



Visions of a Socially Inclusive Community Mini-Lessons



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**

Updated November 2020



Special Olympics Mission

The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in sharing gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® is a program for schools Pre-K through university that intentionally promotes social inclusion by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities through sport and education-related activities. There are currently over 7,600 schools in 49 U.S. states, the District of Columbia and the commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

The three-component model offers a unique combination of effective activities that equip young people with the knowledge, skills, tools and training to create classrooms and school climates of acceptance, respect, and meaningful inclusion. 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.

This is accomplished by implementing **Special Olympics Unified Sports®, inclusive youth leadership** opportunities (such as clubs, student organizations and leadership teams), and **whole school engagement**. The program is woven into the fabric of the school community, enhancing existing efforts and providing rich opportunities that empower all students to be the agents of genuine change in their schools, creating socially inclusive environments that support and engage all learners. Unified Champion Schools implementation can vary greatly from school to school, based on the needs, goals, schedules, and other factors unique to each school, but the building blocks and framework are the same.



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The contents of this Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® resource were developed under a grant from the Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.



This series of mini-lessons would be useful in a Unified Club, classroom, or leadership group setting to developing inclusive youth leadership skills. Through the activities provided, students will take a snapshot of their community with regard to inclusion of those with intellectual disabilities. They start by creating a picture of their community based on their perceptions. Then, they repeat this exercise as if they were someone with an intellectual disability to see how the experience changes. Ideally, the club will work with the school's Unified Champion Schools Leadership Team to assess the level of social inclusiveness of their school community using the Social Inclusion Scale.

The desired outcomes of these activities are as follows. Students will:

- Reflect upon the current environment of social inclusion in their school.
- Understand how a student with an intellectual disability might see their school community.
- Work with the school's Unified Champion Schools Leadership Team to assess the school community's current attitudes, access, programs and climate using the Social Inclusion Scale.
- Develop action plans for strategies that could be implemented to improve social inclusion in their school.

“A rewarding life is filled with challenge, so do not pity me. Give me a chance!”

- Thomas Gatu, Special Olympics Athlete

Visions of a Socially Inclusive Community

Mini-lesson 1: What Does My Community Look Like?

Focus: Students will examine and reflect on their perception of social inclusion within their school community.

Time Required

30-60 minutes. Please note: This lesson will carry over to lesson 2.

Recommended Materials

- Art materials (i.e. poster boards, markers, colored paper, colored pencils)
- Cameras and/or video equipment
- “What Does My Community Look Like” worksheet
- **VIDEO:** Unified Talks: Tajha Talks Belonging: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYODpGZXwu0>



Steps

1. Watch the 6 minute video “Unified Talks: Tajha Talks Belonging” at the link listed above to start the lesson. In it, Tajha talks about the different communities to which she belongs.
2. Write the word “Community” and its definition on the board, and ask students to name various types of communities they might be a part of. Have the students focus on the different types of communities that exist within the school and which ones they are included in, and discuss the following questions:
 - *Do you feel welcome in their school community?*
 - *How respectful and inclusive is that group?*
 - *Are there rules or guidelines that tell students how to act in that community?*
 - *How do you know when you belong to a community at your school?*
3. Define “Social Inclusion” for the students and provide examples of how it is present in their school community. For example, all students are meaningfully engaged in formal and informal settings throughout the school including classrooms, hallways, and playing fields.
4. Divide the students into equal groups and have them discuss the following. You may pass out the discussion worksheet to aid them along.
 - *Choose three (3) words that describe social inclusion in your school.*
 - *What helps to make your school an inclusive community? What barriers exist?*
 - *Do all students in your school community have meaningful friendships in formal and informal settings?*
 - *How inclusive and accessible are classrooms, lunchrooms, hallways, and playing fields?*
 - *If you could choose anywhere to go to school, would you choose your school? Why or why not?*
 - *If you were to give your school a “grade”, on social inclusion, what would it be and why?*
5. Challenge each group to draw, take a photograph, or create a video of a “picture” of their school community from their own perspective. Each group’s “vision” of community should be completed and presented at the next meeting or class session.

What Does My Community Look Like?

After discussing the meaning of the words “community” and “social inclusion,” consider the following questions and discuss with your group.

Reflection Questions:

Choose three (3) words that describe social inclusion in your school.

What helps to make your school an inclusive community? What barriers exist?

Do all students in your school community have meaningful friendships in formal and informal settings?

How inclusive and accessible are classrooms, lunchrooms, hallways, and playing fields?

If you could choose anywhere to go to school, would you choose your school? Why or why not?

If you were to give your school a “grade”, on social inclusion, what would it be and why?

Visions of a Socially Inclusive Community

Mini-lesson 2: Understanding Perspective

Focus: In this lesson, students will reflect on the current environment of social inclusion in their school and understand how a student with an intellectual disability may see the school community differently.

Time Required

30-60 Minutes

Recommended Materials

- Students' presentations created from Mini-lesson #1
- A copy of the handout "Reflecting on Our School" for each student
- If needed, review the Unified Talk on Belonging from the last mini-lesson: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYODpGZXwu0>



Steps

1. (Optional) Review the "Unified Talks: Tajha Talks Belonging" video as a group. Ask students to think about how as a student with an intellectual disability, Tajha's perspective may be different from theirs.
2. Have students present the images/videos they created that depict their school community.
 - *Discuss the similarities and the differences in each presentation*
 - *How can people who live in the same community see it from completely different perspectives? Consider the perspectives of students with intellectual disabilities, and how they may be different from their own.*
3. In small groups, have the students work together to complete the "Reflecting on Our School" handout.
4. Have the students share their reflections and discuss the following:
 - *Was this exercise challenging or easy? Why?*
 - *How do programs and resources in your school community differ for persons with and without intellectual disabilities?*
 - *Where have you seen students with intellectual disabilities being included and supported in our school?*
 - *Do you see meaningful friendships developing between students with and without disabilities?*
5. Ask students to spend some time observing and reflecting on various perspectives of social inclusion as they participate in their school community and be ready to report back what they observed at the next meeting.

Reflecting on Our School

Record your observations and reflections on social inclusion in our school. Try to look at your classes, time between classes, cafeteria, and after school activities from the perspective of students with intellectual disabilities. Think about the questions we discussed in our meeting as you make your observations.

- What can you find out about the support, programs, perceptions and opportunities in the school for students with intellectual disabilities? How do they compare to the resources, programs, perceptions and opportunities for students without intellectual disabilities?
- Where have you seen students with intellectual disabilities being included and supported in our school? Do you see meaningful friendships developing between students with and without intellectual disabilities?

	Activity	Observations	Reflections or Thoughts
Unstructured time such as hallways or the cafeteria			
Classroom Instruction			
After-School Activities			
Other			

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Mini-lesson 3: Digging Deeper

Focus: In this lesson, students will assess the school community's current attitudes, access, programs, and climate using a Social Inclusion Scale.

Time Required

30-60 minutes

Recommended Materials

- A copy of the Social Inclusion Scale handout for each student
- Pens, Pencils

Steps

1. Tell students that this activity will help them get a clearer picture of what their school community looks like. Have students fill out the Social Inclusion Scale handout individually. Make sure they know there are no wrong answers! Encourage each student to fill out the Scale based on their own perspective.
2. After students have completed the scale, discuss the results. Explore some possible follow up questions such as:
 - *Do students in our school think it's okay to use the R-word?*
 - *Do people in our school community know what an intellectual disability is?*
 - *What percentage of students know someone with an intellectual disability?*
 - *Is there evidence that students in our school are tolerant and inclusive of those with intellectual disabilities?*
 - *Are students with disabilities in our school encouraged to participate in sports teams, clubs, and special programs? If so, do they participate? Why not?*
 - *What is the general perception of persons with disabilities in our school?*
 - *Are there opportunities for students with and without disabilities to interact with each other? What are they?*
 - *Are there opportunities for persons with disabilities to share their strengths and talents with the school community? What are they?*
 - *Do students with disabilities feel welcome throughout the school community? Why or why not?*
3. Work with the students to develop a plan to on how to measure social inclusion throughout the school, gather the data, compile the results and/or communicate it to the school community.



Social Inclusion Scale

In this scale, you will find questions about your school's inclusiveness, which refers to the extent that all students in your school community are valued, respected, and supported. The following questions are designed to measure how well you believe your school specifically includes students of all abilities in the school community.

In the following chart, please identify the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1 pt)	Disagree (2 pts)	Agree (3 pts)	Strongly Agree (4 pts)
1. Every student of any ability can be a leader in this school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. In this school, the accomplishments of students of all abilities are celebrated (e.g., award ceremonies in school assemblies, sports awards dinners, displaying school projects).	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. At this school, after school activities (e.g., sports clubs) include students with and without disabilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Most people in this school feel responsible for including special education students.	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. This school provides opportunities for all students, including special education students, to help others (e.g., service-learning, community service).	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. This school provides opportunities for all students, including special education students, to share their ideas (e.g., contribute to school decisions or inclusion efforts).	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. In this school, students do not use negative terms to refer to students with disabilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. In this school, adults do not use negative terms to refer to students with disabilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. This school encourages students to develop friendships with special and general education students and interact in social situations (e.g., extracurricular activities, lunchtime, unstructured time within and between classes).	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. Students in this school learn from having students of all abilities in the classroom.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Social Inclusion Scale (continued)

Once you have finished completing the social inclusion scale, add up the number values assigned to each rating.

Each "Strongly Disagree" = 1 point

Each "Disagree" = 2 points

Each "Agree" = 3 points

Each "Strongly Agree" = 4 points

My total: _____

Using the total above, you can now determine which level (Limited, Emerging, Inclusive, and/or Fully Accomplished) your school falls on the Social Inclusion Scale.

10-15 points = Limited

16-20 = Emerging

21-35 = Inclusive

36-40 = Fully Accomplished

No matter what your school scored on the Social Inclusion Scale, you are taking a step in the right direction just by thinking about your school's inclusiveness. Consider these questions to move forward with inclusion:

How can you as an individual work to ensure a more inclusive school environment?

In what ways can your school be offering more leadership opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities? In new clubs? Student government? Existing clubs?

What activities could the whole school participate in that would promote inclusion of all students?

Are there opportunities for students of all abilities to participate in sports and fitness activities together?

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Mini-lesson 4: Social Inclusion in Our School

Focus: Students will develop an action plan with strategies that could be implemented to improve social inclusion in the school community.

Time Required

60-120 Minutes

NOTE: *This mini-lesson is designed to be used following the Social Inclusion Scale assessment in Mini-Lesson 3, and will likely require more than one (1) meeting.*

Recommended Materials

- A copy of the Social Inclusion in Our School handout for each student
- Pens, Pencils
- Information gathered from the Social Inclusion Scale assessment

Steps

1. Separate students into equal groups. Distribute copies of “Social Inclusion in Our School,” which challenges students to use the information gathered in the assessment process to develop a plan to make a change that will result in greater social inclusion in their school.
2. Give students ample time and assistance with resources to help them develop their plan. Have each group of students present and explain their plan to the rest of the club.
3. As a whole group, decide if you are going to all work together to carry out one of the plans presented, a combination of the plans presented, or if each small group will work on the implementation of their own plan.
4. Set a timeline to report back to the whole group on the progress of the plan.
 - How is your project progressing?
 - What obstacles have you encountered?
 - How can you work through the obstacles?
 - What have you learned along the way?



Social Inclusion in Our School

During the first two mini-lessons, you created a picture of your school community, with a focus on social inclusion. You also gathered some data on how others in your school community perceive social inclusion. Now your challenge is to identify an action your group might take to help your school become more socially inclusive and then develop a plan to put your idea into action. Complete the action plan below to guide your efforts. You will share your plan with the whole group to determine which action plans the club will implement.

Envision the Change

We will help our school become a place where...
This is important to us because...
In order to become a more socially inclusive school, we have identified the need to...

PLAN FOR THE CHANGE

ACTION STEP	CHALLENGES/OBSTACLES	SOLUTIONS

ASSESS THE PLAN - Rate your plan based on each criteria below:

Rating System: 4 = Excellent 3 = Good 2 = Okay 1 = Low or poor	Rating
Saleable (Can we convince others it's a good idea?)	
Affordable (Is the cost reasonable? Will we be able to find any necessary funding?)	
Workable (Is it an appropriate solution, and are we able to implement it?)	
Effective (Will it be likely to increase social inclusion in our school?)	