] to examine the impact of participation in each of the core UCS experiences on students' social and emotional development and to investigate the pathways for these effects. SEM allowed for an examination of all associations simultaneously, including the impacts of UCS program participation on visibility of students with ID, social interactions with students with ID, and SEL. This provided an opportunity to examine both direct and indirect effects of participation on SEL, along with the role of student characteristics. A *direct* pathway would indicate that participation in one of the core experiences of the UCS program leads directly to social and emotional development. An *indirect* pathway would indicate that participation in one of the core experiences leads to social and emotional development via its impact on visibility of students with ID in school or social interactions with students with ID in school. It is important to note that a direct pathway is not in any way "better" than an indirect pathway; an indirect pathway merely specifies the *mechanism* for a particular effect. Both types of pathways, direct and indirect, are important in understanding the ways in which participation in the UCS program impacts students' social and emotional development.

As a first step in examining social and emotional development as an outcome of participation in the UCS program, similar models were analyzed separately for 829 participating middle school students and 428 participating high school students. The middle school model is presented first, in keeping with the recent focus on middle school students as part of the annual evaluation.[86] After examining the impact of participation and the role of student characteristics on SEL at the middle school level, findings from the high school model will be discussed. Having models that investigate these impacts across school levels provides a developmental perspective, revealing not only how the UCS program impacts students' SEL, but also what this impact looks like as students progress from middle to high school. As noted previously, the following models focus only on students who participated in the UCS program in Year 10.

[85] Structural equation modeling (SEM) is an advanced statistical technique that involved the simultaneous estimation of a complete conceptual path model, explicitly testing both direct and indirect effects. See: Schumacker, R. E. & Lomax, R. G. (2004). *A beginner's guide to structural equation modeling* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.
[86] Center for Social Development and Education, 2017

Middle School Students' SEL. At the middle school level, Unified Sports and Unified Club participation indirectly impacted students' social and emotional development (e.g., being more patient, having more problem-solving skills, respecting others). By being involved in those activities, students without ID had more opportunities to see and socially interact with their peers with ID which, in turn, led to them gaining or enhancing SE competencies in the domains of social awareness and relationship skills.[87] Interestingly, there was no direct or indirect effect of Whole School Engagement on SEL, meaning that participation in Whole School Engagement activities did not impact middle school students' social and emotional development in the domains of social awareness and relationship skills. With most Whole School Engagement activities taking place over the course of a few days once a year (as opposed to the ongoing meetings or practices of Unified Sports and Unified Club) it is perhaps not surprising to find no impact on SE competencies in the domains of social awareness and relationship skills through participation in Whole School Engagement activities. See Figure 13 for more information on the pathways from UCS participation to SEL.

In addition to UCS participation, the model also accounted for the same student characteristics that were added to the previous models for attitudes and perceptions (see Section V.B.3). The inclusion of these personal characteristics in examining SEL as an outcome of UCS participation provides continuity with the other outcomes examined in Year 10 and allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence the impact on students. As expected, empathy, grit, peer and teacher support, and academic grades were all related to middle school students reporting that they improved their SE competencies. Empathy and grit both directly impacted students' SEL,[88] although this finding is unsurprising because empathy and grit were added to the Year 10 evaluation with the understanding that these characteristics are often regarded as SE competencies themselves.[89] Empathy also indirectly impacted students' SEL through its impact on increased social interaction with peers with ID.[90] That is, irrespective of the nature of their participation in the UCS program, students who were more empathetic interacted with peers with ID more often, and this increase in social interaction, in turn, was positively related to their social and emotional development. Along with empathy and grit, peer and teacher support also had a direct effect on SEL.[91] Students who felt more supported by peers and teachers at school reported gains in SE competencies, as other research has also shown.[92] Lastly, academic grades had an indirect effect on students' SEL, through their impact on visibility and social interactions with peers with ID,[93] which, in turn, was related to enhanced social and emotional development. See Figure 13 for more information on the pathways from personal characteristics to SEL.

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[87] Indirect effects, mediated by social interactions: Unified Sports participation, $B = .51$, $p < .01$; Unified Club participation, $B = .54$, $p < .01$. Indirect effects, mediated by both visibility and Interactions: Unified Sports participation, $B = .20$, $p < .01$; Unified Club participation, $B = .19$, $p < .01$.

[88] Direct effect of empathy, $B = .39$, $p < .001$; direct effect of grit, $B = .23$, $p < .001$.

[89] www.casel.org

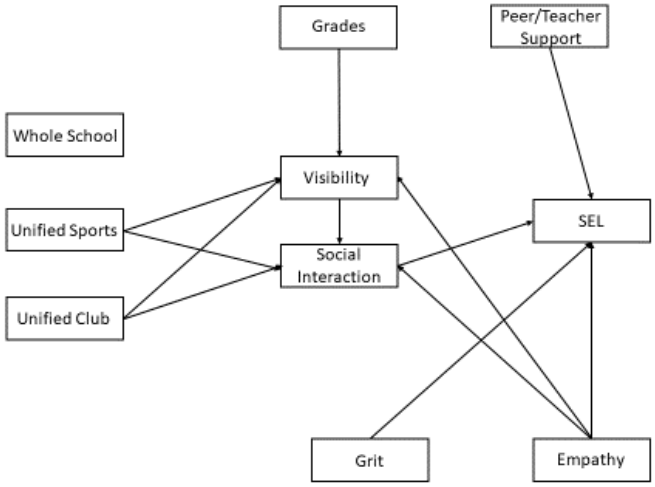
[90] Indirect effect of empathy, $B = .05$, $p < .01$.

[91] Direct effect of peer/teacher support, $B = .22$, $p < .05$.

[92] Ogurlu, Ü., Sevgi-Yalın, H., & Yavuz-Birben, F. (2016). The relationship between social-emotional learning ability and perceived social support in students. *Gifted Education International, 34*(1), 76-95.

[93] Indirect effect of academic grades, $B = .07$, $p < .001$.

Figure 13. Middle School SEM Predicting SEL from UCS Participation



Note: All shown pathways were positive and significant. Gender and grade level (not shown here) were included in the analysis.

Importantly, even when the effects of these additional characteristics were accounted for, the positive effects of UCS participation on students' SEL remained significant, thus corroborating what past evaluations have consistently documented—that by providing meaningful opportunities for students with and without ID to come together in inclusive settings, students without ID not only see and interact with their peers with ID more often and more consistently, but this increased visibility and social interaction is the mechanism for driving positive changes in participating students.

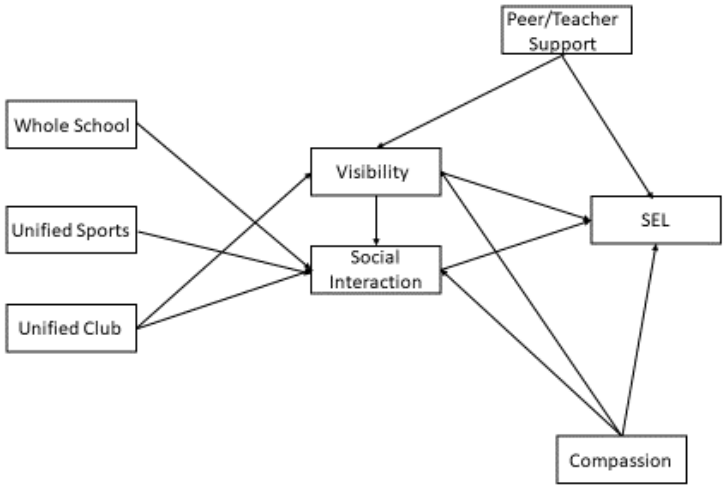
High School Students' SEL. The findings were largely similar at the high school level. For high school participants, both Unified Sports and Unified Club had an indirect effect on students' social and emotional development through increased social interactions with peers with ID.[94] High school students' participation in Whole School Engagement activities also had an indirect impact on their SE competencies through increased social interaction with peers with ID. Taken together, these findings suggest that high school students who participated in any one of the core experiences of the UCS program socialized more with their peers with ID, which, in turn, significantly and positively impacted their social and emotional development. See Figure 14 for more information on the pathways from UCS participation to SEL.

The high school-level analyses also accounted for the personal characteristics of compassion grit, peer and teacher support, and academic grades. Similar to middle school, compassion and peer and teacher support both had a direct effect on students' SEL,[95] such that more compassionate students and students who felt more supported at school reported greater improvement in their SE competencies. Compassion also indirectly impacted students' SEL through both increased visibility of peers with ID and increased social interaction with peers with ID.[96] Interestingly, and different from the middle school

[94] Indirect effects: Unified Sports participation, $B = 1.68$, $p < .01$; Unified Club participation, $B = .91$, $p < .05$
[95] Direct effects: compassion, $B = .55$, $p < .001$; parent/teacher support, $B = .36$, $p < .05$
[96] Indirect effect of compassion, mediated by social interactions, $B = .13$, $p < .01$; mediated by both visibility and social interactions, $B = .04$, $p < .01$.

level, neither grit nor academic grades were related to students' social and emotional development in high school. See Figure 14 for more information on the pathways from personal characteristics to SEL.

Figure 14. High School SEM Predicting SEL from UCS Participation



Note: All shown pathways were positive and significant. Grit, academic grades, gender and grade level (not shown here) were included in the analysis.

Importantly, and as with middle school students, even when accounting for the effects of these additional personal characteristics, the positive effects of UCS participation on students' SEL remained significant, thus indicating that across school and age levels, the UCS program provides meaningful opportunities for students with and without ID to come together in inclusive settings. These opportunities, in turn, result in students without ID seeing and interacting with peers with ID more often and more consistently. This increased visibility and social interaction is the mechanism for driving positive change within participating students, impacting the social and emotional development of participants without ID across their adolescent years.

School Staff Perspectives on SEL through the UCS Program

In addition to examining students' perspectives on their social and emotional development as a result of participation in the UCS program, the Year 10 evaluation also explored how school staff overseeing Unified Sports and Unified Club see those activities as providing the opportunity for students to practice SE competencies. The added perspectives of Unified Sports coaches and Unified Club advisors provide context for students' perspectives and begin to demonstrate how the UCS program can become the experiential learning component of schools' SEL programming.

The Year 10 evaluation looked specifically at Unified Sports and Unified Club, as these activities provide students with ongoing interactions, rather than one-time events, and foster environments where SE competencies could be improved. Both coaches and club advisors overwhelmingly believed that Unified Sports and Unified Club provided students with the opportunity for social and emotional development within all five of CASEL's SEL competencies, especially relationships skills and social awareness. In Unified Club, advisors reported that students "always" or "often" had the chance to practice relationship

skills (89%) and social awareness (86%). Unified Sports coaches reported that students practiced similar skills in Unified Sports, including relationship skills (92%) and social awareness (89%), as well as responsible decision-making (89%). These findings demonstrate that liaisons see a clear connection between UCS program activities and SEL. See Table 18 for more information.

Table 18. Opportunities for SEL in Unified Sports and Unified Club

UCS Activity SE Competency	Percentage of Coaches/Advisors
Unified Sports (n=1127)	
Self-awareness	89%
Self-management	91%
Responsible decision-making	91%
Relationship skills	92%
Social awareness	92%
Unified Club (n=1110)	
Self-awareness	85%
Self-management	87%
Responsible decision-making	90%
Relationship skills	94%
Social awareness	94%

With relationships between students with and without ID at the heart of the UCS program, it is unsurprising that the most school staff reported there are opportunities for development in the two domains most directly related to socialization (relationship skills and social awareness). In reflecting more deeply on these connections during interviews, school staff who were familiar with the UCS program discussed how it impacts students' social and emotional development. See Table 19 for staff perspectives on these connections.

These comments, along with school staff perspectives on the opportunities to practice SE competencies within the UCS program, demonstrate the important role that the UCS program can play in providing both students with and without ID a unique space in which to experience SEL in an applied setting. Through practicing to win a Unified Sports game, or meeting regularly in Unified Club to plan and implement Whole School Engagement activities throughout the year, the UCS program can help meet the social and emotional needs of students both with and without ID.

Table 19. School Staff Perspectives on SEL in UCS

SE Competency	Example Comment
Social Awareness	"…You get to see that gives [students] a real place to have some ownership and engagement… and I think that that helps to build their own confidence and involvement within the school. And I think that also helps to build, as far as we look at the social awareness components and building of relationships with other students, to help young people thrive in the school and really, really draw it." – Unified Sports Coach "Knowing that it's not always about you, and it's about others." –Special education paraprofessional "Just I think [the UCS program] teaches [students] to be aware of other people's feelings. That it can't just all be centered around you. There are other people in this group doing this activity. We need to be aware of everyone." –Special education teacher "I think it allows them to, I mean, expands their mind, first of all, put themself in another person's shoes which someone should have some form of empathy. But then I think after time it's great when you realize how similar we all are and then you just treat everyone, I'm going to say, similar or the same." –Adapted P.E. teacher
Self-Awareness	"…I think just as a broader standpoint of a lot of the projects that are created here in high school from across the board to bring the students together, I think that also it forces students to be self-aware because it's hard to be socially aware and hard to build relationships if you haven't made that first step." –Unified Sports Coach "I do think they gain more skills in self-awareness, all students. Putting others first. Thinking about how to put others first… So these are kids who are used to being the stars of the show. And not that they're divas, but they're performers. And so they've learned-- and they love it. They've learned to, but then they end up loving it, like, "Well, how do I partner with somebody? How do I offer my skills to somebody to let them be in the forefront and to let them shine?" And also, how do you create relationships with peers who have all these differences cognitively and physically?" –General education teacher
Relationship Skills	"I've seen a lot of friendships developed. I've seen it work both ways. I've seen it really benefit students who might have been struggling in other ways in regular education and it's really turned them around. And I can say a couple students this year that were new and come from difficult backgrounds that just really, really blossomed as part of it." –Special education teacher

	"And I've really seen a difference in the way that the social relationships with the way that our regular kids are interacting with our disabled peers and they get to know them not just as, "Oh hey, that's so-and-so," but they know them and they can tell you that kid's likes, and dislikes, and personalities, and you see them high-fiving in the hallways, and I mean it's been a huge positive change." –Special education teacher "There's empathy… I mean, addressing fears. There are a lot of people who may be afraid at the sight of people with a physical disability or just not sure how to even do it, I mean—and in [the UCS program] you're doing things where you got to go hand-in-hand and you got trust lifts, and falls, and things like that and then just to watch kids sort of manage that situation is quite an interesting thing to see." – General education teacher

Summary

The new findings surrounding SEL in the UCS program in Year 10 are important and timely. With students and school staff feeling that the UCS program provides opportunities to gain or enhance SE competencies, and that participation in the UCS program has concrete impacts on students' social and emotional development, the annual evaluation elucidates a strong connection between the UCS program and the field of SEL. Furthermore, the SEM analyses demonstrated that the social interactions between students with and without ID fostered through all aspects of the UCS program are the key mechanism for improving students' SE competencies. By providing opportunities for students to get to know their peers with ID in collaborative, goal-oriented environments, the UCS program creates a space where SEL is an outcome of inclusive activities and interactions. Importantly, the SEM analyses also revealed that the three core experiences of the UCS program all impact students' SE competencies, meaning that students who prefer to join a Unified Club over getting involved in a Unified Sport, or who are able to participate in Whole School Engagement activities but not a Unified Sport or Unified Club, will not lose the opportunity to develop SE competencies related to social awareness and relationship skills—participation in any one core experience of the UCS program will have an impact on students in these two domains. The perspectives of staff and students provide further, compelling evidence that begins to demonstrate the ways in which the UCS program can facilitate skill development in the areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. As coaches and club advisors specifically illustrated, the UCS program has the potential to wholly impact students' SEL through the opportunities that UCS provides in middle and high school.

5. Impact on Youth Leadership

Central to the mission of the UCS program is the belief that change starts with youth. One of the core experiences of the program, Inclusive Youth Leadership, aims to foster the development of leadership skills among students. Past evaluations at the high school level have shown that Unified Sports/PE and Unified Club, as well as the State Youth Activation Committee, provide the most leadership

opportunities for students. Furthermore, these evaluations have provided insight into high school students' perceptions of leadership within the UCS program.[97]

In Year 9, the annual evaluation examined youth leadership at the middle school level. Students with and without ID described their perspectives on youth leadership and also described youth leadership opportunities available at their schools. While a few students with ID held leadership roles in middle school, the majority of youth leaders were students without ID. The Year 9 evaluation also provided insight into how the UCS program fits into the landscape of leadership opportunities offered in middle school. Encouragingly, both students and staff believed the UCS program had the potential to diversify the pool of students who held leadership positions within the school, making youth leadership more inclusive.

The Year 10 evaluation expanded upon these findings by exploring youth leadership at the high school level. High school marks a time in which students are rapidly maturing and preparing for higher education or the workforce,[98] and as a result, are becoming more independent and making decisions that impact their lives and the lives of others.[99] As adolescents transition into adulthood, their views on what constitutes leadership often shift from an ability mindset to an authority mindset. In other words, while youth tend to conceptualize leadership as skills, knowledge, and talents, adults are more apt to view leadership as influence and the power to make decisions.[100] Given this, it is important to consider how high school students' perspectives on youth leadership might differ from the perspectives of middle school students. Finally, in high school, students with ID tend to have limited opportunities to engage in leadership activities,[101] emphasizing the importance of learning more about the leadership roles that are available to students with ID. In order to explore these areas, the Year 10 evaluation took into account the perspectives of 20 students with ID and 31 students without ID from three high schools, who were interviewed about their views on youth leadership in general and the leadership roles they held within their school or community. Thirty school staff, including UCS liaisons, special education teachers, general education teachers, and administrators from these three high schools also provided context for and added to these students' perspectives.

What Makes a Leader?

Similar to the Year 9 evaluation at the middle school level, students with and without ID in high school were asked about their definitions of youth leadership in Year 10. Although students were interviewed from three different high schools, several themes emerged across their discussions of leadership (for descriptions of student leadership practices and opportunities at each individual school, see Appendix

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[97] Center for Social Development and Education (2013). *Project UNIFY 2012-2013: Final Evaluation Report*. Boston, MA: Parker, R., Iskenderoglu, G., Drascher, M. L., Corona, L., Jacobs, H. E., & Siperstein, G. N.

[98] Bangser, M. (2008, August). *Preparing high school students for successful transitions to postsecondary education and employment.* Retrieved from https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/PreparingHSStudentsforTransition_073108.pdf

[99] Spear, H.J. & Kulbok, P. (2004). Autonomy and adolescence: a concept analysis. *Public Health Nursing, 21*(2), 144-152.

[100] MacNeil, C.A. (2006). Bridging generations: Applying "adult" leadership theories to youth leadership development. *New Directions for Youth Development, 109*, 27-43. doi: 10.1002/yd.153

[101] Klisz, T.A. (2014). Disability and access: Leadership opportunities for students with disabilities in high school. *Senior Honors Thesis*.

G). To some extent, middle school and high school students shared similar conceptualizations of leadership. Both middle and high school students with and without ID viewed leadership as service-oriented, for example, involving helping others. However, high school students with and without ID expanded the definition of leadership to include altruistic traits related to this helping behavior, such as empathy and compassion. High school students also provided more self-oriented perspectives of leadership, such as being in charge, and viewed leadership skills as either coming naturally or developing over time. Staff members' perspectives on youth leadership helped to contextualize students' responses. The following section presents in detail the perspectives of students with and without ID and school staff on youth leadership within high schools.

Similar to the findings in Year 9, where middle school students with and without ID thought of leadership as primarily service-oriented—describing a leader as someone who is "helpful" or makes a habit of "helping people out"—high school students in Year 10 also shared this service-oriented view. Most students without ID (65%) and 40% of students with ID viewed leadership through a service-oriented lens, with over one-third (41%) of students with and without ID believed being a service-oriented leader meant helping others. High school students went so far as to suggest that leaders are *obligated* to help everyone. In the words of one student with ID, "If you don't like them or if you do like them, you still have to help them no matter what."

Despite a continued focus on helping people, high school students with and without ID expanded their definitions of service-oriented leadership to include other altruistic traits. According to one student without ID, being a leader means having the ability to "understand…the needs of other people." Beyond simply understanding others, students recognized leadership as involving empathy and compassion. As one student with ID offered, it is the responsibility of a leader to make people "feel safe" and ensure they are "good with others." Similarly, students without ID described the importance of "tak[ing] everyone into consideration" through "listening to everyone and making sure people are heard." Students recognized the role of leaders in making sure that "everyone is comfortable and included… and know[s] that they are welcome." Through these responses, students demonstrated their understanding of a leader as someone who acknowledges and meets the needs of others. From the viewpoint of these high school students with and without ID, leadership is not driven by one individual but is a more collaborative and inclusive process.

When discussing their definitions of leadership, high school students with and without ID also included traits more aligned with adult perspectives of leadership,[102] such as the ability to take control. High school students viewed leadership as a position of authority, occupied by individuals who are "in charge." From their perspective, leaders were people who "ran" things and were at the forefront of situations. Given that high school students are in the process of transitioning to adulthood and

[102] Mortensen, J., Lichty, L., Foster-Fishman, P., Harfst, S., Warsinke, K., & Abdullah, K. (2014). Leadership through a community lens: understanding youth conceptualization of leadership. *Journal of Community Psychology, 42*(4), 447-452. doi: 10.1002/jcop/21620

developing a greater sense of individualism and identity, this expansion of high school students' definition of leadership seems natural and unsurprising.[103]

Even when talking about leadership as individualistic, students still acknowledged the impact that leaders have on others, particularly in acting as a "role model" or "an example" for other students. Accordingly, students described leaders as individuals who "lead people in the right direction." Further, students with and without ID recognized that, as role models, leaders should display qualities such as responsible decision-making and self-management skills. For example, students described leaders as "being responsible" and "being patient." In viewing leaders as role models, students with and without ID described a leader as being both self-oriented and service-oriented—being in charge but also serving others. See Table 20 for more student perspectives on leadership.

High school staff were also asked about their definitions of youth leadership. Similar to students, school staff tended to view youth leadership as more self-oriented than service-oriented. According to teachers across the three high schools, being a leader meant that a student had to "step up to the plate." In one teacher's opinion, "true youth leadership means that kids actually get to take roles where they're in charge and they're running things," adding to the idea that being a leader means taking on responsibility and acting more often in an individualistic, rather than collaborative, way.

School staff generally concurred with students' portrayal of leaders as roles models. For example, staff described student leaders as "role model[s] for other kids to follow" and believed that, through leadership roles, students "find their ability to…influence others." Teachers also reinforced the idea that role models "tak[e] responsibility" for both their actions and the task at hand. In this way, staff added to high school students' more nuanced understanding of the traits and responsibilities of a leader. See Table 21 for staff perspectives on youth leadership.

Table 20. Student perspectives on leadership

Leadership Quality	Example Comment
Altruism	"It means helping a group of people." "Putting other people's feelings before your own." "To help others and make them feel safe and to care about [themselves]…make sure they're healthy and good with others." "Help others."

[103] Grotevant, H.D. & Cooper, C.R. (1998). Individuality and connectedness in adolescent development: review and prospects for research on identity, relationships, and context. In E. Skoe & A. von der Lippe (Eds.), *Personality development in adolescence: A cross national and life span perspective* (pp. 3-57). London & New York: Routledge.

Authority	"Just jumping up and taking charge when everything's not going well." "Kind of coordinating everything…" "Probably just standing up and saying, 'This is what we need to do.'" "I think it means stepping up and taking your part…"
Role Model	"I think it means being a role model and someone that other people look up to." "…being able to be a role model and kind of show people how to lead by example and set good examples." "To lead people in the right direction…" "Being a good role model to everybody and making sure that people can look up to me for appropriate behavior." "Somebody that you can look up to and they can guide you down that path. And you could always look up to them and ask them a question and they can answer it for you. Kind of just being a role model." "…you set the example for others and do what's right so they know what to do, and just set a good example for others to follow."

Interestingly, students in high school viewed leadership not only in terms of being self- versus service-oriented, but also as something that was either innate or malleable. In other words, some students believed that leadership skills came naturally, while other students believed these characteristics could be learned. For those students who believed leadership abilities are innate, several attributed this to being "natural leaders" or that the tendency to take charge was "just… part of [their] personality." This was especially true for students who viewed themselves as "outgoing and extroverted" or "not scared to ask the teachers questions." These students believed that natural leaders had "an overall different way that they…carry themselves" and categorized leadership ability as dichotomous—something a student either had or did not have.

Students who viewed leadership abilities as innate were exclusively those without ID, and they shared certain characteristics. For example, most of these students viewed leadership as more self-oriented than service-oriented and believed that student leaders are those who take charge and act as role models for their peers. These students tended to be more individualistic and viewed leadership more as a function of their personality and abilities rather than their surroundings and circumstances. Perhaps unsurprising, most of the students who believed leadership abilities are innate also held formal

leadership roles within their school. Most of these students did not believe taking on leadership opportunities was difficult and believed there were plenty of leadership roles available in their school. Overall, students who viewed leadership abilities as innate were inclined to view leadership as an individual, self-directed process.

In contrast, other students viewed leadership abilities as malleable and developing over time. Most of these students believed effort was the most important factor in becoming a leader. As one student without ID put it, "It takes the effort, if you want to [be a leader]." These students believed that "the more time you put into it," the more leadership opportunities would be available. Additionally, these students did not view the leadership roles available in their school as fixed. Several students talked about the opportunity to create new clubs or activities. As one student with ID summarized, students in the school could "do anything they put their mind to."

Table 21. Staff perspectives on youth leadership

Example Comment
"They are going to be representing [our school] in a responsible and proud way and that they are truly good role models for all students."
"I think mostly just leading by example."
"A student stepping into a role where they are going to help make decisions, where they're going to help lead other people, where other students will look up to them and they will see them as a role model."
"Someone who leads by example, whether you're in a group project together in class, or on doing an extracurricular activity together, someone who can…bring structure to the group, and lead by example, and just being a role model for other kids to follow."
"Youth leadership means, to me, someone taking charge and responsibility of a group, [and] making wise decisions for that group so that they can succeed."

While only students without ID thought of leadership as innate, students who viewed leadership as malleable included those with and without ID, and were also students who held a mix of formal and informal leadership roles. Interestingly, these students also tended to describe leadership in terms of self-orientation, yet it is important to note how their perceptions differed from students who viewed leadership abilities as innate. While students who saw these abilities as innate were more likely to focus on themselves in the sense that these skills came naturally, students who thought of leadership as malleable were more likely to focus on themselves in terms of putting in the effort to become a better leader and they believed their surroundings and community could impact these skills. For example, students could learn a lot from other students who were willing to "take them under their wing…and guide them." Compared to students who saw leadership abilities as innate, students who considered

these abilities malleable held a more flexible view of leadership overall. While they may not have been the captain of a sports team, they realized they could still acquire leadership skills through informal positions, such as helping in the classroom. See Table 22 for more student perspectives on whether leadership ability is innate or malleable.

Table 22. Student perspectives on leadership ability

Leadership Ability	Example Comments
Innate	"I think teachers definitely appreciate people who are just natural leaders, like in the classroom…" "I'm a leader just in how I act." "I just do what I normally do." "I'm not saying I'm smart but I know I'm doing a lot in classes so I help people out. You have to take charge in groups, like really easily, too." "I'm just the one to step up and say things that need to be said and get things done that need to be [done]."
Malleable	"The more time you put into it and then the more you show that you're a leader, you'll be offered a lot more things to be involved in…" "If someone really wanted to be a leader, had the desire to be, there would be opportunities for it." "I wouldn't say a leadership position itself is hard, but just the time it takes and multi-tasking." "It just really depends on how you work." "You don't have to be the best at everything to be a leader."

Youth Leadership Opportunities

Regardless of how students conceptualized leadership, they acknowledged the multitude of leadership opportunities available in high school through extracurricular activities. In fact, 47% of students without ID held formal leadership positions within their school. Several students were captains of sports teams or held leadership roles within school clubs, such as being a treasurer. One student without ID talked about being the school's "yearbook editor," while another student mentioned that she was "section leader" for her instrument group in band and helped other members with their music. In addition to traditional extracurricular activities, several students with and without ID held leadership roles within

the UCS program, such as being an officer in the Unified Club or captain of a Unified Sports team. Multiple students held more than one leadership role.

In contrast to students without ID, only 15% of the students with ID who were interviewed in Year 10 held formal leadership roles at school, and all of these students attended School A (see Appendix G). While students without ID held leadership roles in a wide array of activities, leadership positions for students with ID were limited to the UCS program, primarily Unified Sports as a captain or manager of a team. Only one student was an officer in his school's Unified Club. Importantly, even within the UCS program, the three students held positions with titles that were recognizable to others in the school as a leadership role. This demonstrates that the UCS program can provide leadership opportunities that are valued in a way similar to leadership roles that other students might have in sports and clubs outside of the UCS program. However, these findings echo those of the Year 9 evaluation in middle schools—while students with ID do hold some leadership positions within their schools, few, if any, inclusive opportunities exist outside of the UCS program. Given the findings from the Year 10 interviews, it is clear that the UCS program is a unique space with the potential to provide leadership positions for both students with and without ID. However, it is up to the school to truly carry out the inclusive mission of the UCS program to ensure that it is implemented in a way that encourages all students to take advantage of these inclusive leadership roles.

Despite the formal leadership opportunities offered through the UCS program and other high school extracurricular activities, not all students take on these positions. Instead, the majority of students (59% with ID and 76% without ID) believed they showed leadership in more informal ways at school, for example, by providing their peers "help with homework" or assisting their teachers in the classroom. Students with ID, in particular, thought of themselves as leaders for "helping people," doing "work," or "show[ing] people around." One student with ID believed she was a leader when she "pick[ed] up trash off the floor." However, unlike formal leadership roles, students in informal leadership roles are not always recognized by other students as having a leadership position. Given that students with ID tend to hold fewer leadership positions than students without ID, both formally and informally, when students with ID are in leadership roles these roles may not be as recognizable or of the same caliber as the leadership roles held by students without ID.

The UCS Program and Inclusive Youth Leadership

Although there were leadership opportunities offered through a plethora of clubs and sports teams across the three high schools, students and staff talked about the unique ways in which the UCS program encourages student leadership. Students viewed the UCS program not only as another chance to become involved in their school, but also as a way to provide leadership experiences to a more diverse population of students. Similarly, staff described the UCS program as expanding the profile of students who have leadership roles, especially to students with ID. In this way, students and staff alike viewed the UCS program as an environment with the potential to foster truly inclusive youth leadership.

Students, especially those without ID, viewed the UCS program as another opportunity to "get involved in the school and community." Even if they were not the captain of a Unified Sports team or an officer in

a Unified Club, students without ID saw involvement in the program as a form of informal leadership. Similar to their definitions of leadership, as discussed previously, students talked about leadership in the UCS program as helping others. One student without ID talked about the way her peers viewed her involvement in the UCS program:

> And if you go on walks with [students with ID] out in the hallway, people see you with them. And then they're like, "Oh, well, that must be a leader because they're taking their time out of their day to help them."

As another student mentioned, "there are a lot of opportunities for people to get involved with…our Unified program…and there are a lot of leadership opportunities that come with that." Similar to other extracurricular activities, students viewed the UCS program as adding to the leadership opportunities available within their school.

Students also recognized the ways in which the UCS program could provide leadership opportunities to more students, including those who might not typically hold leadership roles. Several students believed the UCS program's inclusive environment allowed students of all abilities to take on leadership roles because in the program they "try to involve everybody." One student without ID emphasized that being involved in the UCS program allowed all students to experience leadership because "it gives an opportunity for everyone to kind of have people depend on them"; a student with ID supported this statement, adding that her involvement in the UCS program had given her the chance to "help out more often" and experience having others depend on her. Another student without ID summarized the ways in which the UCS program offered leadership opportunities to all students, regardless of ability, interest, or intensity of the role:

> In [the UCS program], there are a bunch of different ways you can be involved by helping out, set[ting] something up, or helping out plan[ing] something, or passing around ideas. And that can be just—it shows how you can formally and informally be a co-leader of something, even if it's not a straight up "I'm the dictator of all of you" position.

Like students, school staff also discussed the ways in which the UCS program provided leadership opportunities to all students. One teacher spoke about the ways in which the UCS program emphasizes that every student has something to offer, and "taps into the unique skill sets of all students." Some staff members talked more specifically about the ways in which the UCS program provides opportunities for students with ID. For example, one teacher, who also coached a Unified Sports team, described how she tried to have students with ID help coach drills and serve as "mentors" to other students, thus providing them with a leadership role on the team. Teachers acknowledged the unique position of the UCS program in providing these opportunities for students with ID, who "probably wouldn't be accessing as many leadership opportunities if they didn't have this." As one teacher explained, there were some students involved in the program who "would naturally be leaders" even if they were not in the program; they would "be involved in some leadership opportunities anyway." However, this teacher stressed that there were "some [students] who definitely wouldn't be" leaders otherwise, and "are leaders because they're involved in [the UCS program]." For these students, especially those with ID, the UCS program makes the difference between having and not having leadership experiences.

As discussed previously, only three students with ID—all from School A—held formal leadership roles, and these roles were within the UCS program. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this school heavily emphasized the importance of inclusive leadership within the UCS program and made it a point to have co-leaders—one leader with ID and one leader without ID—for each of their Unified Sports as well as their Unified Club. While students without ID might see the UCS program as another opportunity to get involved in their school, a robust UCS program may be the primary source of leadership opportunities for students with ID. Even so, students without ID still largely dominated the leadership roles within the UCS program at Schools B and C. With Inclusive Youth Leadership being one of the three core components of the UCS program, schools that are implementing the program must focus on the *inclusive* part of youth leadership. This reflects a need for schools not only to use the UCS program as a means to engage students with ID, but also to empower them to make decisions and meaningfully contribute to the program. The liaison from School C recognized this issue and mentioned that her school had been "working on that," explaining:

> We will always say it can't just be people without disabilities that [are] running it. It is a Unified program so we have to find ways of having every voice on that table so [there is] nothing about us without us, that kind of concept.

In order for inclusive youth leadership to be truly inclusive, it must provide opportunities for students with ID to lead, not simply participate.

Impact of Youth Leadership Opportunities on Students

Similar to middle school students in Year 9, the majority of high school students with and without ID who held leadership roles in Year 10 believed that these experiences positively influenced their personal development at school. Of the students without ID who held leadership roles, either formally or informally, over half (54%) believed they learned something from having these roles. As in Year 9, students' takeaways from their leadership experiences were largely unique to each individual, although a few themes emerged. First, through their leadership positions, students without ID felt that they were able to gain new skills, several of which corresponded to the domains of social and emotional learning. For example, students believed they gained important relationship and social awareness skills, such as how to better work with others. Students talked about how they learned "to be patient with people" and "how to cooperate with others" through their leadership roles. Students without ID also described learning to work with a more diverse group of people, with the understanding that "everybody comes from a different situation." Further, students without ID felt that they acquired self-awareness skills and reported that their leadership positions helped build their self-esteem and self-advocacy skills. For example, one student believed leadership roles helped "teach you to be more confident in yourself." Through their leadership positions, students believed they learned to "speak up" for themselves and stand up in situations that "are not in [their] comfort zone."

In addition to acquiring important social-emotional competencies, students without ID also felt that their leadership positions had provided them with new experiences. In fact, 64% of students believed they were able to experience something new from being a leader. Similar to middle schoolers, high

school students discussed the ways that having a leadership position allowed them to meet "more people." Further, students talked about having the opportunity to experience new places, as some of their leadership positions allowed them to travel to "national conferences" or to other states for sports tournaments. Clearly, being a leader allowed these students to experience new faces and new places. Unique to high school, students talked about how their leadership positions brought them recognition. One student said she had "never spoken in front of big crowds" before doing so as part of her leadership role. Students talked about being interviewed for their school newspaper and even for local TV stations. For these students, being a leader allowed them to experience public "recognition by the state" or "school board."

While students without ID believed their leadership positions allowed them to learn and experience new things, only one of the three students with ID who held a leadership position felt this way. According to this student, he learned "to help out a lot of kids." Similarly, while several students without ID reported having new experiences through their leadership roles, only one student with ID who held a leadership position believed he got to experience something new by helping to referee for Unified Sports. While it is important to consider the nature of certain leadership positions and how functioning level may impact students' responses and experiences. Because students with ID held more informal leadership roles (e.g., helping in the classroom) than formal leadership roles, it may be that these students did not view their leadership positions as much different from their typical day-to-day activities. For example, while helping a teacher hand out papers in class may be a form of informal leadership, it is unlikely that a student would have learned anything new from this activity. Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of schools providing students with ID with accessible and purposeful leadership roles, both formal and informal, as well as the autonomy to choose these roles, just like their peers without ID.

Summary

The Year 10 evaluation focused on youth leadership at the high school level, specifically within the context of three high schools whose corresponding middle schools were the focus of the evaluation in Year 9. Across these high schools, students viewed leadership as helping others but also believed that other traits, such as compassion, were essential to being a leader. Interestingly, high school students viewed leadership as individualistic, aligning more with adult perspectives, compared to middle school students who viewed leadership as largely service-oriented. Further, some high school students believed that leadership was innate, and that leadership ability was something someone either had or did not have, while others believed that the process of becoming a leader was more malleable and could be accomplished through hard work and effort.

There were a number of leadership opportunities available to students in these three high schools, whether in the classroom, through extracurricular activities, or through the UCS program. However, not all students were able to access these leadership opportunities equally. Specifically, there was a disparity in the leadership opportunities held by students with and without ID. While almost half of the students without ID who were interviewed reported having a formal leadership role, only three students with ID held formal leadership positions, all of which were in the UCS program. Moreover, these three students with ID were all from the same school, highlighting an important difference among schools

related to implementing the Inclusive Youth Leadership component of the UCS program. Students with ID were more likely to hold informal (versus formal) leadership roles, such as helping a teacher in the classroom. However, it is unclear whether students with ID really viewed these helping activities as leadership roles, or whether this more reflects their teacher's perspectives.

Given that just three students with ID held formal leadership roles and they were all through the UCS program, it is clear that UCS activities are sometimes the only opportunity for students with ID to hold a leadership position in school. Even so, students without ID still dominate leadership positions within the program. When implementing the UCS program, schools should ensure that leadership opportunities are truly inclusive and that students with ID are able to engage in leadership positions that are just as meaningful as the ones held by students without ID.

6. Impact on the Transition to High School

The transition from middle school to high school is a time of stress and uncertainty for many students. In high school, students are typically confronted with a different educational curriculum than the one they were used to in middle school, characterized by greater departmentalization and increased pressure to make decisions about post-secondary life.[104] For students with ID, the transition to high school can be particularly difficult, as their peers without ID separate into academic and vocational tracks and start to spend less time in the classroom and more time developing skills related to post-secondary employment.[105] Subsequently, interactions between students with and without ID often become relegated to after-school and extracurricular settings, which is a challenging shift since friend and peer support are important protective factors across the transitional period.[106] However, school-based extracurricular programs that span the transitional period, especially those with an emphasis on peer support, have been shown to help students move successfully from one educational setting to the next.[107] The UCS program, as one such program with its focus on peer relationships, is in just such a position to facilitate the transition from middle to high school for students both with and without ID.

While the Year 9 evaluation focused on the transition from middle to high school from the perspective of middle school students looking ahead, in Year 10, 18 high school students (freshmen and sophomores[108]) reflected on their recent transition from middle school to high school. They key themes that emerged from interviews with these students were contextualized by interviews with 22 teachers

[104] Benner, A. D., & Graham, S. (2009). The transition to high school as a developmental process among multiethnic urban youth. *Child development*, *80*(2), 356-376.

[105] Carter, E. W., Sisco, L. G., Brown, L., Brickham, D., & Al-Khabbaz, Z. A. (2008). Peer interactions and academic engagement of youth with developmental disabilities in inclusive middle and high school classrooms. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, *113*(6), 479-494.

[106] Kleinert, H. L., Miracle, S., & Sheppard-Jones, K. (2007). Including students with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities in school extracurricular and community recreation activities. *Intellectual and developmental disabilities*, *45*(1), 46-55.
Benner, A. D., Boyle, A. E., & Bakhtiari, F. (2017). Understanding students' transition to high school: demographic variation and the role of supportive relationships. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 46*, 2129-2142. doi: 10.1007/210964-01716-2

[107] Roybal, V., Thornton, B., & Usinger, J. (2014). Effective ninth-grade transition programs can promote student success. *Education*, *134*(4), 475-487.

[108] Last year, the middle school associated with School C contained grades 6-9. Year 10 was the first year that the high school included 9th grade, so students in grades 9 and 10 were new to the school.

who offered their perspectives on the differences between middle and high school. Both students and teachers reflected on whether the transition met the expectations of greater responsibility and autonomy, higher academic stakes, and social pressures to fit in in high school. Teachers shared additional perspectives on the impact of the UCS program across the transition and its role in cultivating friendships and a sense of belonging among participants–both those who joined as freshmen and those who continued their involvement from middle school. In addition to interviews, 133 students who completed the *Student Experience Survey* in Year 9 in middle school completed the same survey again in Year 10 at the end of their first year of high school. While a relatively small number of students completed both surveys, their responses provided valuable insight into how interactions between students with and without ID and participation in the UCS program can be affected by the transition to high school.

Student and Teacher Expectations about High School

Consistent with the findings from middle school students in Year 9, high school students with and without ID reflected that they had many concerns about high school when they were in middle school. Students without ID recalled trepidations about high school, including that it "would be very scary," "it'd be too big of a school," "it would be hard," and that they "[weren't] going to fit in." In Year 9, middle school students with ID similarly noted that they were nervous about the upcoming transition, with one student stating, "I just don't feel ready for it." Despite these apprehensions, only 21% of students without ID and 25% of students with ID reported in Year 10 that these fears were met. The rest of the students described high school as "the complete opposite" of what they had anticipated, with one student noting, "I enjoyed it a lot more than I thought I would." In particular, students without ID were surprised by the sense of inclusion they felt in high school, as one student stated, in reference to other high schoolers, "They're actually really welcoming, and the people here are really nice, and they help you fit in." Students also described high school in terms of greater responsibility and heightened academic pressure, a sentiment that was echoed by teachers, and students without ID specifically mentioned the social pressures that high school brought. See Table 23 for more information on student and teacher perceptions of high school.

While students with ID tended to focus on more concrete differences between middle and high school (e.g., one student with ID described high school as "much bigger" than middle school), students without ID and teachers described intangible differences, such as increased autonomy and responsibility. Compared to middle school, teachers noted there was "less hand-holding" and "a lot more responsibility" in high school. Similarly, some students without ID (25%) acknowledged the expectation for "more responsibility" at the high school level. In fact, both students with and without ID tended to perceive high school as a time of greater choice and freedom.[109] As such, students without ID described being "more self-dependent" than in middle school. As one student explained, "Teachers, they don't nag on you to do homework, which…grows your independence more." Both students and teachers

[109] Letrello, T. M., & Miles, D. D. (2003). The transition from middle school to high school: Students with and without learning disabilities share their perceptions. *The Clearing House*, *76*(4), 212-214.

acknowledged greater responsibility and autonomy as key distinguishing features of high school, and teachers, in particular, expected high school students to exhibit these traits.

Table 23. Perceptions of high school, as reported by students without ID and teachers

Topic	Students	Teachers
Greater responsibility and autonomy	"I thought there'd be more responsibility but also a better experience than being at the middle school." "There's more responsibility. And more, I don't really know how to say it, but it's more you have to be more responsible. Each person has to be more responsible."	"In high school, your work is late and it's late. In middle school, you can turn in your work until the last day of middle school." "The high school…has a very college atmosphere. There's a lot of autonomy. Students are able to kind of self-select where to go during their student prep time. There are a lot of different options for them during flex block. And so I think there just is an expectation that students are turning into young adults and they're responsible for their education." "There is a lot more responsibility. More things will be expected of them."
Heightened academic pressure	"I definitely thought it was going to be easier than it was. So I think, on the school level, it's definitely harder because, well, I take a lot of honors classes, and those are very difficult." "I was kind of nervous…that the teachers would be really mean, and they wouldn't have any slack when you would not turn something in or get a bad grade."	"You're expected to show up at your class. And being held accountable for things that they weren't held accountable before…and grades, grades that count toward college is really scary for a lot of kids." "They know that they're going to have to study more, they know they're going to have to be more organized."
Social pressures	"I thought it would be very scary and that you always hear the horror stories about upperclassmen picking on people." "I was scared because there would be a lot of unfamiliar faces… I was also	

	scared because I wasn't the oldest anymore. I knew I was going to be the youngest, and everyone was going to treat me different." "These kids are so much older than me. If you look at the seniors, I know that they're only four years older than me, but it's still [laughter]—they're so much older than me. And so it was just scary."	

Teachers and students also recognized that a key component of the transition to high school is a greater focus on academic performance. [110] In interviews with teachers and students, they specifically mentioned the increased importance of grades in high school. Some students without ID seemed surprised by this shift in academic rigor, as one student stated, "I have to study every night and... I think that's definitely a big change." Another student acknowledged the greater academic difficulty in high school, noting that her classes "are way more challenging" than they were in middle school. Similarly, teachers explained that students "have to study more" because "grades do matter." One teacher described the high stakes of grades in high school, noting, "If you don't do your homework, it means that your grade gets lowered and this is something that gets put on your permanent record."

While teachers and students both addressed greater responsibility and heightened academic pressure as aspects of high school that are different from middle school, students uniquely spoke of the social pressures that came with the transition. This is unsurprising, as adolescents tend to be highly concerned with peer acceptance during this stage of development.[111] Students without ID expressed fears that they would not "fit in" when they transitioned to high school. One student was worried about being accepted by peers on her varsity sports team, stating, "I was scared…because I didn't know if the girls were going to like me." While teachers did not explicitly mention peer acceptance when describing student concerns about the transition from middle to high school, they did discuss how the UCS program promotes a sense of belonging among students during this time of change.

Interactions between Students with and without ID across the Transition to High School

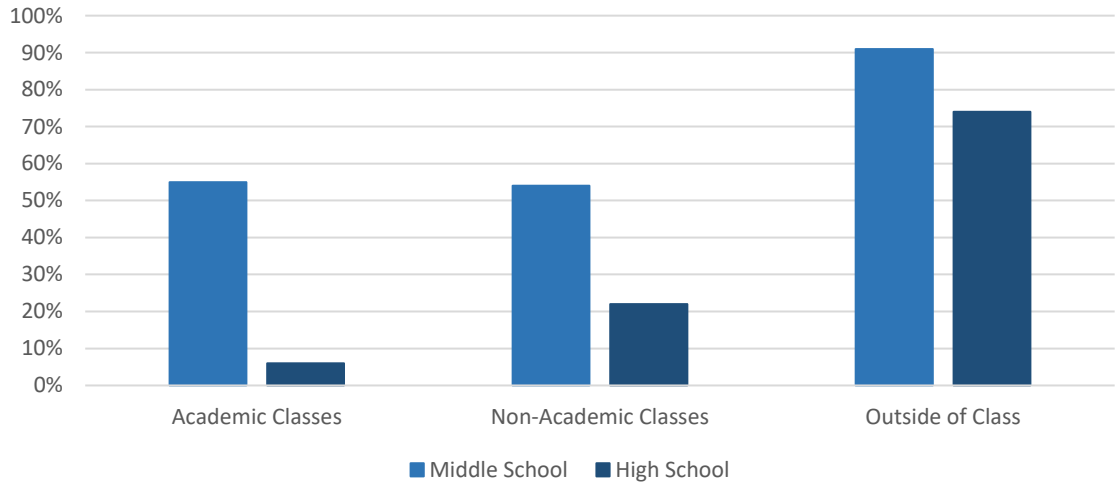
As a result of heightened academic and social pressures in high school, students without ID acknowledged a change in the frequency of interactions with peers with ID across the transition. In examining the *Student Experience Survey* data collected from students in middle school and again in high school, more students reported that they knew someone with ID in their school when they were in middle school (96%) than when they got to high school (69%). When in middle school, over half of these students identified the presence of students with ID in one of their academic classes (e.g., math,

[110] Smith, J. S., Akos, P., Lim, S., & Wiley, S. (2008). Student and stakeholder perceptions of the transition to high school. *The High School Journal*, 32-42.

[111] Wenz-Gross, M., Siperstein, G. N., Untch, A. S., & Widaman, K. F. (1997). Stress, social support, and adjustment of adolescents in middle school. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, *17*(2), 129-151.

reading, or social studies; 55%) or saw their peers with ID in their non-academic classes (e.g., art, P.E., or music; 54%). In contrast, after completing their first year of high school, a very small proportion of these same students without ID (6%) reported attending an academic class with a student with ID. They were more likely to see their peers with ID in non-academic classes (22%), but still not with the same frequency as when they were in middle school. Similarly, when in middle school, almost all (91%) of these students without ID reported seeing students with ID around the school (e.g., hallways, cafeteria, school assemblies), compared to less than three-quarters (74%) of these same students during their first year of high school. See Figure 15 for more on these differences across school levels. Overall, students without ID appeared to be in the presence of their peers with ID more frequently in middle school (especially in classes), while in high school, interactions between students with and without ID were mainly limited to outside the classroom and still did not occur as often as in middle school.

Figure 15. Interactions between students with and without ID in Middle School vs. High School



In part, students with and without ID have fewer opportunities to interact in high school due to the structure of high school itself. High schools often have much larger student populations and, thus, more expansive campuses than middle schools.[112] Therefore, depending on their schedule or the location of their classes and free periods, students with and without ID may not see each other as often as they did in middle school. In fact, interviews with students without ID revealed the ways that their schedule in their first year of high school limited their interactions with peers they saw frequently in middle school. In high school, they were now with students in their grade who had attended other middle schools, as well as upperclassmen; there were a lot of "new" peers that these students had not met before. As one student without ID mentioned, the students in high school were a "different crowd" than the students who had been in middle school with him. Further, when talking about the UCS program at high school, one student felt that she had "less time with [students with ID]" due to scheduling (the UCS program

[112] McIntosh, K., Flannery, K.B., Sugai, G., Braun, D.H., & Cochrane, K.L. (2008). Relationships between academics and problem behavior in the transition from middle school to high school. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 10*(4), 243-255. doi: 10.1177/1098300708318961

met only once a week at the end of the day, whereas in middle school it had met every day). Beyond size and scheduling, the transition to high school is accompanied by greater academic challenges, which also interfere with opportunities for students with and without ID to interact. More so than in middle school, students in high school attend classes based on their abilities and post-secondary trajectory.[113] Students with ID often take classes related to functional life skills, while students without ID may be in courses focused more on academics and preparing them for college or a career.[114] For example, one student without ID described taking "way more challenging classes like AP World History" during her first year in high school. Another student mentioned that classes kept him occupied, and while he "had a lot of free time" in middle school, that was no longer true in high school. Along with a more challenging course load, high school students often have greater autonomy in selecting their courses and may choose to enroll in classes based on personal interests.[115] Because of factors like these, it is possible that middle school students who saw their peers with ID every day in academic or non-academic classes no longer had that opportunity in high school.

Impact of the UCS Program on the Transition to High School

While the structure of high school appeared to limit the frequency of interactions between students with and without ID in Year 10, the UCS program offered a regular space for participants to socially interact. While some of the freshmen and sophomores who were interviewed began participating in the UCS program in high school, others had maintained their involvement since middle school. Regardless of when students joined the UCS program, both teachers and students recognized the benefits of the program in building relationships and fostering a sense of belonging among participants.

Teacher Perspectives

Much like the findings in Year 9, all 22 teachers (100%) described the role of the UCS program in facilitating the transition to high school for students with and without ID by fostering a sense of belonging, building relationships, offering extracurricular opportunities for otherwise disengaged students, and providing continuity for those who maintain involvement over time. While teachers did not explicitly cite social pressures as one of the distinguishing characteristics of high school, they did acknowledge the ways in which the UCS program alleviated social concerns across the transition. Teachers specifically noted that the UCS program promoted a sense of belonging for students, giving them "something to identify with" by being "part of something good." Some teachers described this sense of belonging as a kind of "comfort" for students with and without ID during the transition. Teachers also recognized how "team unity" and "team togetherness" in the UCS program enabled students to feel that "they belong." Such responses from teachers suggest that the UCS program fosters

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[113] Barton, P.E. & Coley, R.K. (2011). *The mission of the high school: A new consensus of the purposes of public education?* Princeton, NJ: ETS Policy Information Center. Retrieved from https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PIC-MISSION.pdf

[114] Collins, B.C., Karl, J., Riggs, L., Galloway, C.C., & Hager, K.D. (2010). Teaching core content with real-life applications to secondary students with moderate and severe disabilities. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 43*(1), 52-59.

[115] Smith, J.S., Feldwisch, R., & Abell, A. (2006). Similarities and differences in students' and parents' perceptions of the transition from middle school to high school. *Research in Middle Level Education, 29*(10), 1-9. doi: 10.1080/19404476.2006.11462033

community and belonging during the transition from middle to high school, which is a clear area of concern for students.[116]

In addition to sense of belonging, teachers focused on the relationship-building aspects of the UCS program as a means of promoting peer acceptance in high school. Specifically, teachers described how Unified Club enabled freshmen to build their social networks. One teacher noted of Unified Club, "It's an opportunity to meet new people and make more friends...you come in freshman year, you're nervous, quiet. And it's...an opportunity to meet more people." Another teacher corroborated, "I think it's a good way to just get your foot in the door and get to know some people." Together, these teachers acknowledged the role that the UCS program plays in cultivating relationships and, thus, in promoting belonging and acceptance for students transitioning to high school.

Beyond relationship-building, teachers commented on the ways in which the UCS program allows freshmen with and without ID to feel more involved in, and connected to, school. As mentioned previously, one teacher explained how the school's Unified Club attracts "fringe students"—students that are not engaged in other extracurricular activities, or "students that aren't necessarily connected in other ways to different groups." For "fringe students" who are freshmen, the UCS program is particularly influential for feeling supported and part of the school community. This teacher explained, "If you're a freshman and you're not in a sport, and you're not in band, then [Unified Sports] is an opportunity for you to be in the parade and be a part of the whole homecoming hoopla." Similarly, results from the *Student Experience Survey* found that freshmen who were not involved in any extracurricular activities besides the UCS program (i.e., "fringe students") felt supported by their teachers and peers. Of these freshmen, 91% noted they had a friend at school who cared about them, and 85% believed they had a friend at school who would help them through a hard time. These students also felt support from teachers. In particular, 89% believed there was a teacher at school who would listen to them and believed in their success. In these ways, the UCS program enables freshman who are traditionally disengaged, or "fringe students," to feel part of the school community.

For students who have been engaged in the UCS program since middle school, continuing to be involved in high school offers benefits across the transition. These benefits are particularly salient for students with ID. As one teacher explained, "I think it helps them have some continuity...that's really important to know that some of the same things are going to be there, and it's going to be okay in the world. It's not going to be scary." Furthermore, for students with and without ID, teachers explained how friendships developed in middle school through the UCS program act as a protective factor during the transition. Research suggests that this type of social support from peers enables students to effectively cope with stress during the transitional period and improves social adjustment to high school.[117] One teacher stated, in reference to students with ID, "The first day of school didn't seem so scary because they already knew some people." Another teacher explained how these friendships motivate students,

[116] Ibid.

[117] Anderson, L. W., Jacobs, J., Schramm, S., & Splittgerber, F. (2000). School transitions: beginning of the end or a new beginning? *International Journal of Educational Research*, *33*(4), 325-339.

especially those without ID, to continue their involvement across the transition: “Students...just have really strong relationships that have formed and friendships, and so it's socially reinforcing to continue to participate.” In these ways, participating in the UCS program across the transition from middle to high school benefits students with and without ID by providing them with a sense of familiarity and social support from peers.

Student Perspectives

Unlike Year 9, which only featured the perspectives of teachers reflecting on the impact of the UCS program across the transition, in Year 10, high school students with and without ID were able to offer their thoughts on how the UCS program facilitated their transition to high school. In particular, students outlined the ways in which the UCS program in high school was similar and different to the UCS program in middle school, and also described the ways in which the program promoted a sense of belonging and alleviated transition-related stress.

The UCS Program across the Transition. For the 18 students with and without ID who continued to be involved in the UCS program across the transition, there were similarities and differences between the programs at their middle and high school. These perspectives varied based on school-level factors, including the structure of extracurricular activities in middle and high school. Many students believed both programs shared the same mission. As one student stated, “I think that the programs are a lot the same…they have the same expectations.” Students elaborated on those expectations, explaining that both programs “really circle around respecting others,” and provide students with “an integration community.” With the consistency of the mission of the UCS programs in middle and high school, students noticed overlap in the types of activities that were implemented as part of the programs. For instance, one student with ID described the two programs as equivalent because they “do the same activity” in both. In contrast, some students with and without ID viewed the UCS program in high school as different from the program in middle school. Interestingly, the reasons students gave for this distinction differed depending on their school. For example, students with and without ID in School B viewed the high school UCS program as different than the program in middle school due to the altered structure of the program. As one student with ID explained, “in middle school we used to see each other every morning, but in high school we don't.” A student without ID corroborated, in reference to peers with ID in the UCS program, “I feel that we have less time with them.” At School B, this feeling of “less time” is understandable—while Unified Club met every day in middle school, it was only offered once a week in high school during a “flex period.” This shift in structure is most likely due to the fact that, as mentioned previously, high school is more focused on academic performance than middle school. As such, any extraneous, non-academic classes are typically relegated to flex periods or extracurricular time. Unfortunately, according to students with and without ID at School B, this shift in the UCS program from a daily occurrence to a weekly occurrence resulted in fewer opportunities for peers in the UCS program to interact.

Unlike School B, in School C, students without ID perceived the UCS program at the high school level as giving them greater opportunity to interact with their peers with ID. In comparing their middle and high school UCS programs, one student noted, “I'd say we do more activities here than we did at [middle

school].” Students explained that, in high school, “there's more options…more activities planned.” One reason for the increased opportunity for interaction in School C lies in the larger, more organized program at the high school compared to the middle school. For example, at the feeder middle school, there was no Unified Sports team nor a formal UCS Leadership Team to help plan and implement UCS activities. As one student reflected, “more students are involved with the [Unified Club] in high school.” These results suggest that similarities and differences between UCS programs in middle and high school are often dependent on unique structural factors within schools.

The UCS Program and Belonging/Community. Like teachers, students with and without ID described many positive impacts of the UCS program in facilitating their transition to high school, particularly by cultivating a sense of belonging and community. Students without ID also uniquely spoke about the benefits of the UCS program in alleviating academic stress associated with the transition to high school. See Table 24 for a summary of student responses on how the UCS program promotes a sense of belonging and community.

Students with and without ID who continued their involvement in the UCS program from middle to high school noted that the program eased their transition by creating a community. In fact, all 5 students with ID stated that the program helped them to adjust to high school. As one student with ID noted, “it helped me to know people.” Similarly, students without ID expressed how the UCS program enabled them to “make new friends” and “get to know more people” in high school. These friendships offered “comfort” and support during the transitional period. In fact, findings from the Year 10 *Student Experience Survey* demonstrate that more students who participated in the UCS program believed they had a friend at school to talk to about problems (75%) or help them through a hard time (78%) compared to students not in the UCS program (66% and 71%, respectively).

In their interviews, students also noted that seeing “familiar faces” from the UCS program in the hallways “gives you kind of [a] community,” which allowed them to feel a sense of belonging in their school. As one student without ID explained of her friends in the Unified Club, “They help me feel like I fit in.” One staff member described how the UCS program enabled students with ID to be “part of an entire school instead of just ‘those kids,’” while another staff member placed this sense of belonging in the context of Unified Sports:

> So, you might be the token person on a football team or the token person on a basketball team. And one time during the whole season, they're going to set up this special play for you to get out there and do something. But Unified Sports is not like that. That's what's so cool about it, is that they are on a team, they're expected to participate just like everybody else, and everybody goes out and plays their hardest to try to win, and to try to compete together.

Furthermore, the sense of belonging that resulted from the UCS program was not limited to students with ID, or even to students with disabilities more generally, as staff described the benefits of an inclusive and accepting school culture for *all* students who experience marginalization. One staff member noted,

> It's the involvement of [Unified Club], and [Unified Theater], and Unified PE that's giving our school a look at diversity. And so that diversity can be color of skin, it can be an intellectual disability, a physical disability, so I think it's great for our school.

While the UCS program aims to socially include students with ID into everyday school life, interviews with staff and students reveal the greater impact of the program in cultivating a school community that is inclusive and promotes belonging for all students, which is especially critical across the transition to high school.

Table 24. Student perspectives on belonging and community within the UCS program

Example Comment
"I have familiar faces from last year that I just—it gives me comfort."
"I feel like it's helped me get to know more people and feel more comfortable."
"It made me open up to people easier and get to know people."
"I've gotten to know people who are older than me, so they can give me advice."

Summary

Students both with and without ID expressed anxiety about the transition to high school. While students with ID tended to focus on tangible differences between middle and high school, students without ID and teachers described the transition as involving increased responsibility and autonomy, concerns about peer acceptance, and heightened academic pressure. While Year 9 concentrated on the perspectives of middle school students, Year 10 allowed high school freshmen and sophomores to take a retrospective look at this transition, while also incorporating the views of teachers.

Overall, students with and without ID recalled being apprehensive about the transition from middle to high school, worrying about the increased independence and greater academic challenges in high school. These fears were corroborated by teachers, who described high school as a place with "a lot more responsibility" where "grades do matter." Amid these concerns, students and teachers acknowledged the role of the UCS program in easing the transition. The program promoted a sense of belonging for freshmen students not involved in other extracurricular activities by giving them "an opportunity to meet new people," and also provided "continuity" and stability for students who had participated in the UCS program in middle school, especially those with ID. Regardless of whether students begin participating in high school, or whether they begin in middle school and maintain involvement over time, the UCS program builds community, facilitates relationships, and promotes a sense of belonging among students, thus helping them navigate and feel more comfortable in the unfamiliar high school setting.

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

After a decade of research and evaluation into the UCS program, it is clearer than ever that the UCS program is successful in providing inclusive schoolwide programming capable of effecting change within school communities and within students. At the school level, the Year 10 evaluation demonstrated the multiple and varied factors that influence schools reaching full-implementation Unified Champion Schools status, including the UCS Leadership Team, school district support, and support and communication from the State Special Olympics Program. At the student level, the Year 10 evaluation provided insights from both middle and high schools, finding that the UCS program similarly impacts middle and high school students' perceptions and attitudes through its ability to bring students with and without ID together in meaningful ways, and showing that students who get involved tend to stay involved. Furthermore, the evaluation showed that the developmental gains and social-emotional skills resulting from participation in the UCS program are evidenced at all stages of adolescence. The UCS program provides schools with a novel approach to positive youth development and provides youth with opportunities to develop positive peer, school, and community connections. As Special Olympics embarks on the next decade of UCS programming, with an eye on 25,000 schools by 2025, the following recommendations are offered:

Prioritize implementation at the district level and support quality implementation across school districts by focusing on expanded and consistent professional development/training for school staff and continuity in student involvement.

The UCS program has expanded steadily over the last decade. During this time, there has been a 15-24% increase each year in the number of schools contacted to participate in the *Liaison Survey*. In fact, from the very first annual evaluation to the present Year 10 evaluation, the number of schools participating has increased by 472%. In light of this expansion, there has been an increased push from SO for State Programs to provide training on the UCS program for schools/school staff, especially for the hundreds of new schools that join each year. However, the rate of liaisons reporting that their State Program offered training was the same in Year 10 (53%) as it was back in Year 4 (49%), when liaisons first reported on the training opportunities provided to them. In fact, in Year 10 there was wide variability in training offerings from state to state. While nationally 53% of liaisons reported their State Program offered UCS-related training, this figure ranged from just 23% of liaisons in some states to up to 82% of liaisons in others. Given these findings, there is a clear need to create a comprehensive training program for schools that is consistent across State Programs. Such a training program will facilitate capacity building as SO continues to expand into more schools, while also maintaining and improving high-quality UCS programs. Previous evaluation findings have demonstrated a link between training and quality UCS programming, where 66% of liaisons from full-implementation schools reported training offerings compared to 48% of liaisons from Developing Unified schools (liaisons from full-implementation schools more frequently participated in these trainings as well (59% vs. 41%)). With the goal of reaching 25,000 schools by 2025, implementation across school districts is an efficient and effective way to bring the UCS program to many schools and students in a short amount of time.

State Programs will need support to maintain quality implementation across this growing number of schools, and a comprehensive training program gives State Programs the capacity to provide multiple school staff from multiple schools with consistent information. Findings from the annual evaluation highlight the importance of State Programs as a facilitator of higher-quality UCS programs. Liaisons more frequently reported that they formed a Unified Champion Schools Leadership Team when their State Program had suggested they form one (67%) compared to schools whose State Program had not made this suggestion (34%). This is important because schools that used a Leadership Team model to implement the UCS program were more often full-implementation Unified Champion Schools than schools without a Leadership Team (72% vs. 45%, respectively). Given the apparent influence of State Programs on schools' level of implementation, it is clear that consistency in training across State Programs on a variety of topics, especially those related to quality, such as the UCS Leadership Team, could have a great impact on consistency of implementation across schools.

In addition to an expanded and comprehensive professional development/training program creating consistency and continuity across school levels, continuity in student engagement across school levels further signals the need to prioritize districtwide implementation. Across the middle and high schools participating in the annual evaluation the past two years, 77% of students who participated in middle school continued participating in high school. With three-quarters of students maintaining their participation across the transition from middle school to high school, it is clear that ensuring all middle school students have a high school program to transition into should be a priority for school districts moving forward. In fact, 62% of 8th grade students, whether they participated in the UCS program or not, expressed an interest in participating the following year (i.e., their freshmen year of high school), highlighting the need for continuity of programming for what is clearly a large number of interested students. A district approach would ensure interested students always have a UCS program they can join, in any grade and in any school.

Some middle and high schools are already collaborating on continuity of programming. Site visits over the past two years have revealed a number of potentially effective strategies for continuity and consistency that could support districtwide implementation. For example, at one high school, students in a Unified Theater program performed a play for students involved in the UCS program at the middle school. In other areas, students involved in the UCS program in the middle and high school jointly participated in fundraising campaigns or Spread the Word to End the Word poster contests. Implementing UCS activities across multiple schools, especially those activities where students take the lead, provides continuity and consistency that facilitates scaling up to all schools in a school district. However, activities are not the only way to achieve districtwide implementation. The UCS Leadership Team, as already demonstrated, is a key factor in schools' successful implementation of the UCS program, including quality of programming. Utilizing the UCS Leadership Team not only within schools but *across* schools is another way to achieve consistency and continuity of programming on a large scale. Especially across transitional periods, such as the transition from middle school to high school, the UCS Leadership Team can provide the seamless implementation, integration, and communication, hallmark of a districtwide approach. In fact, a district approach to the UCS Leadership Team may be something to consider (i.e., a district UCS Leadership Team made up of members from the schools' UCS

Leadership Teams) so that school districts are ensuring they establish the strongest possible foundation for students to continue their involvement in the UCS program across their K-12 schooling.

Position Unified Club and the Unified Champion Schools Leadership Team as models for how schools can expand opportunities for students with ID to be meaningfully included in leadership roles thereby shifting the balance from a helper-helpee dynamic to a more reciprocal relationship with other youth leaders in the school.

Over the past two years, the evaluation has focused on inclusive youth leadership at the middle and high school levels to better understand the types of students engaged in leadership within their school as well as the opportunities for leadership available to students, particularly in the UCS program. Findings revealed that both students with and without ID are engaged in leadership within their schools, albeit to differing degrees. While half of students without ID in middle and high school (59% and 48%, respectively) held a leadership role within the school, far fewer students with ID reported such involvement (13% and 15%, respectively). Findings also revealed two broad categories of leadership positions—"formal," such as those positions recognized by others in the school (i.e., they have a title or are appointed through an elections process, e.g., sports team captain or student body president), and "informal," which are more ambiguous but often involve helping behaviors (e.g., passing out papers in class, taking attendance). More often, students with ID reported holding these informal types of leadership roles.

While students without ID took advantage of the many leadership opportunities offered within their schools in Year 10, students with ID were largely restricted to roles within the UCS program. In fact, all of the formal leadership roles that students with ID reported holding were within the UCS program (e.g., Unified Sports captain, Unified Sports manager, Unified Club officer); no students with ID held a leadership role within the larger school community. While this highlights the importance of the UCS program in providing leadership opportunities for students with ID that schools may not otherwise be able to provide, it also indicates that schools can do more to bring inclusive youth leadership to a broader platform. As one of the few venues, and in some cases the only venue, where students with ID are leaders in the school, the UCS program has an important role to play in supporting schools to achieve an inclusive youth leadership structure on a broader platform.

Using Unified Club and the UCS Leadership Team as models, the UCS program can demonstrate to schools how to create co-leadership structures. As the annual evaluations have shown, the majority of UCS Leadership Teams (59% Year 8, 60% Year 9) and Unified Clubs (75% Year 7, 79% Year 8) include both students with and without ID in the planning and implementation of the UCS program. Clearly, a large number of schools have already incorporated an inclusive approach to leading the UCS program, but merely including students with ID in these groups does not ensure they are *meaningfully* included. Maximizing "formal" leadership roles within these groups is one way to enhance the meaningful inclusion of students with ID in these leadership opportunities within the school. Designated shared leadership positions held by students with and without ID within the Unified Club, UCS Leadership Team, and even the Unified Sports team(s) will signal to the school the reciprocal relationship that students

with ID have with other youth leaders in the school. Another key component of creating more reciprocal leadership relationships is to incorporate the voices of students with ID into UCS activities, particularly Unified Club. Incorporating their voices goes beyond their mere participation to ensure that students with ID are not only part of Unified Club, but are able to contribute to decision-making within the group as well. Finally, maximizing the potential of the UCS Leadership Team and Unified Club to be models for inclusive youth leadership within the broader school community should be driven by a strengths-based approach, in which schools capitalize on the strengths of students with ID. Unified Club advisors should encourage students with ID to identify their skills and talents, and to pursue leadership opportunities -- both within the Unified Club and in other areas of the school -- that correspond with these skills and talents or provide opportunities for growth in these areas. Similarly, schools should encourage students with ID to set realistic goals for themselves and to identify areas in which they want to improve, and then provide the necessary supports to facilitate this growth. By focusing on the strengths of students with ID, as well as by helping them set and achieve goals, schools demonstrate high expectations for the capabilities of students with ID and, as a result, recognize students with ID as individuals who are capable of taking on leadership roles within their schools.

It will be important to provide professional development opportunities for school staff to learn how to facilitate youth-led inclusive co-leadership within their schools, especially Unified Club advisors. Within this professional development, there should be an emphasis on establishing a youth-driven strategy. In other words, Unified Club advisors should view their role as facilitating rather than leading, and should be trained on how to "step back" and let the youth lead the process. The vision and goals for the club should be determined by students with and without ID, as outlined in the Unified Champion Schools High School Playbook. It is also important that professional development opportunities focus on how to identify students whose voices may be absent from the conversation and strategies for encouraging these students to share with and engage with the group, especially students with ID. As a step forward in shifting the balance from a helper-helpee dynamic to a more reciprocal relationship with other youth leaders in the school, professional development for staff and students should focus on respecting the range of perspectives offered by all students, so as to create an environment that is truly inclusive.

Promote the UCS program as a youth development program that uses the platform of inclusion to have positive developmental impacts in CASEL's five SEL domains and the "Five Cs" of positive youth development.

The positive developmental outcomes of the UCS program demonstrated in the Year 10 findings clearly suggest that the program goes beyond promoting a socially inclusive school environment and provides a pathway for improved SEL skills among middle and high school students. Specifically, students who participated in the UCS program reported experiencing positive developmental outcomes in the domains of social awareness and relationship skills. Given the growing recognition of the value of SEL skills for success in the classroom and beyond,[118] the apparent success of UCS as a natural facilitator of SEL skills presents it as a viable option for providing students with the opportunity to learn or enhance

[118] Jones & Bouffard, 2012

SEL skills outside of the classroom. This is particularly important for high school students, who face increasingly difficult developmental tasks and social demands, but for whom there is limited access to effective school-based SEL programming.[119] Because it provides opportunities to learn SEL skills in normative extracurricular activities like sports, clubs, and schoolwide assemblies/events, the UCS program may have a unique role to play in the SEL and positive youth development (PYD) fields.

A more deliberate approach to viewing PYD and SEL skills as realistic outcomes of participation in the UCS program is warranted. With both students and school staff feeling that the UCS program provides opportunities for SEL skill development, the annual evaluation elucidates a strong connection between the UCS program and the fields of SEL and PYD. Structural equation modeling demonstrated that the social interactions between students with and without ID fostered through all aspects of the UCS program are the key mechanism for improving students' SEL skills. By providing opportunities for students to get to know their peers with ID in collaborative, goal-oriented environments, the UCS program creates a space where PYD and SEL are outcomes of inclusive activities and interactions. The perspectives of staff and students in Year 10 provide compelling evidence that begins to demonstrate the ways in which the UCS program can facilitate skill development not only in the areas of social awareness and relationships skills, but also in self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making.

One way to support this deliberate approach to PYD and SEL is through resources for schools and State Programs and deliberate messaging aimed at schools and the general public that serve to reframe Special Olympics as not just a promoter of positive school climate and social inclusion but as an organization whose school-based programs have positive developmental impacts on all adolescents. Having adolescents with and without ID lead this charge and take this message and example out into the world will be most effective. On a more micro level, addressing the common view that Special Olympics is a Special Education program or a program that can only benefit students with ID begins with diversifying the leadership structure for the UCS program within schools. With just 41% of schools utilizing a Leadership Team in Year 10, the majority of schools have yet to bring in a group of stakeholders from across the school community (e.g., special education, general education, administrators, and students) to collaborate and work together to implement the UCS program. Involving school staff from outside the Special Education department will introduce the UCS program and its myriad benefits to a wider audience. More than a decade of research and evaluation on the impact of the UCS program demonstrate the impacts are far greater and far more widespread within schools and communities than just Special Education. As a CASEL report recently revealed, over three-quarters of high school graduates felt as though their high school could have done a better job helping them develop their SEL skills.[120] The Year 10 findings help position the UCS program as a new, and unique, way for schools to meet the challenge of setting their students up for post-secondary success.

[119] Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based university interventions. *Child Development, 81*(1), 405-432.
[120] DePaoli, J. L., Atwell, M. N., Bridgeland, J. M. & Shriver, T. (2018). Respected: Perspectives of youth on high school & social and emotional learning.

Expand the reach of the UCS program in schools through efforts to engage students who are not actively participating in school activities, particularly students with lower academic grades and little peer/teacher support.

As the annual evaluation continues to build a body of evidence supporting the positive impacts of the UCS program, it has become increasingly clear that these benefits may be maximized for the students who are not actively participating in school activities (i.e., disengaged students). As the Year 10 findings revealed, middle and high school students who participated in the UCS program reported higher academic grades, higher levels of grit/perseverance, and higher levels of social support from peers and teachers compared to non-participants. Moreover, interviews with students and school staff revealed an overwhelming sense of belonging, togetherness, and unity within the UCS program that helped students feel part of a community. For disengaged students, this type of social support might elude them elsewhere in the school, but the UCS program seems a natural place where they could have the opportunity for connection and engagement with peers and adults. In fact, there is preliminary evidence that the UCS program can fulfill this role in examining high school freshmen in Year 10. Results from the *Student Experience Survey* found that freshmen who were not involved in any extracurricular activities besides the UCS program (i.e., "fringe students") felt supported by their teachers and peers. Of these freshmen, 91% noted they had a friend at school who cared about them, and 85% believed they had a friend at school who would help them through a hard time. These students also felt support from teachers. In particular, 89% believed there was a teacher at school who would listen to them and believed in their success. As highlighted in both survey and interview data, the UCS program creates a positive feedback loop for students—it promotes feelings of support among students, which, in turn, increases students' level of engagement in both the program and the school.

Evidence from the Year 10 evaluation suggests that some school staff may already be beginning to see the value of bringing an inclusive program like the UCS program to these "fringe students," where the majority of Unified Sports coaches (52%) and Unified Club advisors (59%) who targeted certain students to join the program reported these students were the ones not involved in other school activities. But Unified Sports and Unified Club are not the only promising aspects of the UCS program for engaging disengaged students. There are many aspects of the UCS program that make it a viable option for helping fringe students feel more connected to their school, which is important because students' sense of belonging has been found to positively correlate with their academic motivation and their persistence in schoolwork, especially among students at risk of school dropout.[121] Examining effective dropout prevention programs highlights many positive features of the UCS program that position it as a program that could support disengaged students, such as its real world/real life experiences in normative extracurricular settings and its opportunities for leadership and decision-making.[122] Moreover, the UCS

[121] Goodenow, C., & Grady, K. E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *Journal of Experimental Education, 62*(1), 60-71. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00220973.1993.9943831

[122] Dary, T., Pickeral, T., Shumer, R., & Williams, A. (2016). *Weaving student engagement into the core practices of schools: A National Dropout Prevention Center/Network position paper*. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.

program leads to friendships between participants (including, but not limited to, friendships between students with and without ID), and research suggests that school-oriented friendship networks reduce the risk of dropout.[123] Importantly, the UCS program not only impacts students on an individual level but also creates a positive school culture and climate, and interventions that both increase engagement for the individual student and impact the ecological context of the student (i.e., the school) are more effective than programs that focus on effecting change in the student alone.[124,125]

Seeing how the UCS program may be able to support disengaged students to feel more connected to their school, which has clear short- and long-term benefits for such students, warrants a targeted effort to attract these fringe students to the UCS program. As evidenced from the Year 10 findings, Unified Sports coaches and Unified Club advisors have already begun this important work, but there are many more coaches and advisors who can reach out to the students on the margins of their school community. Sharing best practices and other resources and professional development/training in this area will help school staff feel more confident in their outreach. Schools can also examine the feasibility of giving academic credit or extra credit to students for participating in the program, which may attract disengaged students to join as these might also be the students who are struggling to stay afloat academically and would benefit from such incentives. Likely, engaging disengaged students will be an individual process that varies from school to school depending on their student population and needs, and how Special Olympics can support them in that work will vary from state to state. What is clear is that the benefits of the UCS program for this population of students, along with the myriad benefits of the program that have been documented over the last decade, is now another tool Special Olympics has to reach and engage 25,000 schools by 2025.

[123] Ream, R. K., & Rumberger, R. W. (2008). Student Engagement, Peer Social Capital, and School Dropout Among Mexican American and Non-Latino White Students. *Sociology of Education, 81*(2), 109–139. https://doi.org/10.1177/003804070808100201

[124] Lehr, C. A., Hansen, A., Sinclair, M. F., & Christenson, S. L. (2003). Moving Beyond Dropout Towards School Completion: An Integrative Review of Data-Based Interventions. *School Psychology Review, 32*(3), 342-364.

[125] Prevatt, F., & Kelly, F. D. (2003). Dropping out of school: A review of intervention programs. *Journal of School Psychology, 41*(5), 377-395. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0022-4405(03)00087-6

VII. Appendix A: Data Tables

Table A1. Number of participants in the Year 10 evaluation

Participants	Survey	Interview
Liaison	2,822	3
School Staff	*	27
Parents	*	12
Middle School Students	1,557	*
Students with ID	*	*
Students without ID	1,557	*
High School Students	824	51
Students with ID	*	20
Students without ID	824	31
Matched Middle School/High School Students	133	*

** This methodology was not used with these participants.*

Table A2. *Liaison Survey* response rate, by State Program

State Program	Number of Schools[1]	Surveys Completed[2]	Response Rate
Alaska	61	14	23%
Arizona	133	78	59%
Arkansas	76	27	36%
Colorado	193	42	22%
Connecticut	73	61	84%
Delaware	67	50	75%
District of Columbia	17	17	100%
Florida	156	91	58%
Hawaii	44	36	82%
Idaho	20	8	40%
Illinois	160	88	55%
Indiana	298	169	57%
Iowa	39	39	100%
Kansas	23	17	74%
Kentucky	56	26	46%
Louisiana	98	27	28%
Maine	78	46	59%
Maryland	236	64	27%
Massachusetts	117	65	56%
Michigan	160	92	58%
Minnesota	41	36	88%
Mississippi	11	10	91%
Missouri	191	35	18%
Montana	61	48	79%
Nebraska	94	62	66%
Nevada	52	28	54%
New Hampshire	72	40	56%
New Jersey	120	83	69%
New Mexico	24	14	58%
New York	151	109	72%
North Carolina	241	197	82%
North Dakota	9	2	22%
Northern California	180	132	73%
Ohio	28	21	75%
Oklahoma	58	41	71%
Oregon	56	46	82%
Pennsylvania	113	112	99%
Rhode Island	78	64	82%
South Carolina	236	150	64%
South Dakota	20	8	40%
Southern California	79	56	71%
Texas	109	91	83%
Utah	16	6	38%
Vermont	67	44	66%
Virginia	384	198	52%
Washington	162	89	55%
Wisconsin	49	34	69%
Wyoming	23	9	39%
ALL	4830	2822	58%

[1] Number of schools does not include duplicate schools, schools that reported not implementing the UCS program, or schools that closed/merged.

[2] Surveys completed takes into account only liaisons who satisfactorily completed the survey. Partial responses were not counted.

Table A3. School level, by State Program

State Program	Completed Surveys	Preschool/ Elementary	Middle	High	Other
Alaska	14	5 (36%)	1 (7%)	7 (50%)	1 (7%)
Arizona	78	23 (29%)	3 (4%)	50 (64%)	2 (3%)
Arkansas	27	13 (48%)	2 (8%)	9 (33%)	3 (11%)
Colorado	42	11 (26%)	9 (21%)	22 (53%)	--
Connecticut	61	1 (2%)	21 (34%)	37 (61%)	2 (3%)
Delaware	50	24 (48%)	10 (20%)	15 (30%)	1 (2%)
District of Columbia	17	8 (47%)	2 (12%)	6 (35%)	1 (6%)
Florida	91	15 (17%)	18 (20%)	55 (60%)	3 (3%)
Hawaii	36	8 (22%)	8 (22%)	18 (50%)	2 (6%)
Idaho	8	--	2 (25%)	5 (63%)	1 (12%)
Illinois	88	28 (32%)	23 (26%)	36 (41%)	1 (1%)
Indiana	169	20 (12%)	19 (11%)	121 (72%)	9 (5%)
Iowa	39	2 (5%)	20 (51%)	17 (44%)	--
Kansas	17	--	1 (6%)	15 (88%)	1 (6%)
Kentucky	26	1 (4%)	2 (8%)	23 (88%)	--
Louisiana	27	7 (26%)	7 (26%)	11 (41%)	2 (7%)
Maine	46	2 (4%)	3 (7%)	41 (89%)	--
Maryland	64	4 (6%)	6 (9%)	54 (85%)	--
Massachusetts	65	1 (1%)	3 (5%)	59 (91%)	2 (3%)
Michigan	92	31 (34%)	23 (25%)	34 (37%)	4 (4%)
Minnesota	36	4 (11%)	8 (22%)	18 (50%)	6 (17%)
Mississippi	10	3 (30%)	1 (10%)	5 (50%)	1 (10%)
Missouri	35	16 (46%)	2 (6%)	11 (31%)	6 (17%)
Montana	48	18 (37%)	9 (19%)	14 (29%)	7 (15%)
Nebraska	62	21 (34%)	9 (15%)	23 (37%)	9 (14%)
Nevada	28	11 (39%)	6 (22%)	11 (39%)	--
New Hampshire	40	--	7 (18%)	32 (80%)	1 (2%)
New Jersey	83	24 (29%)	14 (17%)	45 (54%)	--
New Mexico	14	3 (21%)	6 (43%)	5 (36%)	--
New York	109	5 (5%)	1 (1%)	67 (61%)	36 (33%)
North Carolina	197	50 (25%)	52 (26%)	94 (48%)	1 (1%)
North Dakota	2	--	--	2 (100%)	--
Northern California	132	47 (36%)	15 (11%)	69 (52%)	1 (1%)
Ohio	21	8 (38%)	1 (5%)	11 (52%)	1 (5%)
Oklahoma	41	8 (20%)	10 (24%)	15 (37%)	8 (19%)
Oregon	46	3 (7%)	8 (17%)	35 (76%)	--
Pennsylvania	112	5 (5%)	1 (1%)	91 (81%)	15 (13%)
Rhode Island	64	12 (19%)	22 (34%)	29 (45%)	1 (2%)
South Carolina	150	62 (41%)	37 (25%)	49 (33%)	2 (1%)
South Dakota	8	2 (25%)	2 (25%)	2 (25%)	2 (25%)
Southern California	56	9 (16%)	10 (18%)	36 (64%)	1 (2%)
Texas	91	31 (34%)	29 (32%)	28 (31%)	3 (3%)
Utah	6	--	--	6 (100%)	--
Vermont	44	15 (34%)	5 (11%)	21 (48%)	3 (7%)
Virginia	198	111 (56%)	25 (13%)	60 (30%)	2 (1%)
Washington	89	4 (4%)	14 (16%)	70 (79%)	1 (1%)
Wisconsin	34	6 (17%)	5 (15%)	22 (65%)	1 (3%)
Wyoming	9	2 (22%)	2 (22%)	5 (56%)	--
ALL	2822	684 (24%)	484 (17%)	1484 (53%)	161 (6%)

Table A4. Liaison demographics

Demographic Characteristics	Percent of Liaisons (n=2,723)
Position within school	
Special Education Teacher	50%
Administrator	16%
General Education Teacher	7%
Physical Education Teacher	6%
Adapted Physical Education Teacher	3%
Special Education Aide	3%
School Psychologist/Counselor/Social Worker	2%
Other position not specified	13%
Number of years as liaison	
0-1 years	31%
2 years	24%
3 years	16%
4 years	10%
5 years or more	19%

Table A5. Demographics of schools in Year 10

Variable	Percentage of schools[1]
US Region[2]	
Northeast	22%
Midwest	21%
South	35%
West	22%
Locale	
Urban	24%
Suburban	44%
Rural	32%
Title I[3]	56%
School Level	
Preschool/Elementary	24%
Middle	17%
High	54%
Student Enrollment	
<500	23%
501-1,000	38%
1,001-1,500	18%
1,501-2,000	11%
More than 2,000	10%
Students with ID	
1-10	19%
11-20	25%
21-30	20%
31-50	17%
51-100	11%
More than 100	8%
Students receiving free/reduced lunch[3]	
0%-25%	23%
26%-50%	28%
51%-75%	22%
76%-100%	28%
Students of racial/ethnic minority[3]	
0%-25%	47%
26%-50%	22%
51%-75%	16%
76%-100%	15%

[1] Note: Percentages in table may not add to 100% due to "other" and "don't know" responses.

[2] US Regions are taken from the US Census Bureau.

[3] This percentage excludes liaisons who responded "don't know" to the question.

Table A6. Student demographics

Demographic Characteristics	Middle School Percent of Students (n=1,557)	High School Percent of Students (n=824)
Gender		
Male	48%	51%
Female	52%	49%
Grade		
6th	24%	--
7th	39%	--
8th	37%	--
9th	--	23%
10th	--	31%
11th	--	26%
12th	--	20%
Race		
White	68%	89%
Hispanic or Latino	39%	23%
Black or African American	20%	5%
American Indian or Alaska Native	12%	5%
Asian	8%	9%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	6%	2%

Table A7. Unified Champion Schools program activities, by implementation level

Activity	Unified Champion Schools n=1600	Developing Unified Schools n=525	Emerging Unified Schools n=697
Unified Sports programs[1]	100%	100%	27%
Unified Sports team	83%	79%	76%
Unified PE	72%	66%	58%
Young Athletes[2]	45%	26%	27%
Unified Fitness	23%	14%	6%
Unified Club	76%	25%	33%
Youth Summit	29%	5%	7%
R-word Campaign	78%	41%	38%
Fans in the Stands	58%	22%	19%
Unified Sports Day/Festival	29%	12%	16%
Fundraising	55%	23%	22%
Get Into It	17%	5%	9%
"It's Our School, Too" play	2%	<1%	1%
Young Athletes Volunteers	27%	9%	13%
Traditional Special Olympics Volunteers	67%	26%	31%

[1] Only schools that answered "yes" to implementing Unified Sports programs were asked whether they implemented the individual Unified Sports programs (Unified Sports teams, Unified PE, Young Athletes, and Unified Fitness). Thus, the percentage listed for these activities is out of schools that implemented Unified Sports programs (n = 2295).

[2] Because Young Athletes is a program for children ages 2 to 7, the "Young Athletes" row only includes responses from preschools/elementary schools.

Table A8. Level of Unified Champion Schools implementation, by State Program

State Program	Completed Surveys	Unified Champion Schools[1]	Developing Unified Schools[2]	Emerging Unified Schools[3]
Alaska	14	2 (14%)	5 (36%)	7 (50%)
Arizona	78	35 (45%)	18 (23%)	25 (32%)
Arkansas	27	12 (44%)	10 (37%)	5 (19%)
Colorado	42	18 (43%)	15 (36%)	9 (21%)
Connecticut	61	37 (61%)	21 (34%)	3 (5%)
Delaware	50	22 (44%)	21 (42%)	7 (14%)
District of Columbia	17	7 (41%)	5 (30%)	5 (29%)
Florida	91	54 (59%)	25 (28%)	12 (13%)
Hawaii	36	12 (33%)	13 (36%)	11 (31%)
Idaho	8	1 (12%)	3 (38%)	4 (50%)
Illinois	88	39 (44%)	26 (30%)	23 (26%)
Indiana	169	69 (41%)	50 (30%)	50 (29%)
Iowa	39	18 (46%)	8 (21%)	13 (33%)
Kansas	17	5 (29%)	10 (59%)	2 (12%)
Kentucky	26	20 (77%)	3 (12%)	3 (11%)
Louisiana	27	6 (22%)	5 (19%)	16 (59%)
Maine	46	14 (30%)	26 (57%)	6 (13%)
Maryland	64	10 (16%)	27 (42%)	27 (42%)
Massachusetts	65	45 (69%)	12 (19%)	8 (12%)
Michigan	92	50 (54%)	22 (24%)	20 (22%)
Minnesota	36	22 (61%)	6 (17%)	8 (22%)
Mississippi	10	6 (60%)	3 (30%)	1 (10%)
Missouri	35	4 (11%)	8 (23%)	23 (66%)
Montana	48	28 (58%)	10 (21%)	10 (21%)
Nebraska	62	19 (31%)	23 (37%)	20 (32%)
Nevada	28	12 (43%)	10 (36%)	6 (21%)
New Hampshire	40	16 (50%)	17 (43%)	7 (17%)
New Jersey	83	56 (67%)	9 (11%)	18 (22%)
New Mexico	14	5 (36%)	6 (43%)	3 (21%)
New York	109	69 (63%)	23 (21%)	17 (16%)
North Carolina	197	93 (47%)	37 (19%)	67 (34%)
North Dakota	2	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	--
Northern California	132	40 (30%)	56 (43%)	36 (27%)
Ohio	21	12 (57%)	7 (33%)	2 (10%)
Oklahoma	41	32 (78%)	6 (15%)	3 (7%)
Oregon	46	25 (54%)	14 (31%)	7 (15%)
Pennsylvania	112	74 (66%)	25 (22%)	13 (12%)
Rhode Island	64	27 (42%)	24 (38%)	13 (20%)
South Carolina	150	59 (40%)	29 (19%)	62 (41%)
South Dakota	8	3 (38%)	4 (50%)	1 (12%)
Southern California	56	44 (79%)	7 (12%)	5 (9%)
Texas	91	51 (56%)	20 (22%)	20 (22%)
Utah	6	1 (17%)	3 (50%)	2 (33%)
Vermont	44	11 (25%)	18 (41%)	15 (34%)
Virginia	198	44 (22%)	43 (22%)	111 (56%)
Washington	89	33 (37%)	27 (30%)	29 (33%)
Wisconsin	34	10 (29%)	3 (9%)	21 (62%)
Wyoming	9	2 (22%)	3 (33%)	4 (45%)
ALL	2822	1275 (45%)	767 (27%)	780 (28%)

[1] Unified Champion Schools implemented 3 components.

[2] Developing Unified Champion Schools implemented 2 components (one of which had to be Inclusive Sports).

[3] Emerging Unified Champion Schools implemented either 2 components (neither of which was Inclusive Sports), 1 component, or 0 components.

Table A9. Percentage of schools implementing each activity as part of their Unified Champion Schools program, by State Program

State Program	Completed Surveys	Unified Sports program	Unified Sports team[1]	Unified PE[1]	Young Athletes[1,2]	Unified Fitness[1]	Unified Club	Youth Summit
Alaska	14	79%	82%	82%	25%	18%	39%	7%
Arizona	78	84%	91%	67%	27%	18%	59%	18%
Arkansas	27	93%	64%	80%	29%	21%	50%	7%
Colorado	42	86%	83%	77%	14%	24%	51%	19%
Connecticut	61	100%	98%	62%	50%	13%	70%	48%
Delaware	50	88%	86%	85%	55%	5%	45%	20%
District of Columbia	17	88%	80%	86%	75%	39%	65%	12%
Florida	91	96%	90%	68%	44%	27%	67%	10%
Hawaii	36	86%	93%	55%	14%	28%	44%	31%
Idaho	8	75%	83%	67%	100%	83%	43%	13%
Illinois	88	82%	58%	83%	71%	17%	57%	30%
Indiana	169	81%	79%	68%	19%	16%	52%	5%
Iowa	39	68%	60%	76%	100%	17%	67%	15%
Kansas	17	94%	100%	69%	*	7%	40%	6%
Kentucky	26	89%	100%	65%	--	17%	77%	46%
Louisiana	27	58%	53%	87%	33%	29%	39%	4%
Maine	46	96%	96%	73%	50%	30%	28%	9%
Maryland	64	94%	97%	59%	100%	4%	29%	5%
Massachusetts	65	94%	90%	65%	--	21%	72%	29%
Michigan	92	85%	80%	66%	32%	23%	74%	8%
Minnesota	36	81%	83%	57%	50%	7%	77%	33%
Mississippi	10	90%	100%	100%	75%	22%	100%	--
Missouri	35	51%	80%	87%	17%	7%	15%	6%
Montana	48	84%	61%	84%	33%	24%	61%	23%
Nebraska	62	90%	74%	75%	19%	24%	47%	10%
Nevada	28	89%	77%	92%	60%	30%	64%	--
New Hampshire	40	95%	97%	67%	*	30%	57%	20%
New Jersey	83	83%	81%	70%	33%	23%	91%	40%
New Mexico	14	100%	79%	36%	33%	15%	39%	--
New York	109	98%	99%	57%	9%	14%	59%	57%
North Carolina	197	73%	58%	83%	70%	20%	70%	6%
North Dakota	2	100	100	--	*	--	50%	--
Northern California	132	86%	79%	66%	37%	19%	42%	5%
Ohio	21	95%	95%	63%	38%	21%	57%	14%
Oklahoma	41	95%	97%	79%	54%	25%	69%	61%
Oregon	46	91%	95%	68%	33%	1400%	54%	58%
Pennsylvania	112	96%	98%	52%	6%	18%	71%	57%
Rhode Island	64	95%	90%	71%	60%	6%	53%	16%
South Carolina	150	65%	56%	80%	60%	29%	62%	17%
South Dakota	8	88%	71%	86%	--	43%	57%	--
Southern California	56	96%	85%	59%	25%	20%	85%	14%
Texas	91	80%	63%	90%	32%	42%	79%	3%
Utah	6	100%	100%	40%	*	80%	17%	17%
Vermont	44	84%	94%	59%	33%	20%	27%	16%
Virginia	198	59%	64%	74%	24%	18%	30%	7%
Washington	89	90%	100%	61%	50%	18%	42%	19%
Wisconsin	34	41%	69%	54%	67%	33%	73%	24%
Wyoming	9	88%	100%	71%	--	29%	25%	--
ALL	**2822**	**83%**	**82%**	**70%**	**38%**	**20%**	**54%**	**19%**

[1] Only schools that answered "yes" to implementing Unified Sports programs were asked whether they implemented the individual Unified Sports programs (Unified Sports teams, Unified PE, Young Athletes, and Unified Fitness). Thus, the percentage listed for these activities is out of schools that implemented Unified Sports programs (n = 2295).

[2] Because Young Athletes is a program for children ages 2 to 7, the "Young Athletes Participants" column only includes responses from preschools/elementary schools.

* These State Programs did not have any preschools/elementary schools that responded to the *Liaison Survey* indicate they implemented the Unified Champion Schools program in Year 10 (see Appendix A: Table 3 for the response rate of preschools/elementary schools in each State Program).

Table A9 Cont. Percentage of schools implementing each activity as part of their Unified Champion Schools program, by State Program

State Program	Completed Surveys	R-word Campaign	Fans in the Stands	Unified Sports Day/ Festival	Fundraising events	*Get Into It*	"It's Our School, Too" play	Young Athletes Program Volunteers	Traditional Special Olympics Volunteers
Alaska	14	8%	--	8%	23%	--	--	23%	46%
Arizona	78	68%	30%	25%	47%	15%	3%	9%	46%
Arkansas	27	59%	36%	12%	46%	19%	--	35%	52%
Colorado	42	78%	24%	11%	38%	11%	--	11%	38%
Connecticut	61	42%	62%	18%	51%	8%	4%	18%	53%
Delaware	50	92%	26%	4%	34%	17%	--	29%	47%
District of Columbia	17	59%	21%	19%	31%	6%	--	19%	31%
Florida	91	93%	44%	25%	29%	17%	1%	17%	70%
Hawaii	36	67%	27%	15%	41%	24%	--	15%	29%
Idaho	8	14%	14%	14%	38%	--	--	--	14%
Illinois	88	71%	46%	25%	51%	16%	2%	26%	62%
Indiana	169	60%	38%	30%	72%	5%	1%	20%	46%
Iowa	39	100%	24%	42%	39%	3%	--	8%	61%
Kansas	17	59%	13%	--	44%	7%	7%	--	40%
Kentucky	26	89%	44%	9%	52%	13%	--	9%	56%
Louisiana	27	33%	20%	24%	20%	--	--	16%	52%
Maine	46	48%	63%	13%	48%	13%	--	17%	57%
Maryland	64	26%	9%	9%	31%	5%	2%	14%	35%
Massachusetts	65	62%	59%	27%	65%	19%	--	25%	63%
Michigan	92	78%	22%	32%	34%	16%	--	10%	47%
Minnesota	36	74%	41%	11%	72%	9%	3%	28%	50%
Mississippi	10	70%	30%	11%	40%	10%	--	40%	60%
Missouri	35	24%	30%	6%	35%	18%	--	12%	49%
Montana	48	85%	83%	25%	64%	9%	5%	28%	76%
Nebraska	62	42%	17%	25%	39%	13%	2%	20%	30%
Nevada	28	76%	38%	53%	29%	5%	--	20%	41%
New Hampshire	40	17%	47%	22%	57%	6%	9%	12%	58%
New Jersey	83	69%	44%	43%	47%	13%	3%	19%	40%
New Mexico	14	69%	50%	39%	31%	8%	--	--	50%
New York	109	58%	58%	8%	38%	7%	--	24%	55%
North Carolina	197	75%	43%	20%	31%	13%	1%	26%	69%
North Dakota	2	100%	--	--	100%	--	--	--	50%
Northern California	132	48%	50%	35%	18%	12%	3%	23%	53%
Ohio	21	91%	48%	11%	57%	15%	--	25%	71%
Oklahoma	41	74%	71%	26%	85%	16%	--	45%	85%
Oregon	46	67%	41%	13%	60%	5%	--	10%	26%
Pennsylvania	112	76%	51%	12%	49%	10%	1%	12%	42%
Rhode Island	64	67%	67%	22%	44%	6%	--	11%	42%
South Carolina	150	54%	53%	29%	37%	28%	1%	37%	69%
South Dakota	8	100%	50%	17%	71%	14	--	29%	63%
Southern California	56	76%	57%	46%	34%	24%	--	15%	48%
Texas	91	72%	50%	37%	35%	36%	1%	23%	53%
Utah	6	50%	17%	17%	--	--	--	--	17
Vermont	44	45%	35%	10%	45%	8%	--	19%	39%
Virginia	198	36%	34%	23%	14%	8%	2%	27%	42%
Washington	89	37%	45%	11%	40%	9%	1%	10%	30%
Wisconsin	34	69%	32%	17%	59%	10%	--	16%	45%
Wyoming	9	63%	25%	88%	25%	--	--	25%	62%
ALL	**2822**	**60%**	**40%**	**21%**	**39%**	**12%**	**1%**	**19%**	**49%**

VIII. Appendix B: Special Olympics Year 10 Guidelines

THE UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS PROGRAM

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program is aimed at promoting social inclusion through intentionally planned and implemented activities affecting system-wide change. With sports as the foundation, the three-component model offers a unique combination of activities that equip young people with tools and training to create sports, classrooms, and school climates of acceptance. These are school climates where students with disabilities feel welcome and are routinely included in, and feel a part of, all activities, opportunities, and functions.

UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS COMPONENTS

Inclusive Sports

A fully-inclusive sports or fitness program that combines an approximately equal number of students with and without intellectual disabilities. Examples include such things as Interscholastic Unified Sports, Unified PE, Unified Intramurals, or Young Athletes. These activities occur throughout the school year with the support of an adult coach and include opportunities for competition.

Inclusive Youth Leadership

Students with and without intellectual disabilities work to lead awareness, Unified Sports, advocacy, inclusion, and other Special Olympics activities throughout the school year. Examples include such things as Unified Clubs, inclusive student councils, or similar types of inclusive student groups. The clubs are supported by an adult liaison and offer leadership opportunities and/or training for students with and without disabilities.

Whole School Engagement

These awareness and education activities promote inclusion and reach the majority of the school population. Examples include such things as Spread the Word to End the Word (R-word) Campaigns, Pep Rallies or “Fans in the Stands” for Unified Sports teams, Respect Campaigns, or student fundraising. Ideally students with and without disabilities are involved with planning and leading awareness events with the support of an adult in the school.

UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOL

These schools implement activities from all three Unified Champion Schools program components (Inclusive Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, Whole School Engagement). Through various levels of intensity, the combination of these three components creates the maximum impact within a school.

DEVELOPING UNIFIED SCHOOL

These schools are on their way to becoming full-implementation Unified Champion Schools. Developing Unified schools implement activities from two out of three program components (Inclusive Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, Whole School Engagement), and Inclusive Sports must be one of the two

components implemented. These schools are expected to become full-implementation Unified Champion Schools within 3 years.

NATIONAL BANNER SCHOOL

These schools are nationally recognized for having exemplary Unified Champion Schools programs. To be recognized as a National Banner School, schools must implement Unified Sports in at least two seasons out of the year that are competitive and recognized at the same level as other school activities and coached by an adult who has received Special Olympics Unified Sports training. These schools must also implement Inclusive Youth Leadership with a Unified Club that meets at least once per month and is supervised by an adult liaison, similar to other school activities. National Banner Schools must implement two Whole School Engagement activities per year that are planned by both students with and without ID. Finally, National Banner Schools must be self-sustainable or have a plan in place to sustain each of the three components in the future.

UNIFIED SPORTS TEAM MODELS

Competitive. The Unified Sports Competitive model combines Athletes (individuals with ID) and Partners (individuals without ID) as teammates on sport teams for training and competition. Two things differentiate the Competitive Unified Sports model from the other two models: 1) all Athletes and Partners on a Unified Sports Competitive team must have attained the necessary sport-specific skills and tactics to compete without modification of the current Special Olympics Official Sports Rules;[126] and 2) teams that participate in this model may be eligible for advancement to Regional and World Games. A Unified Sports team is an inclusive sports program with approximately equal numbers of Athletes and Partners.

Player Development. The Unified Sports Player Development model combines approximately equal numbers of Athletes and Partners as teammates on sports teams for training and competition. What differentiates Unified Sports Player Development from the other two models is: 1) teammates are not required to be of similar abilities, and 2) 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.

Recreation. Unified Sports Recreation consists of inclusive recreational sports opportunities for Special Olympics Athletes and Partners. This model does not follow any prescribed training, competition, or team composition requirements established by Special Olympics. These 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 (including Unified Sports Experiences), or ongoing activities such as physical education classes and intramurals.

[126] Special Olympics Official Sports Rules: https://media.specialolympics.org/resources/sports-essentials/general/Sports-Rules-Article-1-2017.pdf?_ga=2.128522444.1795695031.1544735922-1605599380.1544735922

IX. Appendix C: Student Experience Survey Selection Procedures and Survey Measures

Student Experience Survey Selection Procedures

Selection of Schools: School selection in Year 10 was based on the dual focus of examining the impact of the UCS program at the middle and high school levels as well as examining the transition from middle school to high school. Because of the transition focus, the evaluation team reached out to the same middle and high schools that participated in the Year 9 *Student Experience Survey*. In the fall of 2017, the evaluation team contacted six middle schools and four high schools to participate in the Year 10 *Student Experience Survey*. All six of the middle schools and two of the high schools agreed to participate. The other two high schools were not able to participate because of school size, administrator buy-in, and scheduling difficulties. One school had difficulties due to a structural change at the school—an additional grade was added to the high school. In addition to these eight schools, the Year 10 *Student Experience Survey* also included three schools (two middle schools and one high school) in partnership with a State Special Olympics Program that was interested in collaborating with the evaluation team to conduct a research and evaluation project on UCS schools in their state. In total, the *Student Experience Survey* was administered in 11 schools (eight middle schools and three high schools) between March 2018 and May 2018.

Selection of Students: The evaluation team carried out student selection procedures to ensure the selection of random and representative samples of 20-25% of the student body from each school. The evaluation team worked with liaisons and school administrators to obtain a list of all classes offered in the spring within a required (all students in all grades), year-round, academic subject (e.g., English, Social Studies/History), or all classes taught during one period of the school day (e.g., homeroom, all academic 4th period classes) if the school operated on block or semester scheduling. These lists contained class enrollment sizes and grade distributions within each class, which were needed for selection procedures. In total, 1,557 middle school students and 824 high school students participated in the *Student Experience Survey*.

Survey Procedures: Schools were able to choose whether to administer the *Student Experience Survey* online via Qualtrics or as a hardcopy paper-and-pencil version. Half of the schools (five middle schools and one high school) chose to administer the survey online. These schools received a packet, available via mail or e-mail according to the school's preference, including passive parental consent forms (distributed the week prior to the survey) and an instructional letter to teachers. The liaisons at these schools were provided with a unique survey link for the school prior to the survey, which was then distributed to the teachers of the selected classrooms. After the survey was administered in all selected classrooms at a given school, the survey link was closed.

Schools that chose to administer a paper-and-pencil survey to students received these materials in the mail one week prior to the survey administration date set by the school. The liaison received an

instructional letter, passive parental consent forms (distributed the week prior to the survey), the *Student Experience Survey* (packaged per class, along with an instructional letter to teachers), number two pencils to ensure pens were not used, and return mailing materials. Students were told to place completed surveys in the provided envelope on their teacher's desk, which was sealed after survey completion. For all classrooms, the teacher was asked to fill out information on the front of the envelope indicating the name of the teacher, the name of the class, the number of students enrolled in the class, the number of students who completed the survey based on attendance and parent permission, and any pertinent notes about survey distribution and completion. The liaison collected these sealed envelopes from all of the teachers and mailed them back to the evaluation team using the provided pre-paid return mailing materials. The surveys were administered to students at the end of the school year (March-May 2018). On average, the surveys were administered in 10 classrooms in middle schools and 16 classrooms in high schools.

Student Experience Survey Instruments

The end-of-year *Student Experience Survey* covered many areas. Both the middle school survey and the high school survey documented students' participation in UCS program activities (*Student Involvement Scale*) and the social and emotional gains they made in the UCS program (*Social and Emotional Learning Scale*), students' perceptions of their schools' climate as related to social inclusion (*Comprehensive School Climate Inventory Social Inclusion Subscale)* and their attitudes toward classroom inclusion (*Attitudes toward Classroom Inclusion Scale*), students' perseverance or "grit" (*Grit Scale*), social support available to students at their school (*Peer and School Support Scale*), students' academic grades (*Academic Achievement Scale*), the visibility of and students' social interactions with students with ID (*Student Social Interactions Scale*), students' friendships with students with ID (*Friendship Scale*), and their perceptions of the UCS program's impact on the school (*Perceived Impact on the School Scale*). The middle school survey documented students' inclination toward empathetic behavior (*Empathy Scale*), and the high school survey documented students' inclinations toward compassionate behavior (*Compassion Scale*). Different scales were used to assess empathetic and compassionate behavior in middle and high schools in alignment with the developmental appropriateness of the measures for these age groups. Descriptions of the individual scales that made up the student survey are provided below.

Student Involvement in Unified Champion Schools Program Activities Scale. To assess the involvement of students in UCS program activities, students were asked to indicate whether or not they participated in each of the activities that took place at the school (Unified Sports/PE, Unified Club, Unified Sports Day/Unified Festival, R-word Campaign, Fans in the Stands, and Fundraising). Students were also asked whether they participated in each activity the previous school year. Students who indicated participating in Unified Sports/PE or Unified Club answered follow-up questions about the nature and level of their participation in these activities, and all students answered questions about their interest in future involvement in these activities and their involvement in sports and clubs outside of the UCS program. Although scores could range from 0 to 6 on the *Student Involvement in Unified Champion Schools Program Activities Scale*, the number and type of initiatives implemented within their school limited the

number of initiatives in which students had the opportunity to take part. Thus, the range of scores differed by school and was based on the number of initiatives offered in the school, as reported by the liaison.

Attitudes toward Classroom Inclusion Scale. To measure students' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in classrooms with typically-developing students, a revised version of the *Attitudes toward Persons with an Intellectual Disability Questionnaire* (Rillotta & Nettelbeck, 2007) was employed[127]. The adapted scale consists of 10 items that assess the cognitive aspect of youth attitudes. Examples of questions include, "Do you think having students with intellectual disabilities in the class creates problems?" and, "Do you think students learn things from students with special needs?" Students responded on a 4-point scale, with response options including "Yes," "Probably Yes," "Probably No," and "No." Possible sum scores ranged from 10 to 40 (three items were reverse coded), with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes toward classroom inclusion. The coefficient alpha index for internal consistency is 0.85 in high schools and 0.81 in middle schools, indicating good reliability.

Comprehensive School Climate Inventory Social Inclusion Subscale. To measure students' perceptions of their school environment in terms of the social inclusion of students with ID, a revised version of the *Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) Social Inclusion Subscale* was employed.[128] Adaptations were made to align the language in the scale with the language used throughout the survey (e.g., changing "students in special education" to "students with intellectual disabilities"), and items that did not pertain directly to students (e.g., asking students about teachers' perceptions) were removed. The revised version included 8 items. Students rated their agreement with statements such as, "In my school, after-school activities such as sports and clubs include both students with and without intellectual disabilities," and, "My school provides opportunities for both students with and without intellectual disabilities to volunteer or do community service," on a 4-point scale, including "Yes," "Probably Yes," "Probably No," and "No." Possible sum scores ranged from 8 to 32, and the coefficient alpha index for internal consistency was 0.87 in high schools and 0.81 in middle schools.

Grit Scale. To measure students' grit, the *Grit Scale* was utilized. This scale was adapted from two existing scales related to grit—the original *Short Grit Scale* (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) and a later adaptation (Malin et al., 2017).[129] The revised version included 7 items. Students rated how often they did things such as "finished whatever I started" and "kept working hard even if I felt like quitting" on a 4-point scale, including "Never," "Sometimes," "Often," and "Always." Possible sum scores ranged from 7

[127] Rillotta, F. & Nettelbeck, T. (2007). Effects of an awareness program on attitudes of students without an intellectual disability towards persons with an intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability, 32*(1), 19-27.
[128] Thapa, 2015
[129] Malin, H., Liauw, I., & Damon, W. (2017). Purpose and character development in early adolescence. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 46(6), 1200-1215.
Duckworth, A. L., & Quinn, P. D. (2009). Development and validation of the Short Grit Scale (GRIT–S). *Journal of personality assessment*, 91(2), 166-174.

to 28, and the coefficient alpha index for internal consistency was 0.90 in high schools and 0.85 in middle schools.

Peer and School Support Scale. To assess students' social support at their school, a revised version of the *Social and Emotional Health Scale* was used (Furlong et al., 2014).[130] The revised version included 6 items taken from the *Peer Support* and *School Support* subscales. Students rated their agreement with statements such as, "I have a friend at my school who would help me if I was having a hard time," and, "There is a teacher or some other adult at my school who always wants me to do my best," on a 4-point scale, including "Yes," "Probably Yes," "Probably No," and "No." Possible sum scores ranged from 6 to 24, with higher scores indicating more social support at school. The coefficient alpha index for internal consistency was 0.84 in high schools and 0.75 in middle schools.

Empathy Scale. To measure middle school students' empathy, a revised version of the *Children's Empathetic Attitudes Questionnaire* (Funk, Fox, Chan, & Curtiss, 2008) was employed[131]. The revised version removed six items from the original scale because they were noted by the authors to contribute less to the psychometric properties than the rest of the items, and added two items from the *Student Prosocialness Scale*, which has been used in past evaluations at the high school level.[132] The revised version contained 14 items. Students rated how true they feel statements such as, "I understand how other kids feel," and, "I'm happy when the teacher says my friend did a good job," are for themselves on a 3-point scale, including "Never True," "Sometimes True," and "Always True." Possible sum scores ranged from 14 to 42, with higher scores indicating more empathetic tendencies. The coefficient alpha index for internal consistency was 0.84.

Compassion Scale. To measure high school students' compassion, a revised version of the *Compassion Scale* was used (Malin et al., 2017).[133] The revised version included five items and students rated themselves on a 4-point scale. The scale wording differed slightly among the items to match item wording. Students rated themselves on questions such as, "If you see someone you do not know who needs help, how willing would you be to help them?" responding that they were "Not At All Willing," "A Little Willing," "Somewhat Willing," or "Very Willing." Possible sum scores ranged from 5 to 20, with higher scores indicating greater compassion. The coefficient alpha index for internal consistency was 0.87.

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[130] Furlong, M. J., You, S., Renshaw, T. L., Smith, D. C., & O'Malley, M. D. (2014). Preliminary development and validation of the social and emotional health survey for secondary school students. *Social Indicators Research*, 117(3), 1011-1032.

[131] Funk, J., Fox, C., Chan, M., & Curtiss, K. (2008). The development of the Children's Empathic Attitudes Questionnaire using classical and Rasch analyses. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 29*, 187-196.

[132] The *Student Prosocialness Scale* was used in the Year 9 *Student Experience Survey*. For more details, see: Center for Social Development and Education. (2017). *The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Program: Year 9 Evaluation Report 2016-2017,* Page 106. Boston, MA: Jacobs, H.E., Osborne, K., Landis, K., Jang, Y., McDowell, E., & Siperstein, G. N.

[133] Malin, H., Liauw, I., & Damon, W. (2017). Purpose and character development in early adolescence. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, *46*(6), 1200-1215.

Student Social Interactions Scale. To measure the extent of social interactions of youth with their peers with disabilities, students were first asked about the visibility of students with disabilities in the school and then about their social interactions with them. Questions adapted from the *Behavioral Intentions Scale* (Siperstein, Parker, Norins Bardon, & Widaman, 2007) were used to assess youths' social interactions with their peers with disabilities in different settings.[134] Students who indicated that they saw students with disabilities in school were asked to indicate all the places they saw them (e.g., in the hallway, cafeteria, classes, extracurricular activities, etc.) and whether they socially interacted with them in these locations. Possible sum scores for visibility of students with disabilities ranged from 0 to 9, and possible sum scores for students' social interactions with students with disabilities ranged from 0 to 7, with higher scores indicating higher visibility and more frequent social interactions with students with disabilities.

Academic Achievement Scale. To measure students' level of academic achievement, the *Academic Achievement Scale* was employed (Lerner et al., 2005).[135] Students were asked to describe their academic grades, indicating whether they achieved, for example, "Mostly As" or "Mostly below Ds." Possible scores ranged from 0 to 7, with higher scores indicating higher academic achievement.

Friendship Scale. To measure whether the self-reported social interactions of youth with their peers with disabilities represent meaningful relationships in Year 10, the *Friendship Scale* was employed. This scale was developed and employed for the first time in Year 7 based on consultation and guidance from Dr. Barry Schneider,[136,137] who has extensive knowledge of and work in the field of peer relationships and friendships. The scale consists of statements such as, "I feel close to this person," "I would miss this person if we no longer attended the same school," and "I like many of the same things that this person likes." Students responded on a 4-point scale, with options including "Yes, Definitely," "Quite a Bit," "A little," and "Not at All." The scale had 10 items and a possible range of 10 to 40, with higher scores indicating a higher quality relationship between students with and without disabilities. The coefficient alpha index for internal consistency was 0.91 in high schools and 0.93 in middle schools.

School Impact Scale. To measure students' perceptions of the impact of the UCS program on their school, students were asked several questions about the extent to which the program impacted different areas of the school. The *School Impact Scale* contained 8 items. Students rated how much impact the UCS program had on areas like "reducing bullying and teasing," "creating a more inclusive school environment," and "raising awareness about students with intellectual disabilities in the school"

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[134] Siperstein et al., 2007

[135] Lerner, R. M., Lerner, J. V., Almerigi, J. B., Theokas, C., Phelps, E., Gestsdottir, S., ... & Smith, L. M. (2005). Positive youth development, participation in community youth development programs, and community contributions of fifth-grade adolescents: Findings from the first wave of the 4-H study of positive youth development. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 25(1), 17-71.

[136] Schneider, B. H. (2000). *Friends and enemies: Peer relations in childhood.* London, England: Arnold.

[137] Schneider, B. H., Lee, M.D., & Alvarez-Valdivia, I. (2011). Adolescent friendship bonds in cultures of connectedness. In Laursen, B., & Collins, W. A. (Eds.). *Relationship pathways: From adolescence to young adulthood* (pp. 114-134). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

using a 3-point scale, including "A Big Impact," "A Little Impact," or "No Impact." Possible sum scores ranged from 8 to 24, with higher scores indicating that students felt the UCS program had a bigger impact on their school. The coefficient alpha index for internal consistency was 0.91 in high schools and 0.90 in middle schools.

Washoe County Social and Emotional Learning Scale. To measure students' gains in social and emotional learning, a revised version of the *Washoe County Social and Emotional Learning Scale* (or *Washoe County SEL Scale*) was used (Davidson et al., 2018).[138,139] The scale was adapted to be shorter and to assess whether students had gotten better at certain social-emotional skills over time. The revised version included 11 items. Students rated whether and how much they got better at certain social-emotional skills, including "paying attention to my classmates' feelings," "working out disagreements when I'm in a group," and "welcoming someone I don't usually eat lunch with to eat lunch with me" on a 4-point scale, including "Got A Lot Better," "Got Somewhat Better," "Got A Little Better," and "Did Not Get Better." Possible sum scores ranged from 11 to 44, with higher scores indicating more improvement. The coefficient alpha index for internal consistency was 0.97 in high schools and 0.94 in middle schools.

Matched Student Experience Survey Selection Procedures

Selection of Schools: In Year 9, schools were selected based on criteria surrounding the transition from middle school to high school. The evaluation team collaborated with State SO Programs to identify school districts where at least one middle school and one high school were both full-implementation Unified Champion Schools with a Unified Champion School Leadership Team. The Year 9 evaluation collaborated with three middle school/high school pairs, focusing on the three middle schools. In the fall of 2017, the evaluation team reached out to the three high schools in these pairs. All three schools agreed to participate in the *Matched Student Experience Survey* between March 2018 and May 2018.

Selection of Students: In Year 9, middle school students who were going to high school the following year (i.e., 8th grade students in most middle schools and 9th grade students in one middle school) were given unique survey ID numbers. Students filled out a separate contact form with their name and survey ID number. In Year 10, school staff at the connected high school were given the names of students who had completed the survey in Year 9 and identified which students were now enrolled at the high school. These students were contacted to complete another survey. In total, 263 students were surveyed as middle school students in Year 9, and 133 were identified and surveyed again as high school students in Year 10.

[138] Davidson, L. A., Crowder, M. K., Gordon, R. A., Domitrovich, C. E., Brown, R. D., & Hayes, B. I. (2018). A continuous improvement approach to social and emotional competency measurement. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, *55*, 93-106.
[139] https://www.washoeschools.net/Page/10932

Survey Procedures: One week prior to the survey administration date set by the school, the liaison at each school received a mailing containing an instructional letter, passive parental consent forms (distributed the week prior to the survey), the *Matched Student Experience Survey* (packaged individually for each student, along with an instructional letter to teachers), number two pencils to ensure pens were not used, and return mailing materials. Students were pulled from their typical activities to complete the survey on a day and time chosen by the school. Students were told to place completed surveys in the provided envelope left with the teacher overseeing survey administration. This envelope was sealed and mailed them back to the evaluation team using the provided pre-paid return mailing materials. The surveys were administered to students at the end of the school year (March-May 2018).

Matched Student Experience Survey Instruments

The *Matched Student Experience Survey* was identical to the high school version of the Year 9 *Student Experience Survey*. The survey documented students' participation in Unified Champion Schools program activities (*Student Involvement Scale*) and the experiences they gained from the program (*Youth Experiences Survey*), students' perceptions of school social inclusion (*School Social Inclusion Scale*) and attitudes toward classroom inclusion (*Attitudes toward Classroom Inclusion Scale*), the visibility of and students' social interactions with students with ID (*Student Social Interactions Scale*), students' friendships with students with ID (*Friendship Scale*), students' inclinations toward prosocial behavior (*Prosocial Scale*), and their perceptions of the UCS program's impact on their school (*School Impact Scale*). For full descriptions of these scales, see Appendix C in the Year 9 Evaluation Report.[140]

[140] Center for Social Development and Education, 2017

X. Appendix D: School Factor Rationale

School Level

As in past evaluations, school level (elementary, middle, high) continued to be a factor explored in Year 10 to better understand how the UCS program is implemented across schools. Past evaluations have shown differences between elementary, middle, and high schools, highlighting the impact that students' developmental level can have on the ways that the UCS program is implemented. Thus, the Year 10 evaluation sought to further explore these differences. To do so, four school level categories were created from *Unified Champion Schools Liaison Survey* data:

- Elementary schools: primarily consisted of those schools containing grades between preschool and 5th grade, but also included schools with kindergarten through 8th grade combinations
- Middle schools: primarily consisted of those schools containing grades between 5th and 8th grade, but also included schools with 5th through 9th grade combinations
- High schools: primarily consisted of those schools containing grades between 9th and 12th grade, but also included 5th through 12th grade combinations and 9th grade through College combinations
- Other: any school where the grades spanned a wide range (e.g., Kindergarten through 12th grade, entire school districts, etc.)

Only elementary, middle, and high schools were considered when examining *Unified Schools Liaison Survey* data by school level.

Implementation of Core Components

As in past evaluations, the ways that schools implemented the three components of the UCS program were categorized in a standard way (i.e., "Unified Champion," "Developing Unified," and "Emerging" schools). These status designations continued to be a factor explored in Year 10 to better understand how schools implementing all three core UCS components differed from schools implementing fewer components. Past evaluations have shown differences among these three groups of schools. To make these designations, three category variables were created from *Unified Champion Schools Liaison Survey* data using SOI guidelines:

- Unified Champion Schools: schools that implemented all three core components (Inclusive Sports and/or Fitness, Youth Leadership, and Whole School Awareness)
- Developing Unified Schools: schools that implemented two components, one of which was Inclusive Sports
- Emerging Schools: schools that did not meet the above two criteria (e.g., schools that implemented two components but not Inclusive Sports, schools that implemented one component)

Unified Champion Schools Leadership Team

A Unified Champion Schools Leadership Team was defined as a group of people that could include teachers, students, parents, or other school staff who come together to promote the UCS program and implement its activities in the school and community. The Year 10 evaluation marked the fourth year

that Leadership Teams were examined. Past evaluations have examined the structure of Leadership Teams and their function related to to the UCS program and other inclusive efforts in the school community. In Year 10, the evaluation continued to document the goals of the UCS Leadership Team and began to explore the reasons why some schools do not form a Leadership Team.

XI. Appendix E: Site Visit School Descriptions

School A

School Description

School A is a medium-sized high school located in the central United States, with an enrollment of 707 students in grades 9-12 and a student to teacher ratio of approximately 13:1 (NCES, 2017-2018). The student body at School A is 53% male and 85% white. The school's special education program serves between 11 and 20 students with ID each year (about 3% of the total enrollment). School A is the sole high school in the district and accepts students from eight feeder schools. The district is fairly spread out with some feeder schools located more than 10 miles away. School A is a Title 1 school; approximately 37% of students at School A qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

The special education classrooms at School A are located in the freshman wing of the building alongside general education classrooms. Many students in the special education classrooms take some general education classes, especially courses that are career-oriented, such as computer classes. In general, School A is an inclusive school community. Staff across the school have similar perceptions about the high level of inclusion, more so than has been observed in other schools from past evaluations. This is largely due to the fact that inclusive programming has been implemented at School A for at least 20 years, with the UCS program arriving at the school relatively recently. School A has a very robust UCS program with multiple sports and events, and the program is entirely self-sustained through the various fundraisers planned by members of the program. Additionally, members of School A's UCS program often interact with its feeder schools, as well as the local community, in order to plan and implement activities and fundraisers.

School A has a cohesive process for easing students' transition between middle and high school. A committee of eight teachers who teach mostly freshmen meet regularly to talk about the students and discuss any issues. Additionally, freshmen have a designated part of the building where they spend half the day to help them adjust to high school. School A also implements social-emotional learning curricula, specifically Why Try[141] and Circles[142]. These SEL curricula are not embedded within the school but used most heavily with freshmen and certain group of students. Staff at the school mentioned that they are interested in broadening their SEL curricula to reach more students.

Program Implementation

Inclusive Sports. In Year 10, School A offered Unified Soccer, Unified Basketball, and Unified Bass Fishing. School A started a Unified Basketball team and a Unified Bass Fishing team in Year 10, with the help of a grant from the State Special Olympics Program; students in the UCS program helped write the grant in order to secure funding. In the fall of Year 10, the Unified Basketball team made it to the state

[141] See website for more information: https://www.whytry.org/
[142] See website for more information: https://www.open-circle.org/

finals and placed second. The Unified Basketball team also had a scrimmage game during the halftime of the boy's JV basketball game, which many students attended to cheer on their peers both with and without ID. School A did not implement Unified PE in Year 10.

Youth Leadership. School A had a very active Unified Club in Year 10, with approximately 25-30 members. The Unified Club held monthly meetings and planned different activities throughout the school year, including a fall party, Unity Day, movie viewings, and a Christmas party. The club also helped plan all of the Spread the Word to End the Word activities. In addition to the Unified Club, School A had an active Youth Activation Committee, with one student with ID and one student without ID acting as co-leaders. Each year, School A also sends six students with and without ID to the state Youth Summit. This year, School A hosted its first ever Mini Summit internally within the district, which included members of their Unified Club and members of the UCS program in grades 6-8 from the various feeder schools. Youth leadership at School A is truly inclusive, and both students with and without ID have ample opportunity to take on leadership roles.

Whole School Engagement. School A implemented several Whole School Engagement activities in Year 10, including a Respect Week and two fundraisers. The Respect Week focused not only on awareness of ID and the r-word, but on other disabilities as well. Activities included a pledge drive, schoolwide assembly, photo booth, and community day at the local Dairy Queen, where students who signed the Respect poster received free ice cream. This was also School A's first year hosting an inclusive fishing tournament, Fish for Respect, as part of their Respect Week. Although Respect Week is only one week long, Spread the Word to End the Word lessons are embedded within classroom curricula throughout the school year.

The two fundraisers that School A implemented in Year 10 were a Chili Cook Off and Run for Respect 5K/1 Mile Fun Run. The Chili Cook Off coincided with the State Special Olympics Program's Law Enforcement Torch Run, and members competed to cook the best chili. Staff from School A, as well as the local police department, participated in the event. This was the sixth year that School A hosted the Run for Respect 5K/1 Mile Fun Run. If participants were not able to be physically present at the run, they were invited to join the race virtually.

Challenges. School A did not face any major challenges with its UCS program in Year 10. As a whole, the program was robust and demonstrated that leadership and participation in extracurricular activities can indeed be inclusive.

School B

School Description

School B is a large high school located in the mountain region of the United States, with an enrollment of 1,880 students in grades 9-12 and a student to teacher ratio of approximately 19:1 (NCES, 2017-2018). The student body at School B is 50% male and 77% white. The school's special education program

serves between 21 and 30 students with ID each year (about 2% of the total enrollment). There are two main buildings at School B and both buildings contain gymnasiums and a cafeteria. Students switch between the buildings for classes throughout the day and are assigned to one building for their lunch period. School B recently added an athletic complex to its campus, located between the two main buildings. Students also have access to the pool at the local recreational center about a block from campus. There is an emphasis on sports and school spirit at School B, and hallways and classrooms are decorated with the school's colors and paintings of its mascot.

The special education classrooms at School B are located behind the library in the main building and are somewhat isolated from other classrooms. There are two special education classrooms—one for students with moderate disabilities and another for students with severe needs—which form a suite that includes a private bathroom, kitchen, and laundry area. The lighting in the suite is dim, and much of the recessed lighting is covered with thin fabric in order to create a space that is friendly to students with sensory issues. The walls of the suite are decorated with student artwork and uplifting quotes, including some from Special Olympics athletes and spokespeople. Students in the special education classrooms stay in the suite for most of the day, although some push out for classes such as PE or art. Students in the suite also eat in the cafeteria with general education students, although they have their own table by the entrance.

School B does not implement any type of social-emotional learning program but is an International Baccalaureate (IB) school, and students are strongly urged to attend college. School B is located in an affluent neighborhood, and the district as a whole sets aside money specifically for the UCS program. Overall, administration described the school as "very positive," notinghowever that the past year had been somewhat difficult after a series of student-involved car accidents, one of which was fatal. While administration seemed optimistic about the school's overall culture, some teachers felt the school climate could be better, and several special education staff wished more was being done to include their students within the general school population.

Program Implementation

Inclusive Sports. In Year 10, School B offered Unified Soccer, Unified Basketball, Unified Flag Football, and Unified Cheerleading. While Unified Soccer and Unified Basketball followed the Competitive model, Unified Flag Football and Unified Cheerleading were implemented using the Recreational model. Athletes on the Unified Cheerleading team joined the varsity cheerleaders at games, and the varsity football team helped run Unified Flag Football. Students and special education staff mentioned that few students came to watch the Unified games, other than Unified Cheerleading (since it was tied to the varsity football games). Spectators at the Unified games were mostly limited to staff and parents of the students involved. Similarly, participation in Unified Sports was mostly limited to students in special education or members of the Unified Club. School B also had an Adaptive PE class in Year 10, which some referred to as "Unified PE," but almost all students enrolled in the class were those with disabilities.

Youth Leadership. School B had a Unified Club in Year 10, though many students without ID were unaware that the group they participated in was considered a club. School B's Unified Club meetings took place during school hours, and students without ID came into the special education classrooms during the day for the meetings. Although there were student leadership opportunities through the Unified Club, youth leadership was not inclusive. A core group of four general education students planned and implemented the activities hosted by the Unified Club, and students in the special education classrooms acted more as participants. In Year 10, the Unified Club hosted holiday parties and social activities, such as tie-dying socks. While the Unified Club did not provide inclusive youth leadership opportunities, both students with and without ID participated in the state's Youth Summit.

Whole School Engagement. In Year 10, School B implemented three Whole School Engagement activities, including a Spread the Word to End the Word Campaign and two fundraisers. During the Spread the Word to End the Word Campaign, students watched a video and signed a poster pledging not to use the r-word. Students in the Unified Club also handed out bracelets during the campaign. Additionally, School B implemented the Polar Plunge as a fundraiser, which took place at a local pool in the early spring. As part of this fundraiser, teachers placed donation cans outside of their classroom doors prior to the event to raise money. The Polar Plunge typically draws a large crowd at School B, and staff, students, and parents tend to participate.

Challenges. Although School B technically implemented all three components of the UCS program in Year 10, the program still faced challenges, perhaps the biggest being a continued lack of awareness of the UCS program throughout the school. The liaison at School B expressed that awareness of students with ID was still lacking, which transferred to a lack of awareness around UCS more generally (for example, the liaison mentioned needing more student support at Unified games). Other staff members noted that they still heard the r-word used around the school. While School B's liaison felt that the UCS program was undoubtedly important for students in the special education classes, the program had yet to make a profound schoolwide impact.

School C

School Description

School C is a large high school located in the central United States, with an enrollment of 2,001 students in grades 9-12 and a student to teacher ratio of approximately 20:1 (NCES, 2017-2018). The student body at School C is 52% male and 78% white. The school's special education program serves between 21 and 30 students with ID each year (about 1% of the total enrollment). Up until this year, School C was a 10th-12th grade school; Year 10 was the first year that 9th grade was at the school. In order to prepare for this influx of new students, School C underwent extensive renovations to increase the capacity of its campus. Because of this, both new and returning students had the challenge of navigating a new building and layout.

The special education classrooms at School C are located in their own wing of the building, which is a bit isolated from the rest of the school. The cross-categorical classes, in which students with various disabilities are taught an adapted general education curriculum, are located in a more visible area of the school. Students with ID attend general education classes whenever possible, and students with and without ID participate in classes such as theater and PE together. Similarly, students with and without ID eat lunch in the cafeteria at the same time. Although the special education classrooms are somewhat separate from the rest of the school, the liaison at School C mentioned that the classrooms were more physically integrated in the school this year than they were before the renovations.

Most of the students who attend School C come from affluent backgrounds, and this affluence is reflected in the surrounding community as well. Although there is currently no official schoolwide social-emotional learning program at School C, staff and administrators are in the process of developing a social-emotional learning curriculum and have created a committee to decide which evidence-based practices might best suit the school. Some of these practices are already being tested in advisory committees, though not everyone is aware that this is occurring. School C has a strong Advanced Placement (AP) program and resembles a college-preparatory school. In fact, 98% of School C's students are college-bound, whether to a two- or four-year institution. Because of the rigor of classes and emphasis on academics at School B, student stress and anxiety are major issues.

Program Implementation

Inclusive Sports. In Year 10, School C offered Unified Bowling, Unified Basketball, Unified Track, and Unified Soccer. The Unified Soccer team was a partnership between the school and the state's Unified Soccer team. The team also partnered with a local professional soccer team throughout the summer and fall, participating in clinics put on by the pro team. School C's Unified Soccer team traveled across the country to participate in the Special Olympics USA games. In addition to Unified Sports, School C had a Unified PE class for the first time in Year 10. Two Unified PE classes were available to students and were co-taught by the PE and adaptive PE teachers. School C demonstrated support for their Unified Athletes and Partners through a schoolwide Pep Fest, and the Unified PE classes performed a choreographed song during the event.

Youth Leadership. School C had a Unified Club that involved both students with and without ID. The club met once a week during a flex period at the end of the day and helped plan events such as the Person-First Language Campaign. Additionally, School C implemented a Unified Theater program, which was a major component of their UCS program. The school's choir department assisted with Unified Theater activities in order to put on two shows, one in the fall and one in the winter. Students with and without ID were paired up to share roles in the show. Although both the Unified Club and Unified Theater program were inclusive, students without ID still assumed most of the leadership roles in these activities.

There were also other opportunities for inclusive leadership at School C that occur on an annual basis. For example, School C had a Special Olympics Student Board of Directors which included both students

with and without ID, and a large group of students typically attend the state's Youth Summit each year. Additionally, students with and without ID are able to attend the "ALPs (Athlete Leadership Program) University" as a Unified pair. During ALPs University, students participate in various leadership activities at a local college.

Whole School Engagement. In Year 10, School C implemented several Whole School Engagement activities, including a Person-First Language Campaign and a Unified Football Celebration, as well as two fundraising events--a Unified Dance Marathon and a Polar Plunge. The Person-First Language Campaign was similar to a traditional Spread the Word to End the Word Campaign in that students signed a pledge and carried a banner during a schoolwide unity walk. During the Unified Football Celebration, the school's varsity football team partnered with Unified Athletes to complete drills while the cheerleaders cheered them on. At the conclusion of the celebration, students received a uniform and football as keepsakes. During the Unified Dance Marathon fundraiser, students raised money by pledging to dance for several hours straight at a local mall. For the Polar Plunge, students of School C, both current and former, jumped into a frozen lake during the winter. Money from both of these fundraisers was allocated to School C's UCS program and the State Special Olympics Program.

Challenges. While School C had a robust UCS program in Year 10, it was not without its challenges. Along with the renovation of the high school and influx of new students, the class schedule at School C had changed significantly from the year before. Previously, School C's UCS program met each day, but in Year 10 it was limited to once a week during the flex period at the end of the day. Even meeting once a week was difficult, as students often had other responsibilities during the flex period and seniors had the option to go home early. As a result, it was increasingly difficult for School C to have regular UCS meetings with full attendance, and attrition was a major concern.

XII. Appendix F: Qualitative Methods and School Demographics

As in past years, the Year 10 evaluation included the collection of qualitative data from liaisons, school staff, and students with and without ID. When possible, interviews with parents were also conducted for additional context and perspective. In Year 10, interviews remained the primary means for collecting data from and about students with ID. The qualitative component of the evaluation contained similar content to Year 9, as well as new information on participation and engagement gathered through the perspectives of high school students and staff. Both students with and without ID were interviewed and asked to reflect on their youth leadership experiences and the transition from middle school to high school. New to the interview protocol for Year 10 for students without ID were questions about engagement in the UCS program, which provided insight into how students initially became involved in the program and their reasons for continued participation over time. Students without ID were also asked questions about their life purpose to begin to understand whether and how this might be influenced by participation in the UCS program. Staff interviews also maintained a focus on youth leadership and transition but included new questions about school climate, the impact of the UCS program, and social and emotional learning. Like in Year 9, the Year 10 interview protocols for liaisons, school staff, and students with and without ID contained similar questions, allowing for an analysis of common themes across all interviews. The Year 10 qualitative data continued the conversation about youth leadership and the transition from middle school to high school that began in Year 9, while also providing new perspectives on the environment in which the UCS program takes place, the program's impact, and the ways students become and stay involved in the program.

Site visits were conducted at three high schools in three states in the Midwestern and Western regions of the United States.[143] The three schools varied in terms of student enrollment, number of students with ID in the special education program, and socioeconomic status of the surrounding community. See Table F1 below for school demographics and see Appendix E for more information about each school. Across the three schools, interviews were conducted with 3 UCS program liaisons and 28 additional school staff members (11 general education teachers, 14 special education teachers, and 3 administrators). In addition, 51 students involved in the UCS program were interviewed, including 20 students with ID and 31 students without ID, as well as at least one parent or guardian of 12 of the students with ID.

[143] US Regions were taken from the US Census Bureau.

Table F1. Demographics of site visit schools[144]

Variable	N/n
Overall	3
US Region	
Midwestern	2
Western	1
Locale	
Suburban	2
Rural	1
Title I	1
Student Enrollment	
501-1,000	1
1,501-2,000	1
More than 2,000	1

[144] The data on these schools are from the National Center for Education Statistics, 2015-2016; http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/

XIII. Appendix G: School Approaches to Youth Leadership

Youth Leadership in School A

While School A is the smallest of the high schools visited in Year 10, students have a wide variety of leadership opportunities to choose from. School A offers traditional leadership opportunities through extracurricular activities, such as sports and clubs; many students hold leadership roles through the school's Key Club, Student Council, or National Honor Society, all of which require students to complete volunteer work and community service projects. School A is located in a rural area and, because of this, Future Farmers of America (FFA) is an especially popular organization in which many students hold leadership positions.

Students at School A have several opportunities to hold leadership roles in collaboration with school staff. For example, several juniors and seniors serve on the Principal's Advisory Board. On the Advisory Board, students meet with the principal to discuss what is happening in the school and brainstorm proactive solutions to any issues that arise among students. The Advisory Board is a fairly new addition to School A, with 2018-2019 marking its fifth school year. In addition to the Principal's Advisory Board, School A is currently in the process of developing a Graduate of Distinction Program. Students had a voice in designing the program and provided their thoughts on collaboration and the qualities that make a student an "adaptive learner," "global thinker," and "responsible citizen." This new program will allow students to graduate with a note of distinction based on certain requirements, such as good attendance, a strong GPA, extracurricular involvement, leadership experience, and community service.

At School A, students with and without ID have opportunities to demonstrate youth leadership in the UCS program in ways that are truly inclusive. In School A's program, there is a major emphasis on co-leadership for students with and without ID. For each Unified Sports team, there is a co-captain with ID and a co-captain without ID. Furthermore, students both with and without ID help brainstorm and plan activities for the program, as well as work together to secure resources for the UCS program by writing grants to the State Special Olympics Program. In fact, these grants are an important student-led aspect of the UCS program at School A and drive the types and frequency of activities that the school is able to implement. Clearly, School A's UCS program promotes youth leaders both with and without ID.

While students are able to simply sign up for some activities at School A, many activities, especially those that promote youth leadership, are merit-based, voted upon, or require an application. For some clubs in School A, such as Student Council, students must be voted on and elected by their peers to hold leadership roles. Other activities, such as National Honor Society, require students to submit an application and have a certain GPA. However, students are also able to create their own leadership opportunities. For example, after attending a large UCS summit, some students with and without ID in the UCS program held a mini Youth Summit in their school district. Clearly, there are many ways that students both with and without ID can step into leadership roles at School A.

Youth Leadership in School B

School B is an International Baccalaureate (IB)[145] school, like the middle school that feeds into it. Student leaders at School B are expected to be "communicators, reflective thinkers, principled, and caring." Additionally, students are encouraged to be their own leaders each day and choose from a large variety of AP classes, electives, and languages. Leadership is also built into the curriculum at School B. For example, each year, sophomores are required to complete a "Personal Project" in which they design a long-term project from 25 hours of individual learning time.[146] School B is rigorous and future-oriented, and students are strongly encouraged to attend college.

At School B, there are many avenues for students to take on leadership roles. School B offers several traditional leadership opportunities through extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs. Similar to School A, Student Council and National Honor Society are common ways that students take on leadership positions at school. Further, many students become leaders through school sports teams; sports are very popular at School B, and most students play at least one sport. In addition to extracurricular activities, School B offers a student-staff retreat at a camp in the fall and spring. Students can take on leadership roles through the camp and help plan activities, as well as act as counselors for students who may be attending the camp for the first time. Finally, some leadership opportunities for students at School B are tied to the outside community at the school district, city, and state levels, like internships with local government agencies.

Within School B's UCS program, students without ID predominantly hold the leadership positions. In fact, a core group of four to five students without ID help plan the activities for the Unified Club. While students with ID do not have formal leadership roles within the program, School B's liaison noted that they are able to take on more informal roles by providing input and helping with tasks for Unified events. School B's UCS program participates in the state's Youth Summit each year, and both students with and without ID attend. Overall, more could be done to promote inclusive leadership in School B's UCS program.

Similar to School A, students at School B can easily sign up to participate in some extracurricular activities, while for other activities, such as Student Council, students need to be voted in to participate. More so than in the middle school, leadership opportunities at School B are merit-based or require an application, such as National Honor Society. In School B's UCS program, all students with and without ID can participate; however, teachers select students for the core leadership team that plans and makes decisions about events. Overall, School B offers a variety of ways for students to take on leadership roles, yet more could be done to make these opportunities truly inclusive.

[145] https://www.ibo.org/
[146] https://dchs.dcsdk12.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=4343963&pageId=6049791

Youth Leadership in School C

School C is the largest of the high schools visited in Year 10 and is listed as one of the top ten high schools in its state and one of the top 100 high schools in the nation.[147] Students are very focused on academics and many attend college after graduation. As expected, students have a variety of ways to enhance their college applications and resumes through youth leadership at School C.

School C offers many traditional leadership opportunities through extracurricular activities, such as clubs and sports, including Student Council and National Honor Society. In addition to traditional leadership positions through sports and clubs, School C offers several leadership opportunities that are service-oriented or social justice-oriented and also provides opportunities for collaboration between student leaders of different activities. For example, in one club students facilitate tours and activities within the community. In another club, student leaders promote awareness of and respect for diversity by holding forums and discussions with other students in the school. To facilitate collaboration, School C has a Student Summit, in which student leaders from various clubs come together to discuss youth leadership and activities for the school.

Within School C's UCS program, students with and without ID have opportunities to take on leadership roles. The school has a Special Olympics Student Board of Directors which includes students both with and without ID, and a large group of students with and without ID attend the state Youth Summit each year. Further, students with and without ID can participate in the "ALPs (Athlete Leadership Program) University" as a Unified pair. However, in the day-to-day UCS activities such as Unified Sports and Unified Club, students without ID hold the majority of the leadership roles.

Similar to both School A and School B, students in School C can come into leadership positions in a variety of ways. For some activities, such as the UCS program, students only need to sign up to participate, while other activities require a vote or application or are merit based, such as Student Council and National Honor Society. Students in School C also have the opportunity to create their own clubs and their own leadership positions within those clubs. However, like in School B, more could be done to ensure that students with ID in School C are aware and taking full advantage of the leadership opportunities available to them.

[147] https://thebestschools.org/rankings/best-public-high-schools-us/