

NHIAA Unified Sports *A Collaboration Between Two Organizations*

Special Olympics was created in 1968 and added Unified Sports® in 1987. Unified Sports® allows students with and without intellectual disabilities (ID) to train and compete together.

The New Hampshire Interscholastic Athletic Association (NHIAA) was created in 1947. The NHIAA is the state governing body for high school sports.

It is understandable that with similar goals, the NHIAA and SONH collaborated to start NHIAA Unified Sports at the high school level in 2011.

The vision of the NHIAA/SONH Unified Sports® program is to provide high school students with and without ID (partners) the opportunity to represent their high schools by participating on a Unified Sports® team. The focus of NHIAA Unified Sports® is competition (not simply participation). Sports teaches so many life lessons: to work as a team, to follow rules and to be committed. Through sports, students can find shared interests that allow friendships to form.

Through the NHIAA/Special Olympics Unified Sports® program, we have an opportunity to make real positive changes in the lives of students with and without intellectual disabilities. There are rules in sports and rules in life. We must have high expectations for students with intellectual disabilities because if we do not, we are teaching another generation of regular education students that people with intellectual disabilities can't follow rules, be held accountable or become productive citizens.

Unified Sports® is a big part of the Unified Champion Schools® program. While the NHIAA governs high school Unified Sports®, Special Olympics supports schools in fostering more inclusive communities and the other areas of whole school engagement, inclusive youth leadership, and sustainability.

The sports offered at the high school level include soccer, basketball, track and field and volleyball. Unified Sports® competition consists of the Player Development Model or the Recreational Model; a school selects the model that better meets their needs.

UNIQUE ASPECTS OF NHIAA UNIFIED SPORTS

- Participants
 - Unified Student Athletes
 - A student with an intellectual disability who, based on his/her IEP, is expected to be in school in accordance with state law (RSA 186-C:2)
 - Unified Student Partners
 - Students playing the same sport for their high school will be prohibited from competing as a Unified partner in Unified Sports® that season.
- Coaches must fulfill all NHIAA coaching requirements.
- Unified teams have fewer games than other school teams and typically do not meet 5 days a week.
- Unified teams in basketball, soccer and volleyball shall be aligned in two divisions as co-ed sports. Unified track shall be aligned in one division as a co-ed sport.

For more information on the sports rules associated with each of the Unified Sports seasons, please view the Policies and Procedures which can be found on the [NHIAA webpage](#).