




THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

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To: District Superintendents
Superintendents of Public Schools
Principals of Public, Charter, Religious, and Independent Schools

From: MaryEllen Elia, Commissioner 

Subject: Participation in Extracurricular Activities for Students with Disabilities

The New York State Education Department continues to support students with disabilities' participation in extracurricular activities. All students deserve the opportunity to participate. Extracurricular activities at all education levels, including club, intramural, and interscholastic (e.g., freshman, junior varsity, varsity) athletics, support a well-rounded education.

One such opportunity began in Spring of 2014 in New York State. The Unified Sports program was initiated by Special Olympics New York and the New York State Public High School Athletic Association (NYSPHSAA). Through funding support from the US Department of Education (USDE), the partnership piloted a program in Section 2 of NYSPHSAA with 12 schools. In addition to fielding a Unified Sports basketball team for a six-game interscholastic season, each school activated a Youth Activation Committee (YAC). Each YAC worked in their school to promote inclusion, through implementation of whole school campaigns and through support of the Unified Sports team. As of 2018, there are now 140 schools involved in this program with opportunity to grow these programs throughout the state.

District administrators and school staff are encouraged to take proactive steps in creating a supportive social emotional and positive climate as part of a well-rounded education, in which all students, including students with disabilities, are able to participate in extracurricular programs. In January of 2013, the USDE's Office for Civil Rights issued guidance to school districts providing educators information clarifying school districts' existing legal obligations to provide equal access to extracurricular athletic activities to students with disabilities. This guidance urges school districts to work with community organizations to increase athletic opportunities for students with disabilities. Click here to access the guidance document. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201301-504.pdf>.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact the Department's Office of Curriculum and Instruction at (518) 474-5922 and/or the Office of Student Support Services (518) 486-6090.