



# Launching the Next 50 Years of Special Olympics

Elise Calanni | April, 2018

“In ancient Rome, the gladiators went into the arena with these words on their lips: Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt.”

When Eunice Kennedy Shriver spoke these words at the very first Special Olympics International Summer Games in 1968, she ignited a spark that would eventually become the modern Special Olympics movement. Fifty years have gone by since that historic event in Chicago. This July, Special Olympics will return to Chicago to celebrate five decades of equality and inclusion and launch the next 50 years of Special Olympics.

What began as a small summer camp for those with intellectual disabilities in Eunice Kennedy Shriver’s backyard has evolved to a global movement that expands to over 172 countries, 4.9 million athletes, and over a million volunteers. In 50 years, Special Olympics has reiterated its devotion to promoting inclusive sports opportunities for those with intellectual disabilities, stronger communities for athletes and their families, better healthcare to create healthier athletes, and increased leadership opportunities.

While the Special Olympics movement is celebrating half a century of inclusion, many programs within Special Olympics are still quite young. One of the most recent additions to the programmatic work of the organization is the Special Olympics Unified Schools initiative.

Unified Schools refers to the global initiative to empower students and the school community to embrace inclusion, promote equality, and shift the whole school climate to one that believes in positive change. However, you may be more familiar with the term Unified Champion Schools, the initiative in place in the United States. Unified Champion Schools (UCS) is currently in its tenth year, marking one decade of Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement: the three pillars of a Unified Champion School.

Unified Champion Schools is just one of the many Special Olympics programs that takes Eunice Kennedy Shriver’s original vision to heart, and expands in incredible

## **Special Olympics**

1133 19<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Washington D.C., 20036-3604, Country **Tel** + 1 202 628 3630 **Fax** + 1 202 824 0200  
[www.specialolympics.org](http://www.specialolympics.org) **Twitter** @specialolympics

Created by the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation for the benefit of persons with intellectual disabilities



ways. Not only do Unified Champion Schools give Special Olympics athletes the ability to compete in sports year round and develop their confidence and courage, UCS also benefits *all* students, with and without disabilities. In order to change attitudes towards those with intellectual disabilities, we must change the climate of schools and the way the entire student body regards athletes. In just ten years, the Unified Champion Schools program has created lasting impacts on the lives of athletes and general education students, truly creating an Inclusion Revolution.

It's impossible to guess what the next 50 years of Special Olympics holds, but one thing is for certain: the Inclusion Revolution is already here. Join Special Olympics in celebrating 50 years of the movement at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary events, July 17-21 in Chicago, Illinois. And don't stop at the celebration- be a part of the change! Find out how to start a Unified program at your school!

**Resources:**

<https://www.specialolympics.org/50th-anniversary-event-schedule.aspx>

<https://www.specialolympics.org/unified-champion-schools/>

[Recruit Your School](#)

**Elise Calanni**

Communications and Content Creation Intern, Unified Champion Schools Elise Calanni is currently a Communications and Content Creation Intern for Unified Champion Schools, the youth engagement and activation strategy that promotes school communities where all young people, as well as adult leaders, become agents of change. The program currently is in 46 states and more than 5,500 schools and reaching 3.4 million students each year with messages and activities that promote inclusive youth leadership and social inclusion.

**Special Olympics**

1133 19<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Washington D.C., 20036-3604, Country **Tel** + 1 202 628 3630 **Fax** + 1 202 824 0200

[www.specialolympics.org](http://www.specialolympics.org) **Twitter** @specialolympics

Created by the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation for the benefit of persons with intellectual disabilities