

SO Get Into It Playbook

I. Introduction

In 2010, Special Olympics re-launched its *Special Olympics Get Into It*® curriculum - an updated resource for K-12 educators and students that explores the subjects of inclusion, acceptance, and social justice through the lens of core curriculum requirements and a service-learning framework.

This *SO Get Into It* Playbook was designed especially for Special Olympics Program staff and volunteers like you who wish to implement the *SO Get Into It* curriculum within their local education community. It will serve as a guide for establishing and nurturing relationships among Special Olympics Programs, schools, educators, and the greater community as a whole.

The Playbook will provide:

- Background information about the *SO Get Into It* curriculum
- An explanation of the importance of gaining traction for and advocacy of the curriculum among the local education community
- Tips and suggestions for engaging the local education community and leveraging community partnerships
- Marketing resources and templates that will help you to communicate effectively with the target audience and build awareness around the curriculum
- Contact information for Special Olympics representatives who can answer additional questions about the curriculum and the outreach efforts surrounding it

There is no single "right" way to gain traction for the *SO Get Into It* curriculum in your local community. Many different strategies and approaches have been successful, depending on the community and the makeup of the local education system. The purpose of this Playbook is to offer a range of ideas and examples that might work in your community and feel comfortable for you.

Keep in mind that, as the following pages make clear, today's schools are under greater pressure than ever before to ensure that students succeed academically. Schools, ever mindful of students' academic achievement, may question the relevance of introducing Special Olympics content. However, we developed *SO Get Into It* to address many school needs. Your challenge will be to convince school professionals and other representatives that Special Olympics not only has something significant to offer, but that we can help educators and students

address many of their academic goals and priorities - creating a win-win situation for everyone involved.

II. About the SO Get Into It Program

SO Get Into It serves to Educate, Motivate, and Activate young people as agents of change in an important social movement. The program is sponsored by a generous grant from the US Department of Education, which has enabled Special Olympics to offer *SO Get Into It* resources free of charge to K-12 educators in the US and beyond.

SO Get Into It is not a curriculum for special education classrooms. Rather, it is a set of resources that educators across all subject areas can use to address their core curriculum requirements, infuse character education into their classrooms, and help implement meaningful service-learning projects that can have a lasting impact among students.

The latest version of the *SO Get Into It* program also targets students directly with a set of online interactive resources. More detail as resources are developed...

Structure

The *SO Get Into It* curriculum is structured into four distinct units, distinguished by grade levels: grades K-2 and 3-5 for elementary school classrooms, grades 6-8 for middle school classrooms, and grades 9-12 for high school classrooms. Each unit is comprised of four self-contained lesson plans - or activities. Although the activities follow a linear flow, educators need not implement all four activities within a unit to achieve positive outcomes.

Each activity includes the following components:

- Activity Overview
- Cross-Curricular Connections
- Academic Skills Addressed
- National Standards Addressed (links to state standards are listed on the website at: <http://www.specialolympics.org/xxxxxxx>)
- Desired Outcomes
- Time Required (each activity typically requires two 45-minute class periods)
- Materials Needed

- Background
- Important Terms
- Activity Steps and Suggestions
- Suggested Assessment
- Cross-Curricular Extensions
- General Extensions and Modifications (including modifications for inclusive classrooms)
- Additional Resources

Content

The *SO Get Into It* curriculum carries a language arts and social studies focus, but includes many options that educators in other curricular areas (e.g., mathematics, health, visual arts, technology) will find useful and relevant. Further, the curriculum was written within a service-learning framework, so that educators may implement their age-appropriate unit as a means of meeting service-learning requirements.

The curriculum explores topics such as:

- Self-identity
- Character education
- The prevalence of the R-word in popular culture
- The perseverance demonstrated by Special Olympics athletes

Student activities include:

- Self-reflecting on their own attitudes and behaviors toward those with intellectual disabilities
- Evaluating levels of tolerance and inclusion within their school or community
- Developing and delivering messages of support for Special Olympics athletes
- Creating a product that models inclusion and acceptance for their peers

The *SO Get Into It* curriculum also includes several built-in opportunities for Special Olympics athletes, local Program personnel, and volunteers to visit schools and discuss both their experiences with intellectual disabilities and

with the Special Olympics organization as a whole. Additional opportunities exist for students and classrooms to attend local Special Olympics events and support the organization and the athletes at its core.

Complementing the curriculum is a new student-focused web portal that includes fun, interactive experiences for youth ([URL](#)). Whether a student was exposed to the *SO Get Into It* curriculum in the classroom or is simply interested in the Special Olympics organization in general, this portal will deliver content that was designed and written specifically for them. More details to follow once this portal is set up..

Goals

The *SO Get Into It* curriculum will serve to:

- Demonstrate the similarities and differences among people with and without intellectual disabilities,
- Promote better understanding and acceptance of individuals with intellectual disabilities,
- Foster participation and involvement in Special Olympics, and
- Motivate sustainable change among students and activate them as champions of an important social movement through a service-learning experience which provides an opportunity to apply the knowledge, skills, and dispositions addressed throughout the curriculum.

Availability

The new version of the *SO Get Into It* curriculum can only be accessed online, at: www.specialolympics.org/getintoit. This delivery mechanism will not only help cut down on production costs and enable ongoing updates to the curriculum, but will also foster a collaborative environment among the educators who are using the curriculum.

When an educator visits the *SO Get Into It* website, he or she will create an account that will:

- Grant access to the curriculum and related multimedia content,
- Provide links to the student web portal, and
- Enable participation in an online community of educators who are using these resources.

More details to follow once the online community is set up..

III. Becoming a Local Champion

When it comes to promoting, marketing, and distributing the *SO Get Into It* curriculum, the involvement of state and local Special Olympics Programs personnel is essential. We want educators, youth, and communities in all corners of the US - and eventually, the globe - to recognize the positive impact that *SO Get Into It* can have on youth attitudes and behaviors toward individuals with intellectual disabilities. But we need to start small. Your involvement as a local champion of the program will help ensure that we create an experience of success, from the beginning and at a local level.

Your local efforts may involve the following:

- Appoint a staff person or key volunteer to coordinate involvement with schools
- Work with the regional Project UNIFY personnel responsible for *SO Get Into It*
- Organize meetings with key education leaders to introduce *SO Get Into It* for initial permission to use it in schools. Meetings could include the national Program Director, Board Chair or Member, prominent educator, parents, etc.
- Respond to local inquiries from *the SO Get Into It* website
- Research new schools in which to introduce *SO Get Into It*
- Follow up with schools once materials are in place. Offer technical assistance in starting Programs, provide Global Messengers to speak with students, register youth and educators as volunteers, register new athletes, etc.
- Conduct surveys (using instruments developed by Special Olympics) to assess the impact of *SO Get Into It* in schools and on the local Program, and report your findings back to Project UNIFY staff
- Connect schools with sub-Programs and local Programs in which students can assist. This may include volunteering at local events, conducting fundraising activities, carrying out an awareness activity (like "Spread the word to end the word"), and taking part in Partner Clubs™ or Unified Sports® training and competition.

The benefits of establishing and nurturing relationships with educators and students extend beyond the curriculum. These relationships will likely foster greater interest in the Special Olympics organization in general, and open the door to a potential pool of new volunteers, donors, and athletes.

Throughout your involvement with *SO Get Into It*, know that you will have full support from Special Olympics in your efforts.

IV. Reaching the Local Education Community

Understanding the needs and priorities of schools is the first step in gaining traction with key school personnel. The *SO Get Into It* program offers many benefits to schools and can help address goals that are important to all educators. *SO Get Into It* can help schools:


- Enhance students' achievement of learning standards,
- Support character education and positive youth development,
- Promote student leadership,
- Involve students in meaningful service-learning experiences in the school and community,
- Change students' attitudes and behaviors toward individuals with intellectual disabilities, and
- Inspire new school-based Programs in settings where students with intellectual disabilities are "mainstreamed," "included," or "integrated" with the general student population.

For all schools today, academic achievement is the highest priority. Most educators also recognize that academic achievement is strengthened when students are provided with rich experiences which challenge them to analyze, synthesize, and apply their learning in a meaningful context. To succeed academically, students need significant opportunities to develop and grow socially and emotionally - both as individuals and as citizens and members of the school/community.

Character Education

Character education is an approach that promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character. It is predicated on the belief that (1) certain core ethical values - such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, respect, and perseverance - are fundamental to good character, and (2) there is basic agreement about these values across all segments of our society.

Character education is sometimes taught as a set of classroom lessons or through reading assignments. It is also practiced school-wide through actions. For example, a school explicitly states the values that it upholds, models those values, uses them as the basis of human relations in the school, and expects all



members of the schools community to behave in ways that are consistent with the stated values.

Special Olympics and *SO Get Into It* are consistent with and support the character education approach. They promote the core values of caring, fairness, responsibility, respect, and perseverance.

Service-Learning

Service-learning receives growing recognition as a powerful teaching strategy that increases academic achievement, civic engagement and is even a potential dropout prevention strategy. In service-learning, students across academic disciplines plan, implement, and assess service projects in their school and community. Service-learning provides the means by which service to the community becomes an opportunity for reflection, rigorous interconnected learning, and personal growth. It is increasingly employed in schools at all grade levels as a teaching method for students to achieve academic, civic, social, personal, and career knowledge and skills.

SO Get Into It was developed within a service-learning framework. Most importantly, the curriculum leads logically to student involvement in service-learning experiences that directly and indirectly impact Special Olympics. Encouraging the formation of new school-based Special Olympics Programs can be a direct result of service-learning.

For additional information about service-learning, please visit the State Education Agency K-12 Service-Learning Network's website at:

<http://www.seanetonline.org/>

Being Prepared

An essential ingredient to communicating effectively with school officials is adequate preparation. Know the facts about your Special Olympics Program and anticipate the questions that will be asked. How teachers will find time to integrate these lessons and cost are two issues that will likely surface, and you should be prepared to address them.

Many school officials view Special Olympics as a once-a-year event and are unaware that it is a year-round sports training program. Others hold the misconception that Special Olympics is only for children when, in fact, persons eight years and older are eligible. Be prepared to present basic information about your Program.

In addition to knowing about your own Program, it will be helpful to know about the needs and goals of the school system. Learn about the system's structure and the personnel who are influential. Pay attention to the actions of the school decision-makers and become familiar with laws affecting special education and

sports. Be ready to help educators understand how Special Olympics can help meet the academic, social, and behavioral goals of our education system. Find out about the issues and needs of the school systems and present some solutions. An example relating to Special Olympics would be to offer Special Olympics sports training and competition programs to schools using their facilities after school with your volunteers as coaches. This would provide a needed service to students with and without intellectual disabilities. Schools get to partner with a respected community service provider at little or no cost while meeting the needs of a traditionally underserved student population.

Marketing Goals

The overall business goals for the *SO Get Into It* program include the following marketing-related goals:

- Leverage existing Special Olympics partnerships in *SO Get Into It* marketing and outreach efforts,
- Increase adoption rates of the *SO Get Into It* curriculum,
- Increase teacher evangelism of the *SO Get Into It* curriculum,
- Encourage *SO Get Into It* dialogue via Fan Community (<http://www.specialolympics.org/community/index.html>) local social media/social networking among Special Olympics Programs (FaceBook, YouTube, TeacherTube, MySpace, Twitter),
- Increase the interaction between Programs personnel and the local education community, and
- Leverage *SO Get Into It* to deepen the impact of Project UNIFY.

Marketing Tips

- You may wish to begin marketing the *SO Get Into It* program directly to schools and educators through existing Special Olympics and Project UNIFY relationships. This is a great place to start. Once these teachers and administrators have successfully adopted the program, they too will become champions of *SO Get Into It*, spreading the word virally to their peers.
- It is very important to obtain support from school officials at the highest administrative level (e.g., superintendents), because once their endorsement is received, it will be easier to obtain support at all subsequent levels.
- Solicit testimonials from successful users for use in future marketing efforts. Ask them to point out which aspects of the curriculum resonated with them (i.e., what they learned, what they enjoyed, what proved most

valuable). These aspects are likely to resonate with their peers, so your marketing efforts should emphasize them.

- Be aware of the timing of your requests to schools. If you approach school personnel at the very beginning of the school year, they may be overwhelmed. The same will hold true just prior to the holiday season. And by late spring, educators will be focused solely on exams and graduations. Early fall and early spring are generally the best times to approach educators. Seeking opportunities to connect Special Olympics with other events or initiatives in the schools will help develop your relationship as a mutually beneficial partnership.
- Beyond your initial relationships, you may find it useful to partner with other local stakeholders. The media, government agencies, teacher organizations, and PTA/PTO groups could all serve as influential supporters of the *SO Get Into It* program. Ask for referrals and introductions from friends, family members, colleagues, social media contacts, and/or local partners.
- Keep in touch with those who have used the curriculum successfully. Notify them of any updates to *SO Get Into It*, local initiatives or news coverage about the program, and social media channels on which they can follow the program. These contacts may be your next source for referrals - whether peers who may wish to use the curriculum or potential Special Olympics athletes.
- Reach out to the State Education Agency service-learning expert in your state. They may be able to help you connect with local schools who are already offering service-learning experiences to their students and may have a great deal of readiness to engage in this work. Joint efforts between Special Olympics and service-learning can result in rich opportunities for both partners as we engage participants with and without disabilities in working collaboratively to make their communities stronger.

National Marketing Efforts

TBD

V. Marketing Resources

Educating the public about Special Olympics and the *SO Get Into It* curriculum program will be an important part of the success of these materials. Here is a list of ideas that will help you in your marketing and promotional efforts:

- Use the sample letter templates in Appendix A to model your communication with school personnel, as well as the top-down communication that happens once a school or district has endorsed *the SO Get Into It* program.

- Customize the attached sample press release (see Appendix B). Distribute it to education reporters at local daily and weekly newspapers, radio shows, and television stations.
- Send a letter to the editor about the importance of the *SO Get Into It* curriculum and students' participation in Special Olympics. Letters can be signed by school principals and other leaders, Special Olympics representatives, or influential educators within the community.
- Organize a community event featuring students who have "taken action" as a result of service-learning activities and lessons learned from the curriculum.
- Post any written content (e.g., press releases, event flyers) or links to news articles (e.g., letters to the editor, TV video clips) on your social media channels (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn).
- Work with media outlets that promote education, youth, and tolerance.
- Leverage our relationships with current "endorsers" of *SO Get Into It* by connecting with your state's representative. These include:
 - ✓ American Association for Physical Activity and Recreation (AAPAR) <http://www.aahperd.org/aapar/>
 - ✓ American Federation of Teachers (AFT) <http://aft.org>
 - ✓ American School Counselor Association (ASCA) <http://www.schoolcounselor.org>
 - ✓ Community of Caring (C of C) <http://www.communityofcaring.org>
 - ✓ Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) <http://www.cec.sped.org>
 - ✓ State Education Agency Service-Learning Network

Story Angles

Consider inviting local news programs or reporters to do a story about any or all of the following:

- Visit a classroom using the Special Olympics curriculum and interview students about what they are learning.
- Interview a Global Messenger. Interview a teacher or education official on the impact of the *SO Get Into It* curriculum within the school.
- Feature a school-aged Special Olympics hero.

- Tie-in with “back to school” stories—for example, a new curriculum launch on the first day of school.

VI. Additional Information

For additional information about the *SO Get Into It* program or questions about how best to market it to the local education community, please contact:

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Special Olympics

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(202) 824-0275

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Online SO Get Into It educator resources:

www.specialolympics.org/getintoit

Online SO Get Into It student portal:

www.specialolympics.org/getintoit



Appendix A: Sample Letters

To School Supervisors from You (as a representative of your local Special Olympics Program)

Dear _____:

Are you aware that more than 3.1 million athletes are involved in Special Olympics, competing in 30 Olympic-type sports in more than 170 countries in all regions of the world? More than 3.1 million athletes is exciting, but we know there are more than a hundred million potential participants with intellectual disabilities waiting on the sidelines, not getting the chance to compete and grow as people. Therefore, Special Olympics is proud to announce *SO Get Into It*[®], a K-12 unique curriculum that is being made available to schools at no cost.

SO Get Into It is designed to Educate, Motivate and Activate young people to become more aware of and better understand the issue of diversity as it relates to people with intellectual disabilities. The curriculum goes beyond attitude change by incorporating an important character education/service-learning component to involve all students directly in service alongside individuals with disabilities. This is accomplished through four lessons aligned with learning standards in language arts, social studies, health, mathematics, technology, and the arts. By the end of the four lessons, students will have had an opportunity to become actively engaged in a Special Olympics activity, along with fellow students with intellectual disabilities in the school or community.

That's how the next million athletes will be moved off the sidelines and onto the playing fields.

When Eunice Kennedy Shriver founded Special Olympics in 1968, she dreamed of helping people with intellectual disabilities and other disabilities develop independence, community acceptance and self-esteem through sports training and athletic competition. That dream has grown into a worldwide movement and you can take an important step to help us reach the next million athletes.

Please review the curriculum at www.specialolympics.org/getintoit and consider incorporating it into your district's curriculum and instruction. For more information about *SO Get Into It*, please contact me at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Title

Contact Information



To School Principals from Supervisor of Schools

Dear _____:

I am writing this letter to introduce you to (*SO Get Into It*[®], Special Olympics' free K-12 service-learning curriculum and resource kit now available through our state's Special Olympics Program. These free materials do a wonderful job of providing general education classes with lessons in the areas of awareness and understanding of people with disabilities. The materials also provide strong support for our district's service-learning program.

SO Get Into It is designed to Educate, Motivate and Activate young people to become more aware of and better understand the issue of diversity as it relates to people with intellectual disabilities. The curriculum goes beyond attitude change by incorporating an important character education/service-learning component that involves students directly in service toward individuals with disabilities. This is accomplished through four lessons aligned with learning standards in language arts, social studies, health, mathematics, technology, and the arts. By the end of the four lessons, students will have had an opportunity to become actively engaged in a Special Olympics activity with fellow students with intellectual disabilities in the school or community.

Please review the materials at www.specialolympics.org/getintoit and encourage your teachers to consider incorporating them into your school's program. To speak with a Special Olympics representative about the materials, please contact _____ at _____.

Sincerely,

Supervisor of Schools



To Parents from the School Principal

Dear _____:

I am writing this letter to introduce you to *SO Get Into It*[®] Special Olympics' free K-12 service-learning curriculum that your child's class will be studying very soon. Our school is interested in providing all students with current and relevant information concerning diversity as it relates to people with disabilities. Through our state's Special Olympics Program, these free materials do a wonderful job of providing general education classes with lessons in the areas of awareness and understanding of people with intellectual disabilities. The materials also provide strong support for our school's service-learning program.

SO Get Into It is designed to Educate, Motivate and Activate young people to become more aware of and better understand the issues of diversity as they relate to persons with intellectual disabilities. The curriculum goes beyond attitude change by incorporating an important character education/service-learning component to involve students directly in service toward individuals with disabilities. At the end of the four lessons, students will have an opportunity to become actively engaged in activities with fellow students with intellectual disabilities in the school or community.

Please discuss *SO Get Into It* with your child and encourage him or her to become as involved as possible with the classroom and service-learning activities. In addition, *SO Get Into It* has a set of online interactive resources available for students (www.specialolympics.org/getintoit). You may wish to review these resources with your child, whether in connection with the classroom lessons or on their own. If you need additional information concerning the curriculum, please contact me.

Sincerely,

School Principal

Appendix B: Sample Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
[DATE]

CONTACT: [NAME]
[TITLE]
[PHONE]

SPECIAL OLYMPICS [PROGRAM] ALONG WITH [SCHOOL] INTRODUCE *SO Get Into It*™ Curriculum Program

Special Olympics Service-Learning Curriculum will Bring Together Students With and Without Intellectual Disabilities

[CITY] — Special Olympics [Program] announced today that [School] will be teaching the newly revised and improved *SO Get Into It*® free K-12 service-learning curriculum developed to bring together students with and without intellectual disabilities.

“Special Olympics is opening its doors to young people in a new and important way,” said Special Olympics Chairman and CEO Timothy Shriver. “From now on, all young people, both those who compete as athletes and those who serve with them, can be a part of the Special Olympics family through *SO Get Into It*. We are asking young people to ‘be the difference’ by learning the values of inclusion, tolerance, respect and welcome. And then we are asking young people to join the world of Special Olympics and ‘make a difference’ in their families, in their communities and in their world.”

SO Get Into It is designed to Educate, Motivate and Activate young people with four age-appropriate units that emphasize awareness and understanding as well as motivating students and encouraging them to take action. The curriculum, which is available online at www.specialolympics.org/getintoit begins with students exploring their own perceptions about and experiences around individuals with intellectual disabilities. From there, students learn about the science behind intellectual disabilities, the dangers of stereotypes, and how to model positive behaviors. The curriculum concludes with a service-learning project in which students plan, implement, and evaluate a project that can make a positive impact on their school, community, or with Special Olympics athletes.

[INSERT QUOTE FROM LOCAL EDUCATOR ABOUT CURRICULUM]

In addition to increasing the participation of children and youth in Special Olympics, the *SO Get Into It* curriculum addresses current trends in schools such as volunteerism, character education, positive youth development and service-learning. The latest version of the *SO Get Into It* program also targets students directly with a set of online interactive resources, available at www.specialolympics.org/getintoit. **More details to follow once this portal is set up...**

[ADDITIONAL LOCAL PROGRAM INFORMATION]

SO Get Into It is sponsored by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education and generous gifts from Mattel Children’s Foundation, Ray and Stephanie Lane, AOL Time Warner Foundation, Gang Family Foundation and Universal Studios Foundation. Other supporters include Disney Studios, Nickelodeon, MTV, Phoenix Wealth Management and Lucky Duck Productions. In addition, the following leading educational organizations have endorsed *SO Get Into It*.

- ✓ American Association for Physical Activity and Recreation (AAPAR) <http://www.aahperd.org/aapar/>
- ✓ American Federation of Teachers (AFT) <http://aft.org>
- ✓ American School Counselor Association (ASCA) <http://www.schoolcounselor.org>

- ✓ Community of Caring (C of C) <http://www.communityofcaring.org>
- ✓ Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) <http://www.cec.sped.org>
- ✓ State Education Agency Service-Learning Network

Special Olympics is an international organization that changes lives by encouraging and empowering people with intellectual disabilities, promoting acceptance for all, and fostering communities of understanding and respect worldwide. Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the Special Olympics movement has grown from a few hundred athletes to nearly 3.1 million athletes in 190 countries in all regions of the world, providing year-round sports training, athletic competition and other related programs. Special Olympics now takes place every day, changing the lives of people with intellectual disabilities in places like China and from regions like the Middle East to the community playgrounds and ball fields in every small neighborhood. Special Olympics provides people with intellectual disabilities continuing opportunities to realize their potential, develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage and experience joy and friendship. Visit Special Olympics at www.specialolympics.org.

Visit Special Olympics online at <http://www.specialolympics.org>, or follow the organization on Facebook, Twitter, or its own Fan Community (<http://www.specialolympics.org/community>).