



NEWSLETTER

Special Olympics Project UNIFY

THE AMERICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM WAS FOUNDED ON THE PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, EQUITY AND JUSTICE SO THAT ALL YOUTH WOULD GROW TO BE CAPABLE, ACTIVE, AND PRINCIPLED CITIZENS.

IN FACT, THE VERY FABRIC OF OUR DEMOCRACY IS DEPENDENT ON STUDENTS STAYING IN SCHOOL LONG ENOUGH TO LEARN THE 21ST CENTURY SKILLS NECESSARY TO BE PRODUCTIVE, INFORMED, WORKING CITIZENS. STUDENTS WHO HAVE HIGH SCHOOL DEGREES ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE SATISFYING AND SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT. AND YET STUDIES SHOW STUDENTS LEAVE SCHOOLS FOR WHAT SEEM THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL OF REASONS: THEY DON'T LIKE SCHOOL; THEY DON'T FEEL THEY BELONG; THEY DON'T GET ALONG WITH OTHERS; THEY DON'T FEEL SAFE. AND HERE'S ANOTHER SHOCKING—AND RELATED—DROP-OUT STATISTIC: GRADUATION RATES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES ARE CITED IN SOME STUDIES AT OVER 32%.



Project UNIFY

This newsletter will illustrate one way to address the issue, through a broader vision of inclusion. We believe authentic inclusion is fundamental to many of the 15 dropout prevention effective strategies—and not just for students with special needs, but for all students in every school.

For generations, millions of Americans have looked to the Special Olympics movement as being at the heart of building a more healthy, hopeful, and accepting nation. And now, a new generation of athletes, volunteers, family leaders, and committed citizens are showing the urgency and dedication to be change makers anew. Based on an abiding belief in the power of sport and its power to build meaningful relationships and motivated citizens, young people throughout the country have launched Special Olympics Project UNIFY®. Project UNIFY is a multilevel effort to promote a youth-led vision of ending prejudice and creating schools and communities of acceptance for all, with Special Olympics Unified Sports® teams, and other inclusive sports activities as the primary platform. At the core of Project UNIFY is a paradigm shift with young people no longer seen as recipients of learning and programming but rather as archi-

fects of relationships and community building.

Project UNIFY integrates Special Olympics programs with ongoing youth activities and focuses on creating and sustaining education systems, classroom practices, school climate, and community engagement to ensure all students develop intellectual, physical, civic, and emotional competencies. The Project UNIFY toolkit includes service-learning curricula, Unified Sports and Young Athletes™ programs, R-word campaigns, youth volunteer training, and leadership development opportunities for young people with and without intellectual disabilities (ID). You can read more about these programs on the pages within.

These efforts, however, are not just a random array of feel-good programs; rather, they are designed to create specific and measureable change.

Project UNIFY aims to be an ally—in combating student engagement in schools (a key factor in increased dropout); in fighting childhood obesity through increased physical activity; in promoting schools where all young people are invited to serve; and in targeting intolerance, hate speech, and bullying. We do this by awakening a new generation to discrimination about which they are frequently

unaware and which they often unwittingly perpetrate. These efforts can serve as a tipping point for school culture and climate as young people with and without intellectual disability are encouraged to collaborate as creators of their community values and norms.

We believe that the work of Special Olympics and Project UNIFY can effectively reshape schools toward a reimagined and broader vision of inclusion that leads to deeper relationships, increased self-worth, greater student engagement, and stronger feelings of belonging—all factors in keeping all students in school.

Throughout this issue you will hear from teachers, students, superintendents and others who are experiencing the transformation that occurs when all young people, regardless of “ability,” are included, valued, and engaged in collaborating together to create climates of welcome and acceptance in their schools. We hope their words will invite you to join in this commitment, to share your own ideas, and to help create a strong network devoted to establishing a culture where young people are the architects of their own future.

—Andrea Cahn, Guest Editor
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The Impact of Project UNIFY

It is well documented that engaging young people in decision making and self-determination is a key factor in preventing dropout. Project UNIFY aims to be youth-centered, involving students with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) as participants as well as in the decision-making and planning process. The most recent data shows a wide range of youth involvement in Project UNIFY participating schools. Half of all schools (50%) involved students with or without intellectual disabilities in the planning of Project UNIFY events, and 33% held at least one activity in which students took a leadership role. Schools were most successful engaging students without intellectual disabilities as leaders (48% of schools), but a significant number (34%) also provided opportunities for students with ID to act in a leadership role.

The data also shows that those youth who were more involved in Project UNIFY held more positive attitudes toward their peers with ID, were more willing to interact with their peers with ID in and out of school, and perceived them as more capable. Moreover, those youth with more involvement in Project UNIFY held more positive perceptions of school climate.

A distinct cumulative or gradient effect has been noted as well. In those schools and among students with the highest levels of participation, there is the greatest impact on attitude; half of all schools participating in Project UNIFY (51%) implemented three or more of the initiatives listed below, a tipping point for change.

The components of Project UNIFY that contribute to that cumulative impact include inclusive sports, education, and leadership opportunities for all students:

Special Olympics Unified Sports® brings together individuals with ID and those without ID together to play team sports and is a core component of Project UNIFY. It fosters close collaboration, team building, and establishment of friendships that carry beyond the field of play. Unified Sports has been shown, through formal evaluations, to be successful in achieving attitude change, and building social skills and self-confidence in all participants.

Special Olympics Young Athletes Program™ is a structured group program of recreational skills development, socialization, physical coordination, individual confidence building, and language development that benefits all children aged 2-7. Formal evaluation of Young Athletes indicates that it is an extremely effective early intervention for young children with ID, implemented either by parents at home or by teachers in schools.

Special Olympics Get Into It® (GI) is a service-learning curriculum for K-12 general education and inclusive classrooms. The lessons emphasize language arts with other cross-curricular connections, exten-

sions, and modifications to support differentiated instruction and multiple learning styles, and are mapped to national performance standards. The content addresses the values of acceptance, introduces role models among the ID community, and includes a Web site with interactive resources and online learning and teaching communities of practice for both teachers and students.

Special Olympics Athlete Leadership is designed to create opportunities for athletes beyond training and competition, as coaches, officials, board members, spokespersons, and leaders. Project UNIFY focuses on inclusive athlete/youth leadership in schools, providing training for collaborative leadership and supports young people with ID as school leaders in clubs and leadership opportunities where they have traditionally been excluded.

The R-Word Campaign, or Spread the Word to End the Word® Day, is a youth-generated, youth-led viral pledge campaign to help students eradicate the hurtful and harmful use of language to demean and diminish. The R-word (retard or retarded) has become commonplace and is used by young and old alike, perpetuating a negative stereotype. As a set of youth engagement and attitude change activities, the R-word campaign has also become a powerful tool for building advocacy skills.

Fans in the Stands introduces students to persons with ID even when direct interaction is not possible, by cheering and supporting Special Olympics athletes at events. Clubs or school groups make posters and hold pep rallies to support and celebrate classmates competing in Special Olympics events along with other student athletes in their schools.

Special Olympics Partners Clubs bring students with and without intellectual disabilities together through planning and participating in sports, recreation, social, and community activities that foster understanding and acceptance. There is a strong learning, leadership, and collaborative skill-building focus to the clubs.



National
Dropout Prevention
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NEWSLETTER

The *National Dropout Prevention Newsletter* is published quarterly by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. Your comments are always welcome. Please address mail to:

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Network Notes

Meet Our Guest Editor

■ Guest editor Andrea Cahn has been with Special Olympics for 21 years and currently is the lead executive for Special Olympics Project UNIFY, a strategy to activate youth and to promote school communities where all young people become agents of change. Andrea, who holds a degree in special education, has also held positions during her tenure at Special Olympics as Vice President of Communications, Organizational Development Director for Government Relations and Urban Strategy, Regional Director for the Caribbean, and was lead administrator on a major Special Olympics expansion project in the New York City school system. Prior to her work with Special Olympics Andrea spent 12 years as an executive in television and radio broadcasting in Thailand.



Partnering With Project UNIFY

■ We are pleased to partner this issue with Special Olympics Project UNIFY. For 42 years, through the power of sport, Special Olympics has endeavored to create a better world by fostering the acceptance and inclusion of all people. The global movement provides sports training and competition opportunities for 3 million athletes with intellectual disabilities in 170 countries and is a catalytic force for communities, promoting volunteerism, civic engagement and a culture of welcome for all people. Recently, Special Olympics launched Project UNIFY in the United States as a school-based program using inclusive sports and education initiatives to promote unity and engagement and positive school climate. Project UNIFY is currently in more than 1500 schools in 43 states.

2010 Crystal Star Award Winners

■ The winners of the 2010 Crystal Star Award of Excellence were announced

at the National Dropout Prevention Network Conference in Philadelphia, PA, November 16, 2010. Congratulations to all!

Michael Carter,

Interim Senior Vice President at Sinclair Community College, Dayton, OH, was awarded the highest award for a Network member, the **Distinguished Leadership and Service Award**, based on his many contributions to the National Dropout Prevention Network as well as the cause of dropout prevention.



Individual Winners



Craig Zeno,

a Graduation Coach for the Houston Independent School District, TX, previously worked as a Dropout Prevention Specialist, a probation officer, and in various management positions at Neighborhood Centers, Inc. and Workforce Solutions.

Brenda Reeh is starting her 10th year at Quannah McCall Empowerment Elementary in North Las Vegas, NV. She has worked to improve academics, parental and community involvement, and personal connections with students.



Dr. Aaron L. Smith

is an Assistant Principal at Gildersleeve Middle School in Newport News, VA. He has over a decade of experience both in the classroom as

a teacher and a school administrator at middle and high school levels. He demonstrates leadership, vision, and creativity in dropout recovery, intervention, and prevention.

Robin J. Morrison

is Instructional Supervisor for Clinical Behavioral Services for Miami-Dade County Public Schools. She oversees the development of academic, behavioral, and clinical services for Programs for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities.



Program Winners

The Olympia Learning Center/STAR Academy, Columbia, SC, an alternative school, has built a program with two vital components: building relationships and providing opportunities for change. They provide diverse and innovative academic, career, support, and life-skills programs using nontraditional and challenging approaches that foster collaboration among staff, parents, postsecondary institutions, and community agencies.

The Choctaw Alternative Transitional School (CATS), Choctaw, OK, a school of choice, serves approximately 120 high school students through the school year from Choctaw-Nicomia Park, Luther, and Jones School Districts. Students attend evening classes and participate in daytime learning such as career-tech, postsecondary concurrent enrollment, community service, and work-site learning.

North Vista Education Center, Plymouth, MN, is a program of Intermediate District 287's Area Learning Center. The program has successfully served hundreds of students who are pregnant and parenting and/or in need of developing basic skills and recovering high school credit. Special features of the program include parenting and life-skills coursework for all students and tailored classes for English Language Learners.

Program Profile

Project UNIFY Brings Youth Together to Learn and Graduate

by William H. Hughes

Last summer, Project UNIFY became part of the necessary work to reduce high school dropouts. As one of the leaders, teachers, volunteers, youth, and principals who attended the Special Olympics National Education Conference and Youth Activation Summit during the Special Olympics National Games in Nebraska, I experienced firsthand the purpose of Project UNIFY—a collaborative effort to activate youth in the development of school communities where young people are agents of change—fostering respect, dignity, and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities (ID). Youth with and without ID join together in sports and education programs to advance school-based opportunities for all students, gaining awareness and understanding, and leading to advocacy for human rights and social justice.

In nearly 2,000 schools across 43 states, Project UNIFY links students with teachers and adults so they have engaging relationships, and learn more. In the case of those at risk of dropping out, being connected to an adult and engaged in meaningful work are some of the most important factors to keeping these students in school. Project UNIFY is one means to give those youth a reason to show up, to be involved, and to graduate.

Project UNIFY focuses on changing school climate and provides coaching and tools to help school leaders and teachers think differently, act differently, and act together so that young people feel part of an inclusive school environment. Project UNIFY is committed to effective practices that link youth to schools:

- **Youth leadership**—Young people representing the diversity of the student body are engaged in leadership positions, and schools acknowledge that youth leadership is a priority.
- **School/community collaborations**—Sustainable collaborations mutually benefit the school and the community. Local business and community leaders see Special Olympics and Project UNIFY as a way to engage in a local school's activities.
- **Creating and sustaining relationships**—A commitment to bring youth with and without disabilities together through programs that allow them to form lasting relationships and friendships.
- **Student developed and led advocacy program**—Rallies for Respect, the R-Word Campaign or web-based friendships and connections. The R-Word Campaign is a viral and grass roots awareness campaign where people say no to the hurtful use of the word “retard.”

Project UNIFY is the tipping point for school culture and climate as all young people collaborate with school and classroom leaders as architects of their community values and norms. Students who may not have graduated *will* when they are connected to each other and see themselves as important to the school. One father of a struggling high school student who saw his son participating in an inclusive “Community Walk” commented to me that he didn’t know his son was capable of that level of caring and commitment. He had not been hopeful that his son would graduate

with his class. Growing from that one experience, the boy is now a mentor for his disabled peers. His grades are up and his behavior more focused. He is on track for graduation.

I understand the challenges districts and schools face in ensuring quality education and experience for every youth. Project UNIFY is a means to give those ready to drop out a reason to show up, to care, and to get involved in work that means something to them. Special Olympics Project UNIFY provides a framework, philosophy, and a set of practices that will engage youth in activities that improve achievement and student connections, keep them in school, and lead to lifelong success.

Better schools are places students run to every day. They have student need-based and engaged cultures that focus on achievement, learning, mutual respect, and collaboration. These schools have higher achievement levels, are more inclusive and welcoming for youth, and are safe places where adults and youth want to be, places where all of us are working together to keep schools strong and youth graduating from high school.

—William H. Hughes, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Greendale (WI) Schools

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Program Profile

Physical Education and Health in New Hampshire

by Mary Jean Hippern

Inclusion can come in many forms and can present itself anytime, anywhere. I have been a Physical Education and Health teacher in New Hampshire for the past 24 years. Three years ago in one of my freshmen wellness classes I had a senior transfer student from Texas named Luke. He informed me that he had gotten into a fair amount of trouble while in Texas and was in my class because he had not passed his Physical Education requirement. In the same class, I also had Corey, a freshman Special Olympic Athlete. Corey had few social skills and did not always act like the “typical freshman.” Luke was not happy being in a freshmen class as a senior, and Corey was not happy either because the other freshman didn’t include him in activities. With Luke being 18 and a little more mature than the rest of the class, I asked Luke to help Corey by being his partner when the other classmates would not. Luke agreed, and class ran smoothly for the remainder of the quarter.

One day I was in the cafeteria, and I witnessed something that made me

think about inclusion. Luke invited Corey to eat lunch with him. Corey ate alone many days, and Luke didn’t think the request was a big one. The look on Corey’s face was priceless. You would think Corey won the lottery. From watching this exchange, I came up with the idea of a Unified Wellness class. A semester-long class where “typical” peers would mentor identified students in a Wellness class. I asked Luke if he would like to be one of my first “mentors” in this class. Luke agreed. That first pilot year was an amazing year for all involved, myself included. Corey flourished, and while Luke was in the class he did well in all of his classes. Luke graduated from high school, and this was a feat that he was unsure he could accomplish. I am not saying this class was the reason for Luke’s success, but I do know he said he wanted to be here daily for class and was rarely absent that semester. Corey is now a senior and participates in Unified Wellness each semester.

Through the success of Unified Wellness, the art department now offers a Unified Art class. In the 2011-



2012 school year we will be adding a Unified Theatre class. Typically there is a waiting list for mentors. One of the best things that has come out of this class is the interaction between the students in and out of class. These students have had parties together, and during the summer, there have been outings with each other. Recently, many of the kids went apple picking. As for me, this class is my daily highlight. I look forward to it each and every day. How many other High School Wellness Teachers can say that when they enter the gymnasium to begin class they get cheers from the students who can’t wait for class to begin?!

Mary Jean Hippern is a Physical Education and Health teacher in New Hampshire, and a recipient of funding from Project UNIFY for a Learning and Leadership project.

Professional Development Series

presents its first release

The Positive Effects of Mentoring

The National Dropout Prevention Center announces the debut of a brand new series of professional development resources: The Professional Development Series. Based on the radio webcasts from *Solutions to the Dropout Crisis*, this new series begins with a national content expert’s one-hour workshop. In addition, the series provided a complete multisession professional development program for schools and communities to use as next steps.

If you are considering mentoring as a strategy for dropout prevention, this 10-session in-service program is a great way to start! For mentoring to be effective, all parties need to understand how to do it right. This professional development program will ensure your success!

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- Promoting Powerful Professional Learning
- Small Learning Communities
- Posttest Evaluation Tool

Book Review

Think College, Postsecondary Education Options for Students with Intellectual Disabilities, 2010. Meg Grigal and Debra Hart. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, Baltimore. [ISBN 13: 978-1-55766-917-9]

Long ago, in the days before P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA) was signed into law by President Gerald R. Ford, parents of children with intellectual disabilities (ID) could hardly have dreamed of this book, let alone the emerging policies and practices it represents. Postsecondary education for students with ID was also the last major public policy effort that Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the Founder of Special Olympics, was engaged in prior to her death in 2009.

Grigal and Hart, both researchers as well as practitioners, have organized 10 chapters of the what and how of postsecondary education for students with ID. Prior to the beginnings of this movement in the 1990s, students with this disability might complete their public education, or drop out of school altogether. Many of them continue to get something analogous to a “Certificate of Completion” but not a diploma. Regardless of the route, too many were relegated to a sheltered workshop or some type of day activity center, both types of programs referred to as “day wasting” by advocates in the field. The employment rate for these students, as adults, remains abysmally low and the dropout rate abysmally high.

Today, public policy, professional practice, and research have brought these students, for those who choose to continue their education beyond secondary school, to a very new frontier. The evidence is clear. We know that inclusive secondary education benefits both students with and without intellectual disabilities. Students with intellectual disabilities, like students without intellectual disabilities, perform better in the adult employment market when they have some college courses under their belts. The programs being created range from certificate programs, to access, to degree-granting programs for students who can perform at that level.

Grigal, Hart, and the authors of the book’s chapters outline the legislation that is supporting and encouraging these programs, the practice models being employed nationwide and increasingly in Canada and Western Europe, as well as the strategies for working with the multiple public systems—from public schools to vocational rehabilitation, from two- and four-year colleges to the system in each state for adults with ID, from financial aid to supports for students and families.

Postsecondary education for students with ID, once unthinkable, is becoming not only accepted practice, but a real option for graduates of secondary education programs. Grigal and Hart, in one volume, have captured what educators and advocates need to know to make this educational option available for more students annually. At the writing of this review, the U.S. Department of Education was awarding up to 25 five-year grants, totaling over \$10 million in the Transition to Postsecondary Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities program. These 25 programs will join the over 200 existing programs in the U.S. providing students with ID the opportunities their predecessors never dreamed possible.

—Steven M. Eidelman, Executive Director
Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation
H. Rodney Sharp Professor of Human Services Policy and Leadership
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Also Recommended

From Integration to Inclusion: A History of Special Education in the 20th Century, by Margret A. Winzer, 2009, Gallaudet University Press, Washington, D.C.

The Teacher’s Guide to Inclusive Education: 750 Strategies for Success, by Peggy A. Hammeken, 2007. Peytral Publications, Minnetonka, MN.

Leadership Strategies for Successful Schoolwide Inclusion: The STAR Approach, by Dennis D. Munk, & Thomas L. Dempsey, 2010. Paul Brookes Publishers, Baltimore, MD.

Resources

Special Olympics

Special Olympics is a global nonprofit organization targeting the nearly 200 million people around the world who have intellectual disabilities.
www.specialolympics.org

Special Olympics Project UNIFY®

Special Olympics Project UNIFY® is an education-based project that uses sports and education programs to activate young people to develop school communities where all youth are agents of change—fostering respect, dignity, and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities.
www.specialolympics.org/project_unify.aspx

Special Olympics

Special Olympics launched the Web site www.r-word.org to combat the inappropriate use of the R-word (retard) in common usage.
www.r-word.org

Special Olympics Get Into It

Special Olympics Get Into It consists of online resources that include lessons, activities, videos, athlete stories, and supplemental materials.
<http://getintoit.specialolympics.org/>

Calendar

October 9-12, 2011 Chicago, IL
23rd Annual NDPN Conference
www.dropoutprevention.org

Taking Action on Effective Instruction

by Anderson Williams

Pablo Picasso was the preeminent artist of the 20th century, and his genius shook the art world from hundreds of years of tradition and sent it in new and profound directions. If you have ever seen a Picasso exhibit that includes his earliest work, you know that his technical skill was genius. He could render a self-portrait at 13 that defied understanding. His skill and technical ability at an early age were equivalent to those working at the highest level of the academy. And yet, this is not the genius for which he is known; a genius so defined for its complicity with the existing art world paradigm.

No, Picasso achieved his genius for exactly the opposite reason, for creating his own paradigm, one that rigorously defied the current norms that simply did not work for him. And yet, his efforts in creating this new paradigm were not about looking forward to new technologies or the skills and techniques of the future. They were instead focused on looking back and unpacking the baggage of cultural expectations and tired creative standards and traditions to become an artist that was more fully himself, more fully human.

In his words, “It took me four years to paint like Raphael and a lifetime to paint like a child.”

Picasso’s groundbreaking genius was the genius of the child; a genius we all once had but has been obscured by years of “development” and cultural norming. His was a genius of deconstruction for the sake of a more fully realized, more liberating construction. It was the genius of starting over and working toward the world we want to live in rather than adapting to the world as we already know it.

Similar to Picasso’s approach to painting, the youth of Project UNIFY are deconstructing the norms, expectations, and definitions of disability in order to develop more genuine friendships and achieve shared learning and



collective action. They are constructing the world they want to live in, a world not focused on disability, but on ability—something everyone has. And, what their approach enables is truly profound:

- The ability to express your love for another with openness and courage
- Seeing no one as a stranger and being willing to sit down at a table with anyone and start a conversation about anything
- Valuing the experience of teamwork and peer support over winning
- Understanding that difference is our common trait and that friendship and respect are at the center of everything good
- The power not to judge what is said when someone shares their thoughts but rather to celebrate the courage it took to do so
- The respect to clap sincerely when someone stands up rather than ironically when they fall down

- The belief that the “high 5” can and should be used at any time at any place and for any one

This sort of openness and connection among young people in Project UNIFY can only be described as a sort of social genius. While Picasso struggled a lifetime to undo the social, cultural, and creative norms of art, these young people are already foregoing the anxieties, the self-consciousness, the uncertainty of youth in order to build the collective and embrace the commonality of difference. These are teenagers who are deconstructing through their relationships and actions the prohibitive and exclusionary norms of their schools, communities, and our broader culture that label and exclude those with intellectual disabilities.

While these young people are already displaying a remarkable degree of social liberation, it is our charge as adults to take Picasso’s more rigorous path. We must commit to supporting their liberation through more inclusive systems and structures and broader awareness and understanding of all kinds of “differences.”

As educators, we must meet their sense of the collective with inclusive schools and classrooms rather than the separate educational and social worlds so many of them beautifully and painfully describe.

We must create the space for their genius to shake and shape our world and ensure that our jadedness and our tired paradigms don’t shape theirs.

We must meet their liberation with our own and together move forward in new and profound directions.

—Anderson Williams
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Viewpoint

A devastating number of recent headlines about school bullying have sent policymakers, educators, parents, and students in search of solutions. But we should be careful to avoid quick fixes that extinguish problem behaviors instead of addressing root causes. Anti-bullying programs, like other symptoms-focused wars, miss the point by directing attention to what needs to *stop*. While understandable, anti-bullying campaigns alone are insufficient for effective prevention. Instead, the major emphasis should focus on equipping children with the skills and experiences that we want them to *start* having.

The statistics are staggering. Nearly 17% of American students are bullied at least two to three times a month, and 28% of students were bullied sometime during the last six months. Little more than half of high school students feel they are important in their school community, and tragically, nearly 15% of high school students say they have seriously considered suicide within the last year.

The reality for students with intellectual disabilities is even bleaker. In one recent study, less than one-third of public school students acknowledged having a schoolmate or classmate with intellectual disabilities, and only 10% of all students reported having a friend with intellectual disabilities, demonstrating the isolation and alienation students with disabilities experience every day in their schools.

An unlikely set of leaders is changing that status quo: students with intellectual disabilities. Through Special Olympics Project UNIFY, these students are leading an effort to start doing things right—to start promoting acceptance, along with unified sports and recreation. For 42 years, children and adults with intellectual disabilities have joined Special Olympics to promote a culture of empowerment and acceptance for all young people, with a formula for success that provides opportunities to train and compete in sports together, to engage communities in change, and to deepen a sense of commitment to an inclusive world-

view. Today, this youth-led campaign is devoted to developing school communities where all young people are agents of change—fostering respect, dignity, and inclusion for all.

Through Project UNIFY, students with and without intellectual disabilities are rallying together to end the use of hurtful language, holding youth summits on inclusive education, playing side by side on the same Unified Sports teams, creating clubs and conducting communal activities to promote acceptance and inclusion, challenging existing prejudices and stereotypes in their classrooms and communities.

It is understandable, with the terrible news that enters our living rooms almost every day about bullying, that leaders are focused on what needs to stop. In the past 40 years, the athletes of Special Olympics have learned one lesson: What you *start* is just as important as what you *stop*.

—*Timothy P. Shriver, Ph.D.*
Chairman & CEO, Special Olympics
Chairman, CASEL