



# Inclusion Week

## March 2nd-6th

### 2026

**Special  
Olympics**  
Iowa



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools®**

# Inclusion Week!



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
Schools®

## Hooray, it's Inclusion Week! March 2<sup>nd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>

Each spring, Special Olympics Iowa and Best Buddies partner to promote, advocate for and celebrate inclusive efforts taking place in 150+ schools and surrounding communities across Iowa.

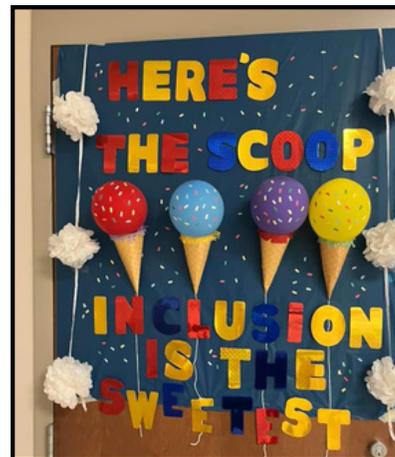
We've assembled this toolkit to help make Inclusion Week a meaningful and memorable experience school-wide.

In this toolkit, you'll find:

- Inclusion Week promotion ideas
- Assembly and morning announcement scripts
- Dress-up day recommendations
- Worksheet activities

You are at liberty to modify this content as you see fit in your school. You'll also be receiving a Spread the Word Pledge Banner.

Thank you for your commitment to to being a champion for change within the Inclusion Revolution movement!



# Special Olympics Iowa Overview

Special  
Olympics  
Iowa



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
Schools®

Since 1968, Special Olympics Iowa has been a statewide movement that unleashes the human spirit through the transformative power and joy of sports. Using sports as the catalyst and including programming on health, leadership and education, Special Olympics is fighting inactivity, injustice and intolerance. As a result, people with intellectual disabilities become accepted and valued members of their communities, which leads to a more respectful and inclusive society for all.

For people with intellectual disabilities, the benefits of Special Olympics include:

- Improved physical fitness and motor skills
- Greater self-confidence
- A more positive self-image
- Lifelong friendships

Special Olympics athletes carry these benefits into their daily lives at home, in the classroom, on the job and in the community. For Athletes, Special Olympics provides a gateway to empowerment, competence, acceptance and joy.

## Special Olympics Iowa Mission

**WHAT**

The mission of Special Olympics Iowa is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports

**WHO**

for individuals with intellectual disabilities by

**WHY**

giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendships with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

# Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools

Special Olympics  
Iowa



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
Schools®

## What is a Unified Champion School?

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® bring together students with and without intellectual disabilities through education, sports and youth leadership to provide them with the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to create and sustain school communities that promote acceptance and respect.

Special Olympics Iowa partners with pre-schools, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools and colleges to implement or continue three main components of the Unified Champion Schools model.



### Special Olympics Unified Sports

A fully inclusive sports or fitness program that combines an approximately equal number of students with and without intellectual disabilities.



### Inclusive Youth Leadership

Students with and without intellectual disabilities work together to lead and plan advocacy, awareness and other inclusive activities throughout the school year.



### Whole School Engagement

Awareness and education activities that promote inclusion and which reach the majority of the school population.



## Special Olympics Iowa & Best Buddies are Better Together

### Improving School Environments Together through Inclusive Friendship, Leadership and Sport

Best Buddies School Chapters and Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® (UCS) share complementary missions of inclusion, leadership, and opportunity. Best Buddies and Special Olympics' education strategy brings a unique approach to schools across the country through a cohesive focus on acceptance. Offering both programs on your school campus will provide a diverse opportunity for students to engage in inclusive activities, empowering events, and gain inclusive leadership skills.

### What are the Differences?

Best Buddies School Friendship Chapters employ a formal club structure that fosters genuine friendships and social connection between people with and without IDD through one-to-one friendships and large group activities. Students with and without IDD are empowered to lead chapter events.

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program is aimed at promoting social inclusion through a three component model: sports, inclusive youth leadership opportunities, and whole school engagement. This equips young people with the tools and training to create sports, classroom and school climates of acceptance.

### We Go Hand in Hand

- Host a Special Olympics Unified Sports event for one of your monthly Best Buddies chapter events
- Both programs require a student leadership team comprised of individuals with and without IDD
- Highlight both clubs during Inclusion Week or Best Buddies Month in March
- Buddy pairs could compete together in Special Olympics Unified Sports
- Both clubs could co-lead an assembly or classroom educational lesson on disability awareness and inclusion
- Take advantage of Best Buddies inclusive leadership and advocacy trainings hosted each semester
- Both programs offer inclusive, annual leadership conferences



# Dress Up Days & Morning Announcements

Special  
Olympics  
Iowa



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
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## **MONDAY: PAJAMA DAY!**

Get comfortable with inclusion! As we wear our coziest pajamas, let's remember that inclusion is all about making everyone feel welcomed, supported and valued no matter their abilities.

## **TUESDAY: JERSEY DAY!**

Today is jersey day. Just like in sports, inclusion means everyone plays a vital role and we all work together to create an environment where everyone feels valued and accepted. Wear your jersey with pride and remember that every player, no matter their abilities, is important to the team.

## **WEDNESDAY: SPECIAL OLYMPICS/SCHOOL SPIRIT DAY!**

Today we celebrate Spread the Word Day with pride and excitement! Whether you're wearing school colors or your favorite Special Olympics Iowa apparel, today is about coming together as a team.

## **THURSDAY: MISMATCHED DAY!**

Today is Mismatched Day. From mismatched socks or clashing patterns, today is about embracing what makes us unique and showing that it's okay to be different. Inclusion is about accepting and celebrating all abilities no matter how different we may seem.

## **FRIDAY: NEON DAY!**

Today is neon day, let's all shine a light on the power of inclusion by saying hi to someone new. Let's continue to be bold in showing kindness, respect and encouragement!



## Need more fun, inclusive ideas? Try these out!

Empower your unified club and youth leaders to help lead school-wide activities.

- **Host an assembly-** gather your school for an assembly to celebrate Inclusion Week! Recognize your athletes, Unified partners and teachers who coordinate the week.
- **Sign the Pledge for Inclusion-** each school will receive a banner from SOIA. Invite the whole school to hear the message of inclusion and sign the banner!
- **Play a Unified Game-** create teams involving students with and without disabilities to scrimmage against each other! Have the school come out and cheer them on.
- Create posters to hang in the hallways or decorate doors
- Unified Young Readers Club





- **Lead with Courageous Action**

Develop the courage needed to advocate for inclusion so all people feel accepted.

Video: [Lead with Courageous Action](#)

Video: [Core Values as an Inclusive Leader](#)

- **Take Action**

Take Action in your school with your classmates and teachers to make sure your school has inclusive classrooms, hallways and courts.

Video: [Make Your School Unified](#)

- **Spread the Word of Inclusion**

Discover impactful ways you can take inclusive action for people with intellectual disabilities in your school and community.

Video: [Spread the Word of Inclusion](#)

Activity: Inclusion Tiles



# Activity Resources

**Special  
Olympics**  
Iowa



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
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# How I Can Spread the Word



## I can take time to reflect.

It's important to identify what inclusion means to you and how you can continue to grow your inclusive mindset. Play Inclusion Tiles on [generationunified.org](http://generationunified.org) to figure out where you are on your inclusion journey.



## I can take the pledge.

The easiest way to do this is to visit the Spread the Word website and complete the virtual pledge! You can take it a step further and create a banner for your school. Have classmates sign the pledge during lunch.



## I can speak up and take action!

Challenge yourself to 1 inclusive action a week. Have a conversation with someone with ID or invite someone new to lunch or a club meeting. Follow [@SONorthAmerica](https://www.instagram.com/SONorthAmerica) on Instagram to learn about and share inclusive stories.



## I can educate people.

Speak to family, friends, and teachers about inclusion and why it's important. [Generationunified.org](http://Generationunified.org) has a lot of information. Act as a bystander and empower others to act inclusively.



Lead



Think



Grow





# INCLUSION JOURNEY



Spread the Word of inclusion through your actions. Start by reflecting on your behavior. Determine where you are on your inclusion journey and how you can be more inclusive.

Select a location in the school.



Classroom



Hallway



Cafeteria



Court or field

Circle how you behave in that location.

**AUTHENTIC FRIENDSHIP**

- Building connection
- Growing community
- Ongoing interaction through Unified Sports®
- Continuing communication

**MEANINGFUL INCLUSION**

- Sense of belonging
- Defined by unique experiences
- Valuing individual identities

**SITUATIONAL FRIENDSHIP**

- Taking part in activities together
- Shared environment
- Opportunity for new friendships

**ACCEPTANCE**

- Equal treatment
- Positive group interactions
- Welcoming

**INCLUSION**

- Opportunities for integration
- Appreciating differences
- Showing respect

**TOLERANCE**

- Object of pity
- Unable to connect
- Little effort
- Helper mentality

**AVOIDANCE**

- Ignored
- Unwelcoming
- Clique

**EXCLUSION**

- Access denied
- Isolation
- Rejection of others

**FEAR OF DIFFERENCE**

- Limited interaction
- Left behind
- Bullying
- Little understanding



Think- what can I do to become more inclusive?



Lead

# How I Can Make My School Unified



## I can ask questions.

One way to be prepared is to ask questions. Talk with your school liaison, or contact your State Special Olympics Program. Ask about events, recruitment, scheduling, and equipment. They will help you get started!



## I can connect with others.

Start taking inclusive action, even if it's small. Fist bump classmates as they enter class, learn classmates names and say hello, or set up an open lunch table and invite others to join. Don't forget to invite others to join the Unified club or team.



## I can include classmates with intellectual disabilities.

Talk with teachers to get involved with your classmates with disabilities. Volunteer in a class and arrange opportunities to eat lunch or work together. Learn about being a meaningful partner to those with disabilities by visiting the Generation Unified YouTube channel.



## I can celebrate my impact.

Don't forget to celebrate all of your inclusive actions, large or small! The more you celebrate, the more you'll feel motivated to keep going. This positivity will inspire others to join or create more inclusive opportunities.



Lead



Think



Grow





# A UNIFIED PLAN

**SCENARIO:** You're part of a school that doesn't have inclusive activities or sports for students with disabilities. You know how being a part of these activities can have positive benefits on students' with and without ID.



Lead

## What would you want to begin? Circle your choice.



Unified Sports team



Unified Club



Fan in the Stands



Spread the Word event

## Who would you contact? Circle your choice.

- Teacher
- Coach
- Athletic Director
- Principal
- Counselor
- Other

## How would you contact them? Circle your choice.

- Request a meeting
- Send an email
- Visit their office

## How would you present? Circle your choice.

- Outline benefits in an email
- Create a presentation
- Have a conversation

## What information would you share? Write ideas below.



Goals:



Benefits:



Timeline:



Support:

# How I Can Take Courageous Action



Think



## I can value inclusion.

It's important to believe in a cause before you speak up and make change. Make sure you fully believe every person matters and deserves respect!



## I can connect with people who also value inclusion.

Taking action can be scary. Find support from coaches, teachers, or classmates who value inclusion. You can work together to teach others. Follow @SpecialOlympicsYouthLeaders for virtual connections and motivation.



## I can talk to others and help them grow an inclusive mindset.

Share the importance of kindness with those who don't yet practice inclusion. Share stories and give them tips from the @SONorthAmerica Instagram page and Generation Unified TikTok. When they're ready invite them to an inclusive event.



## I can start small and use my strengths.

Take small steps to build confidence. You can speak up for others, ask questions and listen to gain new perspectives, or wave in the hallway. Not all actions need to be big or seen!



Grow



Lead



# SAY SOMETHING



Think

You can speak up with your actions and your words!

How would you speak up if a classmate was **left out** of a game?

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What could you say?

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What could you do?

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# TAKE ACTION



Think



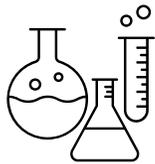
There's a new student with a disability in your class. They have a service dog. At lunch the student sits at a table by the door.

How could you take courageous action?

Walk over and talk about the cute dog.

Invite the new student to your lunch table.

Invite the new student over and ask questions.



This new student is in your science class. The teacher has him sit in the back of the room.

How could you take courageous action?

Ask your teacher if you can sit in the back, too.

Ask your teacher if they can move up to your table.

Look in the back of the room and smile.



During PE, the new student walks laps around the gym as everyone else begins to stretch and warm-up.

How could you take courageous action?

Walk with the new student as others stretch.

Invite the new student to the stretching group.

Wave as the new student walks by the group.



# INCLUSIVE ACTIONS



Think

Julia is picking players for her kickball team. Lizzie wants to play. Julia knows Lizzie has a hard time reading. She needs help in school. She thinks Lizzie will need help in the game, too. Lizzie might be a bad player. Julia doesn't pick Lizzie to play.

Does Julia take inclusive action?

YES

NO

What would YOU do?

THIS

OR

THAT



Tell Lizzie she can't play because of her needs in school.

Ask Lizzie to play. Differences won't make her a bad player! She might have other strengths.

# Skill Building Exercise

## Spread the Word

### Spread the Word BINGO

**Grades:** 6-12

**Time:** 15+ minutes to prep, all day to complete board

**Materials:** A copy of the BINGO board for each student, share resource links (below)

**Optional prep:** Inform the school that your students will be completing the BINGO board and they may be approached throughout the day. Provide staff with the information and tools needed for them to be able to engage with the students.

#### Directions:

1. Tell students that they will be practicing Spreading the Word of inclusion by taking action throughout the day.
2. Give students a copy of the provided BINGO board
3. Review each square with the students.
  - a. Generate ideas of what each square means, how they can complete the square, or any limitations to completing the square
  - b. Point out that some squares involve spreading the word to others and some involve working on their own inclusion journey.
4. Provide a designated time for students to begin working on the board.
5. Tell students any additional time barriers (ideas noted below in differentiation section)

#### Differentiation Ideas:

1. Create groups and have students work together to complete the board.
  - a. Have group leaders assign boxes to peers based on strengths/interest.
2. Edit squares and add examples that are relevant to your class/school.
3. Play different forms of BINGO.
  - a. Get BINGO by completing horizontal, diagonal, or vertical boxes.
  - b. Get BINGO by completing an 'X' with the boxes.
  - c. Get BINGO by completing the outer or inner rings of the boxes.
  - d. Get BINGO by completing the board.
4. Have students work on the board throughout the month to show Spread the Word is more than one day.
5. If completing the board virtually have students highlight their completed square.

# Skill Building Exercise

Spread the Word

## Resource Links:

**Unified Talks: Spread the Word**

[Inclusion Tiles Game](#)

[What is IDD? video](#)

[Virtual Spread the Word Pledge](#)

[Mindful Meditation: Spread the Word](#)

[Unified Talks: Working Together](#)

**School of Strength [workouts](#)**

**Spread the Word [Social Media Templates](#)**

**#TBT Spread the Word Inclusion Youth Ambassador [Vlog](#)**

# Skill Building Exercise

## Spread the Word

### SPREAD THE WORD: BINGO

B	I	N	G	O
Watch Unified Talks: Spread the Word with a friend	Complete the Inclusion Tiles Game.	Ask your coach how they can make your team more inclusive.	Invite a classmate to have lunch with you.	Create a social media post celebrating the inclusion at your school.
Talk with your principal about starting a Unified Club.	Say 'hi' to someone new in the hall. Bonus-ask them about their day!	Watch a movie featuring an actor with a disability.	Ask your librarian to help you find a book featuring a character with a disability.	Watch <a href="#">What is IDD?</a> video. Tell a friend 1 thing you learned.
Sign the Spread the Word pledge!	Listen to the Spread the Word Mindful Meditation.	<b>FREE SPACE</b>	Follow @SONorth America on Instagram.	Answer the question: What is one positive outcome you've seen by being more inclusive?
Write down what inclusion means to you.	Watch Unified Talks: Working together.	Talk with a friend about inclusion.	Arrange a class or school wide Spread the Word banner signing.	Complete and post one of the Spread the Word Social Media templates.
Follow @Unified Generation on TikTok	Ask your PE teacher to complete a School of Strength workout with your class.	Watch #TBT Spread the Word Inclusion Youth Ambassador Vlog. Leave a comment!	Write a poem, song, or short story about inclusion.	Volunteer to help or work with a classmate.

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**[www.soiowa.org](http://www.soiowa.org)**

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