



Special Olympics Pennsylvania Interscholastic Unified Track and Field

What is Interscholastic Unified Sports?

Special Olympics PA Interscholastic Unified Sports® (IUS) is a fully-inclusive co-ed after school high school sports program which successfully brings together students with and without intellectual disabilities. They train and compete as equal teammates and through this experience, become friends. IUS teams are regarded like every other interscholastic sports team at the high school.

IUS is part of Unified Champion Schools, a national program in over 7,600 schools, which offers inclusive sports, youth leadership, and whole school engagement activities. ESPN is the Global Presenting Sponsor for Unified Sports. Special Olympics PA partners with the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) and is the governing body for Interscholastic Unified Sports. Currently, Unified Indoor Bocce is offered by high schools in the winter and Unified Track and Field in the spring.



Interscholastic Unified Track and Field Program Summary

- The Unified Track and Field team is regarded the same as all other interscholastic sports teams at the high school. For example, Unified Sports student athletes are eligible to earn varsity letters and the team is included in all pep rallies and post-season awards ceremonies.
- **Roster Requirements**
 - A Unified Track and Field team is co-ed and can have a minimum of 12 and maximum of 40 participants who are in the 9th-12th grades. They commit to attending all after school practices and competitions for the full season just like other interscholastic sports team members. Students receiving services from the school district until the age of 21 also are eligible.
 - The team consists of a proportional number of Special Olympics-eligible athletes (defined as having an intellectual disability, developmental disability including some types of autism or cognitive delay) and students without intellectual or developmental disabilities. Specifically,

this means a minimum of 40% of the roster must be students who are Special Olympics-eligible and a minimum of 40% of the roster must be students without a disability. The remaining 20% can be distributed between either of these groups and also includes students with other types of disabilities.

- Spring season interscholastic athletes (including members of the boys and girls track and field teams) are not eligible to be members of the Interscholastic Unified Track and Field team.
- **Paperwork Requirement:** All students who are members of the Unified Track and Field team are required to complete the same PIAA paperwork (which includes the physical examination and parental consent forms) as the other interscholastic student athletes at the high school.

Additionally, Special Olympics PA needs its own consent form to be completed for each member of the team. This will be provided to the coaches to give to the students and their parents.

- **Unified Sports Principles:** One of the fundamental principles of Unified Sports to promote inclusion is meaningful involvement. To ensure all team members are empowered to contribute, everyone trains and competes as equal peers. This is not a mentorship program, but rather one where equality is emphasized and labels (i.e. “special education student” or “Special Olympics athlete”) are removed and people are valued for their unique qualities and strengths.
- **Format:** Students select one track event and one field event in which to train and compete, and also may be selected to one relay team. In meets, they are placed in heats with other competitors who have similar qualifying times or distances. Every heat is scored, with 1st place earning 5 points, 2nd place earning 3 points, and 3rd place earning 1 point for their school’s Unified team. The high school with the most cumulative points wins the meet.
 - **Track Events** include: 100 meters, 400 meters, 800 meters; 4 x 100 and 4 x 400 relays
 - **Field Events** include: Shot put, running long jump, mini javelin
- **Season Length:** The season begins with the team having its first practices during the **week of March 7** (the start of the PIAA spring sports season). Practices and competitions run through **May 19**, depending on the date of the culminating regional championship event.
- **Practices and Competitions:** There is a requirement for **two after-school practices each week with at least three regular season meets (one home and two away)**. There is a culminating regional championship, with the winning team advancing to the Interscholastic Unified Track and Field State Championships conducted as part of the PIAA State Championships at Shippensburg University.
- **Coach Training Requirements**
 - Attend the Unified Track and Field Coaches’ Training in your region in February
 - During the preseason, complete the following required free online *Coaching Unified Sports* course and *Concussion Training* course offered through the National Federation of High Schools:

Unified Sports Training: <https://nfhslearn.com/courses/coaching-unified-sports>

Concussion Training: <https://nfhslearn.com/courses/concussion-in-sports-2>