



Special Olympics US Youth Ambassadors 2019: National Inclusive Youth Leadership

Elise Calanni | December 2018

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® is thrilled to announce the very first class of Special Olympics US Youth Ambassadors! The Youth Ambassador program is a brand new engagement opportunity for passionate, inclusive young leaders within the United States to represent their US State Special Olympics Program and Region as advocates, advisors, and participants in leadership development training. Twelve youth leaders with and without intellectual disabilities will serve as Youth Ambassadors for two years (October 2018 – June 2020) in a role focused on training, engagement, and activation at the national level.

After a rigorous application process, twelve such leaders were chosen:

Britney Bautista, Special Olympics Hawaii
Adam Hernandez, Special Olympics Florida
Tajha Ilerant, Special Olympics Florida
Alex Keith, Special Olympics Virginia
Donzel Marshall, Special Olympics Illinois
William McClennan, Special Olympics Virginia

M Maggie McNellis, Special Olympics Illinois
Sydney Meininger, Special Olympics Massachusetts
Kyle Norman, Special Olympics Montana
Savannah Rock, Special Olympics Colorado
Elyse Whittemore, Special Olympics Massachusetts
Jazlyn Young, Special Olympics Montana

To read full bios on each Youth Ambassador, please visit the [US Youth Ambassadors Spark Page](#).



**US YOUTH AMBASSADORS
CLASS OF 2019**





Unified Champion Schools will engage the Youth Ambassadors in three primary areas: advocacy and storytelling, advisory and input, and professional development. As Youth Ambassadors, these individuals will be able to share their stories and advocate for their peers on a national level, through social media platforms, and by helping with Special Olympics North America resources and initiatives. They will also have the opportunity to participate in trainings to further develop their leadership skills, public speaking, and ability to be an advocate for the movement, as well as help train the next class of Youth Ambassadors for 2020! By participating in the Youth Ambassadors initiative, these incredible leaders are helping to promote equality and respect for those with intellectual disabilities around the world.

Prior to their selection for the Youth Ambassadors initiative, these twelve inspirational youth were already leading the way for inclusion in their communities. Inclusive youth leadership – one of the three components of a Unified Champion School – is transformative in the way students are empowered to lead and inspire one another. Once students experience leadership in a truly inclusive environment – such as Unified Clubs, inclusive student councils, Special Olympics State Program Youth Activation Committees, and more – they will feel inspired to bring inclusion to all aspects of their schooling. Inclusive Youth Leadership can be the stepping stone to implementing the existing two components of a Unified Champion School: Special Olympics Unified Sports® and Whole-School Engagement.





Special Olympics
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CASE Newsletter

Want to learn more about how you can empower youth of all abilities? Stay tuned for the upcoming Unified Champion Schools Inclusive Youth Leadership Curriculum in 2019. What are some ways your district already engages students as inclusive leaders? We'd love to hear your stories. Share with us (email Elise Calanni at ecalanni@specialolympics.org), and inspire others. Inclusive leadership at the local level could be the first step in engaging a future Special Olympics US Youth Ambassador!

If you would like to learn more about the Youth Ambassadors Initiative and how you could utilize some of these leaders in your communities, please contact Hannah Elliot-Higgins at hellioghiggins@specialolympics.org.

Resources:

[Youth Ambassadors Spark Page](#)

[Inclusive Youth Leadership Guide](#)

<https://www.generationunified.org/>

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

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Elise Calanni is a Communications, Resources, and Content Specialist 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 48 states, 2,103 school districts, and more than 6,400 schools, reaching students each year with messages and activities that promote inclusive youth leadership and social inclusion.