

Building a Roadmap: Unified Champion School Recognition

Megan Ficke



Vision

To promote social inclusion, for students with moderate to significant needs, at Northwestern Region 7, through intentionally planned and implemented activities affecting systems-wide change to become a Unified Champion School.



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**

..... THROUGH UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS

- Schools and community environments become more welcoming to people of all abilities
- Socially inclusive school climates become free from teasing, bullying and the exclusion of any group of students
- Students with disabilities are routinely included in and feel a part of all social activities and opportunities
- Young people with and without disabilities are playing sports together and socially interacting
- Students without disabilities hold more positive attitudes toward their peers with disabilities
- Special Olympics is viewed as a school and community partner that offers inclusive programming that benefits all students

<https://media.specialolympics.org/resources/community-building/youth-and-school/unified-champion-schools/Overview-of-Special-Olympics-Unified-Champion-Schools-1-2024.pdf>

In Connecticut....

UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® successfully demonstrate a commitment to inclusion by fully adopting three components: the Special Olympics Unified Sports program, Inclusive Youth Leadership and Whole School Engagement.

NATIONAL BANNER UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS

A Unified Champion School receiving national banner recognition is one that has demonstrated commitment to inclusion by meeting 10 national standards of excellence. Connecticut has more Banner Unified Champion Schools than any other state with a total of 70 schools receiving and/or renewing banner status.

<https://www.soct.org/adaptive-sports-programs/unified-sports-in-schools>

Mission

To create a three component model in our district that includes

- inclusive activities
- inclusive youth leadership opportunities
- whole school engagement

Needs Addressed

*Our **Time With Non-Disabled Peers** percentages are lower than anticipated when EdSight data was reviewed.

***Limited participation** in our Unified Sports club for both athletes and partners.

Competencies Addressed

3.6 Develop and submit a local annual performance report for the special education program.

4.2 Demonstrate effective verbal, nonverbal and written communication with a variety of stakeholders, including families, to facilitate their engagement and participation in the special education system.

4.3 Facilitate stakeholder input and engagement in the special education system and program.

4.4 Build strategic relationships and partnerships with people, programs, agencies, and organizations to meet needs of special education programs, services and students and their families. Intra-agency

4.5 Facilitate individual, team intra-agency and interagency relationships, collaborations, planning and meetings to achieve student, program, and/or system outcomes.

4.7 Identify and promote leadership opportunities for special education staff and other stakeholders, including families.

6.4 Incorporate practice-based research to identify and improve instructional outcomes with students receiving special education.

7.2 Identify district, school and classroom practices that promote inclusion of special education students into general education culture: least dangerous; presumed competence; natural supports; peer to peer supports.

7.4 Design and develop a process to demonstrate the scaling up of a practice(s), program, or policy to meet the needs of the special education system.

7.6 - Demonstrate the ability to develop, implement and evaluate a systems change project that will improve the special education systems to achieve outcomes for special education students and their families.

Goal 1 - Activities

Develop a roadmap for NWR7 to develop a comprehensive offering of inclusive activities within and outside of the school day for students with more significant needs.

- **Objective 1.1:** Identify the current inclusive activities offered within and outside of the school day. - **completed**
- **Objective 1.2:** Identify the potential areas of growth for inclusive activities.
 - Work with collaborative partners (students/ staff/ families) to identify activities that may help gather more support / partners for students that are not currently offered. - **in process**
 - Collaborate with current Unified Champion Schools to identify their success and challenges in the area of inclusive activities. - **Fall 2024**
- **Objective 1.3:** Complete the Learn.SpecialOlympics.org training on Unified Champion Schools for Educators. - **in process**

Inclusive Activities

Previous School Years:

HS Track, HS Cheerleading, HS Football, Cooking Club, Robotics, Unified Sports, Band, Chorus, AV Club, Theater

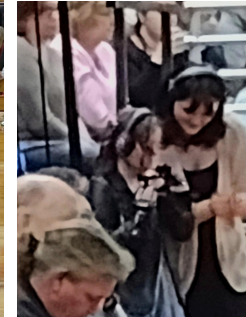
**All clubs/activities are open to all students.*



2023-2024 School Year Additions:

MS Track, MS Softball, United Sound, Student Government

**All clubs/activities are open to all students.*



Goal 2 - Leadership

Develop a roadmap for NWR7 to have **inclusive youth leadership** for multiple underrepresented groups, including those students with more significant needs.

- **Objective 2.1:** Creation of an advisory council at the high school to support grade-level class officers and advisors. - **in process**

**Currently youth leadership opportunities are highly individualized and not globally available each year. Students can opt to take on a leadership role with Kindness in Motion, Capstone and/or Civics projects, but they are often short-lived and are not on-going opportunities each year for more than the individual.*

Inclusive Leadership Opportunities

Previous School Years:

Unified Sports, Student Council, LINK Leader*, Tour Guides (NEASC observations), Capstone and Civics Classes, Kindness in Motion Program*

**application process*



2023-2024 School Year Additions:

*Student Government (current junior running for class officer), United Sound (club officers starting in 24-25 SY), Little Free Library Steward, AgEd Programming**

**1st student enrolled in AgEd this school year, 2 more enrolled for 24-25 SY.*



Goal 3 - Whole School Engagement

Identify inclusive whole school engagement opportunities that are currently available for students with with more significant needs.

**NWR7 is a very welcoming and supportive school to begin with, and clearly identifying our strengths in this area and growing our current opportunities will be ongoing, based on the current student population and their interests.*

Maintaining our current events and adding in aspects of professional development to our staff and peers will help us further expand the yearly opportunities.

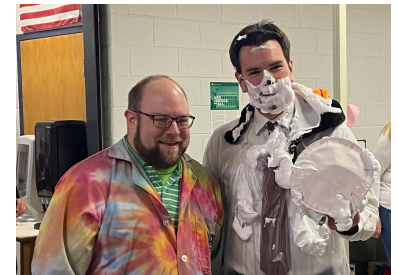
Whole School Engagement

Previous School Years:

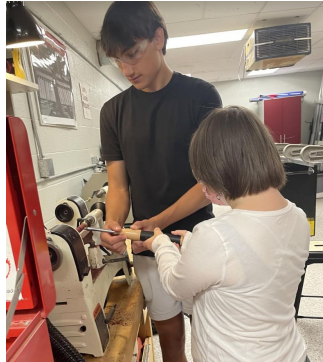
Gilbert/Northwestern Basketball Game includes Unified Game at Halftime, Down Syndrome Awareness Sock Fundraiser, Homecoming

2023-2024 School Year Additions:

Pi-Day Fundraiser (to benefit Penguin Plunge), Brookfield Penguin Plunge



Final Thoughts...



We have the right culture, the resources and the spirit to make it happen. We just need to clearly identify our path and set our goals even higher.

GO HIGHLANDERS!