

Northern Office



Dear School Leader,

Special Olympics Project UNIFY is an education-based project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education that uses the sports and education programs of Special Olympics to activate young people across the U.S in order to promote school communities where all young people are agents of change – fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics believes that through sports young people can make a difference in friendships, schools and communities. Project UNIFY began its sixth year of activities in the fall of 2013. Special Olympics Project UNIFY incorporates Special Olympics sports and related activities, however, in this new way of operating (youth-centered, school focused) there is an enhancement in current programs and paradigms from a focus on events to committing to a movement advocating for youth as change agents now and in the future.

In the 45 years since Special Olympics was founded, much progress has been made, yet there is much yet to be done; we still face the challenge of creating a society that fosters respect, dignity and advocacy for all; we struggle to be viewed as a movement relevant to all of “us” and not only an event for “them”; and educators often narrow-cast Special Olympics as sports only, and not a valuable education program that can enhance school climate and advance schools’ educational agendas. We have strong and irrefutable evidence that Special Olympics sports and related programs provide platforms for youth to understand and value their peers with intellectual disabilities, and empower and activate youth to create opportunities for and with them in sport, friendship and advocacy. Therefore, Special Olympics Project UNIFY is much more than a re-naming of existing school-based programs; it is rather an innovative response to unequivocal research that shows that Special Olympics local programming can contribute to eradicating the social and environmental walls to inclusion that our athletes and those with intellectual disabilities continue to face.

Special Olympics believes that through sports young people can make a difference in friendships, schools and communities. Project UNIFY is youth driven, with a Youth Activation Committee (YAC) made up of young people representing middle schools and high schools across the state. Members of this committee have been working together over the past semester to develop strategies promoting school communities where all young people are agents of change. These amazing student leaders have organized a Youth Activation Summit which they are inviting your students to attend. Space for this summit is limited and registration will take place on a first come first serve basis. This absolutely free leadership summit will leave your students engaged, motivated and wanting to do more in your school community. The summit will take place in Bloomington / Normal on February 15-16, 2014. All Housing and Meal needs will be provided by Special Olympics Illinois. Attached to this letter is a flyer about the summit and a registration form. I hope you take advantage of this amazing opportunity to help develop your school community.

Should you have any questions or need additional information please feel free to contact me at any time, I can be reached at 630-200-7693 or jmarcello@soill.org. We look forward to your school's participation in this amazing program!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer E. Marcello".

Jennifer Marcello
Special Olympics Illinois – Project UNIFY Liaison

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YOUTH ACTIVATION SUMMIT 2014



REGISTRATION DEADLINE 1/31/14

The Youth Activation Summit is being offered for Youth by Youth. It empowers our students to be the agents of change and to create a more inclusive environment in their schools and beyond. Each session will have youth guiding youth through purposeful activities including Social Justice, historical behavior, accepted practices and inclusion. Students will take home activity ideas that may ignite more students into participating and being more accepting of each other as well as acknowledging similarities rather than differences. Students will be actively engaged in conversations and idea sharing throughout the summit.

No cost to attend! Housing and Meals provided for all attendees!

**SPREAD THE WORD
TO END THE WORD™**
www.r-word.org

Saturday and Sunday,
February 15-16, 2014
4:00 pm Saturday-
4:00 pm Sunday

Each school that attends will need to register a chaperone and up to 3 pairs of Special Olympics athletes and partners for 6 students total. This partner/athlete ratio is very important.



Special Olympics

Be a fan.

Project UNIFY.



WHERE: Chateau Hotel, Bloomington, IL

REGISTRATION DEADLINE 1/31/14