



# **SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS®**

## **ONE OF THE LARGEST INITIATIVES FOR INCLUSION IN EDUCATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AND WITHOUT INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES**

Young people with intellectual disabilities are among those most underserved by education systems globally. Of the 65 million primary school-age children who are out of school around the world, nearly half have disabilities. Even of those students that do achieve access, some estimate that less than 5% of children with disabilities complete school.

To address these challenges, Special Olympics created Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® program. In 2020, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, committed \$25 million USD to bring this initiative for inclusion in education to six countries – Argentina, Egypt, India, Pakistan, Romania, and Rwanda. These countries will help lead the expansion of Unified Champion Schools (UCS) within their country. These countries will also play a critical role leading and developing adaptable UCS models in their respective regions, establishing standard practices that will connect a worldwide community of inclusive young leaders with and without intellectual disabilities (ID).

### **Unified Champion Schools Programming**

Special Olympics created **Unified Champion Schools**, an evidence-based programming model that builds social inclusion and promotes social-emotional learning through inclusive sport in primary schools, secondary schools, and universities. Inclusive sports, known as Special Olympics Unified Sports®, and other programming break down barriers and change attitudes for students with and without ID starting in early childhood and progressing through adolescence.

With more than 9,500 schools participating in UCS in over 40 countries, UCS programming creates socially inclusive school environments that are critical to overcoming exclusion for students with ID as well as developing social-emotional learning skills in all students. In fact, in a recent study of USC participants, respondents overwhelmingly indicated they felt the UCS program:

- increased the confidence of students with ID (98%)
- created a more socially inclusive school environment (97%)
- increased opportunities for students to work together (97%)
- raised awareness about students with ID (97%)
- increased the participation of students with ID in school activities (97%)
- reduced bullying, teasing, and offensive language (92%)