



**Unified Sports®**  
Policies & Procedures  
2022-23



**Special  
Olympics**  
Maine



Special Olympics  
**Unified Champion  
Schools®**



## **MPA Unified Sports Committee**

This manual is published by the Maine Principals' Association Unified Sports Committee, 50 Industrial Drive Augusta, Maine 04330.

### **Philosophy:**

The focus of MPA Unified Sports is competition (not simply participation) using the Unified Sports Player Development Model. The Player Development Model emphasizes all players having the opportunity to play and no single player being allowed to dominate a given game. The opportunity to compete in sports teaches many life lessons: to work as a team, to follow rules and to be committed. Through sports we can find shared interests that allow friendships to form. Through MPA/Special Olympics Unified Sports program we have an opportunity to make real positive changes in the lives of students with and without disabilities.

We must have high expectations for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities because we are now teaching a generation of regular education students that people with disabilities can follow rules, be held accountable and be viable members of their community or society in general.

- Unified Sports shall be administered by the MPA Unified Sports Committee and the rules of the National Federation of State High Schools (NFHS) will govern the sport.
- Exception to the NFHS Uniform Rule(s):
  - One set of uniforms per school (one color) shall be allowed.
  - SONA Unified Sports® Unified Branding: With the goal of increasing brand recognition of Special Olympics Unified Sports®, a set of Uniform Guidelines and supporting resources have been finalized by SONA. These guidelines apply to all Unified Sports teams in the SONA region, These guidelines are also in compliance with the NFHS sport rules as a “commemorative patch”. **Uniforms, or a visible area of an under layer, should include the Special Olympics Unified Sports® logo. Logo options can be found on the [Resources page for Marketing and Communications – Special Olympics Brand](#) under Special Olympics Unified Sports® and Play Unified.**
    - **Order of preference (red as primary, all other colors as alternates; 4-line versions not recommended):**
      1. Special Olympics Unified Sports circle logo or
      2. 2-Line logo or
      3. 2-Line logo lozenge or
      4. Special Olympics Unified Sports® in text
      5. Special Olympics Play Unified logo (white lettered logo is included in blank space)

### **1. Introduction to Unified Sports:**

The vision of the joint MPA/Special Olympics sports project is to allow high school students with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities the opportunity to represent their high school by participating on a Unified Sports team providing the students with a quality experience of sports training and competition. **The principle of meaningful involvement is core to the successful implementation of all Unified Sports. Meaningful involvement is when:**

- **Every player is an equally valued team member**
- **Every player is given the opportunity to contribute to the success of their team**
- **Social inclusion on the field leads to social inclusion off the field**

### **2. Definition of Participants:**

- a. **Unified Student Athlete:** A student will be eligible as an athlete if that person satisfies any one

of the following requirements:

- i. The person has been identified by an agency or professional as having intellectual disabilities as determined by their localities.
  - ii. The person has a cognitive delay, as determined by standardized measures such as intelligent quotient or “IQ” testing or other measures which are generally accepted within the professional community in that Accredited Program’s nation as being a reliable measurement of the existence of a cognitive delay.
  - iii. The person has a closely related developmental disability. A “closely related developmental disability” means having functional limitations in both general learning (such as IQ) and in adaptive skills (such as in recreation, work, independent living, self-direction, or self-care). However, persons whose functional limitations are based solely on a physical, behavioral, or emotional disability, or a specific learning or sensory disability, are not eligible to participate as an athlete, but may participate as a unified partner or other volunteer position
- b. **Unified Student Partner:** Any student that meets the student eligibility criteria outlined in MPA Article II, Section 2.
  - c. **Unified Student Assistant Coach/Manager:** Any student that meets the student eligibility criteria outlined in MPA Article II, Section 2.

### 3. Participant Eligibility:

#### a. Age, Scholastic and Semester Requirements:

- i. **Unified Student Athlete:** Any student that meets the Unified student athlete criteria outlined in Section 2.a. The student must be registered at the school, working towards a diploma or certificate, and meeting all other eligibility standards developed by the school.
- ii. **Unified Student Partner:** Any student that meets the student eligibility criteria outlined in MPA Article II, Section 2 as well as meeting all local eligibility rules established by the school.

#### b. Medical/Physical Requirements:

The MPA Sports Medicine Committee believes it is necessary to examine the athletes every other year between the sixth grade and high school graduation. The complete exam should be done when the athlete enters the competitive sports program. The history portion of the PPE should be completed by the athlete and signed by his/her parents each year. In the off year, the athlete’s health history form should be viewed by the school nurse. If there are changes in the medical history, the school nurse should bring it to the attention of a physician and a decision can be made concerning whether the student athlete needs to have another complete physical examination, or not, before proceeding with the upcoming athletic school year. The examination can be done by a medical doctor, doctor of osteopathy, nurse practitioner, or a physician’s assistant. Athletes who sustained major injuries or have medical illnesses during the interim, i.e., the time that elapses between the two examinations, should be recycled into the physical examination program at the start of the next school year, no matter what grade they attend. A sample pre-participation physical exam form may be found on the MPA website.

- c. **Restriction of Participation – Unified Student Partner:** Varsity Student Athletes playing the same sport will be **prohibited** from competing as a Unified Partner in Unified Sports that season. Appropriate participation for those varsity student athletes may take place as a Unified Sport Assistant Coach or Manager. Schools with limited enrollment or special circumstances may apply to the Unified Sports Committee for a waiver of this rule.

### 4. Cooperative Teams: Schools may establish a cooperative team under the following conditions:

- a. Principals of all participating schools must approve the establishment of a cooperative team.
  - b. The request to form a cooperative team must be made prior to the start of the competitive season.
  - c. The establishment of a cooperative team (a) must be consistent with the Maine Principals' Association's dedication to fairness in competition and (b) would be consistent with the spirit and intent of the rule.
  - d. The name of the cooperative team should include the name of the schools involved in the cooperative team.
5. **Coaches Eligibility:** A Unified Sports Coach must complete the [NFHS Coaching Unified Sports](#) online course as well as meet all other MPA Coaches Eligibility criteria outlined in MPA Article II, Section 3. For a Unified coach successful completion of the NFHS Coaching Unified Sports online course fulfills the coaching principles requirement.
  6. **Alignment of Sports:** Unified Sports teams shall be aligned in one (1) class as a co-ed sport. The class will consist of a North and South Division. For scheduling purposes participating schools will be divided into regions.
  7. **Officiating:** All sanctioned Unified Sports contests will have a minimum of one (1) certified official as outlined in the individual sport bulletin. Schools will obtain their own officials for the Unified Games during the regular season.
  8. **Notification of Participation:** Schools planning on sanctioning a Unified Sports team are asked to submit an intent to participate form by the specified date prior to the start of the season outlined in the individual sport bulletin.
  9. **MPA Completed Schedule:** All teams must complete their regular season. Any scheduled contests not played must be made up at the next mutually agreed date. Teams that do not complete their season will not be eligible for the post-season play.
  10. **Tournament Selection:** All teams participating will qualify for tournament play as outlined in that sports individual sport bulletin (Post-season play varies by sport).
  11. **Medical Coverage at Athletic Events:** Schools participating in a Unified Sport are encouraged to provide appropriate licensed medical personnel at practices and contests.
  12. **NFHS Guidelines for Management of Concussions:** The MPA follows the NFHS guidelines for the management of Concussions:  
*"Any athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion (such as loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion, or balance problems) shall be immediately removed from the contest and shall not return to play until cleared by an appropriate health care professional."*