

Benefit-Cost Evaluation of the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Program: Technical Report

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Introduction

Since 1968, Special Olympics has fostered the inclusion of people with an intellectual or developmental disability (IDD) into their communities and around the world. They work towards their mission by hosting competitions that include individuals with an IDD across a wide range of sports, and by focusing on creating programming that fosters inclusion within school systems. Their flagship program, Unified Champion Schools (UCS), provides experiences for young people with and without an IDD to collaborate, socialize, and compete together, furthering the mission of inclusion both by making schools more inclusive and by providing opportunities for youth with an IDD to be included and valued by staff and their peers.

A strong case has been made for inclusion based on a moral imperative for authentically including individuals with disabilities in all aspects of society, including education (United Nations, 2006). However, while the moral argument for inclusion is clear, the economic argument for educational inclusion—suggesting the benefits of inclusion outweigh its costs—remains untested. This evaluation seeks to address this issue by offering the first set of benefit-cost estimates of the UCS program across the U.S. Using the UCS program as an example, this research provides detailed evidence that in addition to inclusion being the right thing to do from a moral standpoint, investment in inclusion also makes good economic sense. Our findings show that every \$1.00 invested in the UCS program provides youth, their families, schools, and taxpayers with \$2.75 in benefits. In other words, there is a 175% return on investment in the program.

The purpose of this technical volume is to supplement the evaluation final report *Benefit-Cost Evaluation of the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Program: Final Report* (Levin et al., 2026) with additional detail. The remainder of the document explains our approach to determining the benefits and costs of the UCS program and the key findings comparing benefits and costs to provide a measure of the program's return on investment.

Unified Champion Schools Program Theory of Change

The mission of the UCS program is to improve the educational and social inclusion of students with an IDD in the schools they attend. Its theory of change is that by providing athletic and social opportunities for students with and without an IDD to interact and engage with one another as teammates and peers, youth of all abilities gain necessary social and emotional skills that are integral to success in career and life (Yin & Jodl, 2021).

The UCS program has three components:

- Unified Sports (US) – Sports programming that involves students with and without an IDD.
- Inclusive Youth Leadership (IYL) – Specific extracurricular clubs and focused events that promote inclusion.
- Whole School Engagement (WSE) – Activities to foster inclusion that involve the whole school community.

Within each component, there are multiple activities in which program schools can engage. Each activity requires collaborative participation from both students with and without an IDD. A school participating in UCS must complete activities from each of the three components. The US component includes both sports teams like basketball, bocce, and bowling and physical education classes. IYL activities include clubs and hosting social events where students collaborate in ways that make their school environment more inclusive. Both US and IYL have regional and state gatherings where students from UCS schools either compete in sporting events or engage with peers at other institutions to learn leadership skills. WSE activities work to develop inclusion across the entire school through pep rallies, fan engagement at sporting events, and fundraising activities. UCS schools regularly participate in a “Spread the Word Event” where students across the school community commit to eliminating noninclusive language.

UCS has been shown to generate significant positive outcomes for students. In a peer-reviewed research study by Yin et al. (2022), the program was shown to improve graduation rates for students with and without disabilities by 1.4 and 0.9 percentage points, respectively. The authors hypothesize that the mechanism through which graduation rates increase is how the UCS program operates to improve school climate and peer attitudes towards students with disabilities. Further, the evidence provided suggests that enhanced student engagement and degree of social inclusion induced by the program results in increased student attendance and perceived “efficacy” (worth) of students and decreased behavioral incidents and bullying.

The UCS program operates independently in thousands of schools across the United States and abroad. As schools implement the UCS program, they draw upon both personnel and non-personnel resources to implement and integrate the program into their school’s culture, working to make inclusion a way of life. Clearly, dedicating these resources to the program is not costless. It follows that understanding whether the benefits generated by the program outweigh its costs is critical, both for schools implementing UCS and for the program writ large.

Evaluation Aims

This report details the benefit-cost analysis we conducted comparing the costs of implementing the UCS program to the benefits it generates. **The key purpose of this evaluation is to determine whether the benefits of the program outweigh its costs, and the extent to which this is the case.** Specifically, we conducted a benefit-cost analysis by monetizing schooling outcomes that are positively affected by UCS (increases in graduation rates for both general and special education students, as well as reduced student absenteeism and behavioral incidents) and comparing these benefits with the costs of implementing the program. This analysis provides Special Olympics and the field the first-ever evidence supporting the economic argument for providing inclusive education to students with an IDD. The analysis provides measures of cost beneficence from a societal perspective, meaning we are interested in the benefits and costs experienced by a broad range of recipients, including students and their families, schools, and public taxpayers.

Methods Overview

We use the ingredients approach (Levin et al., 2018) to estimate the costs of implementing the UCS program at individual schools, which has been lauded as the best method for costing out education and other social programs (Cost Analysis Standards Project [CASP], 2021; Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2014). The approach involves identifying the types and quantities of staffing and material resources and their corresponding prices to estimate program costs. We apply the approach in a sample of six high schools across the United States that are currently in their third year of implementing the UCS program.

To capture the benefits, we identify UCS program impacts for which we can estimate a monetary benefit. These impacts include improved graduation rates (Yin et al., 2022) and conservative assumptions regarding reductions in absenteeism and behavioral incidents. Specifically, we use existing research to estimate the benefits from increased high school graduation, improved attendance, and decreased behavioral incidents requiring disciplinary action. These benefits are then compared to the estimated costs of the program to determine the program's cost-beneficence. We report these values as the return on investment (the extent to which program benefits exceed its costs, measured in percentage terms), which is closely related to the benefit-cost ratio (the relative difference between program benefits and costs).

In the next section we explain how we selected schools so that they matched those found in the Yin et al. (2022) study. Then we show the results of our cost analysis, describe the benefits we estimate, and provide the return on investment.

Chapter 1 | Selection: Determining the School Sample

In this chapter, we describe our process of sample identification, selection, and recruitment. We begin with an overview of our sample selection goals, followed by a description of the process used to obtain a short list of schools from which we selected our final sample. Then, we detail our recruitment process and provide a list of the selected schools and their characteristics. Lastly, we conclude with a discussion of the interview data collection effort.

Sample Identification and Selection Criteria

Selection Goals

To generate benefit-cost measures for the UCS program, this study measured the cost of the UCS program and compared this cost to monetized program impacts obtained from schools that began implementing UCS activities in the 2013-14 school year, with a primary outcome of interest that included high school student graduation rates. Yin et al. (2022) developed program estimates using a sample of schools that began implementation in 2013-14 and implemented at least one activity from each of the three UCS components in that year. As previously discussed, the components are Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement. Within each component, schools can choose from a variety of activities. Exhibit 1-1 lists these activities by component.

Exhibit 1-1. UCS Activities by Component

Unified Sports	Inclusive Youth Leadership	Whole School Engagement
Unified Sports Team	Unified Club	Spread the Word
Unified Physical Education	Youth Summit	Fans in the Stands
Young Athletes Participants ^a	Youth Activation Committee	Unified Sports Day
	Young Athletes Volunteers	Fundraising Events and Activities
		Special Olympics Play/Performance

^a Young Athletes Participants were not included in our site selection criteria, because we focused on high schools that do not serve the younger students who participate in the Young Athletes Participants program activity.

It was not feasible to engage in a retrospective cost analysis of a sample of schools from the original impact analysis sample performed in Yin et al. (2022). The pool of schools included in that study were in their third year of implementation in 2015-16 and an attempt to identify staff involved that long ago would likely have been unsuccessful. Even if these efforts were successful, the quality of the data on the resource efforts involved with implementing the program would be low because the data would have been gathered from individuals reflecting

backwards many years. Because of these reasons, the research team opted to identify a more contemporary sample of UCS schools that were recently in their third year of operation and observationally similar to those included in the impact analysis (e.g., engaged in program activities that were typical of schools used to estimate outcome impacts in Yin et al. (2022)). We describe the process used to identify this contemporary sample of schools below.

Description of Original Yin et al. (2022) Sample

The original treatment sample developed by Yin et al. (2022) included 354 schools that implemented at least one activity from all three program components for the first time in 2013-14, and participated in UCS for three consecutive years across the U.S.¹ The sample was identified using the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD) and lists of participating UCS schools provided by Special Olympics. The selected schools implemented at least one activity from each UCS component, as determined in data sources provided by Special Olympics. That annual list, generated by state UCS program directors, identifies all schools participating in UCS within each state, the number of activities within each component schools participated in, and the date each school started implementing the program. Importantly, the Yin et al. (2022) study does not detail the types of activities schools engage in within each program component. Rather, Yin et al. (2022) used graduation rates, overall and for students with disabilities, student demographic characteristics including gender and race, and school characteristics including size and number of teachers to depict their sample (Ed Data Express, 2023; NCES, 2023; 2024a; 2024b).

Matching to the Original Sample

To identify the costs of the program that align with the effects reported in Yin et al. (2022), we selected a sample of schools that were observationally similar to those in the original sample based on their program activities and other characteristics described in the original study. We chose this matching design because—in addition to the reasons described earlier—the original schools, if they are still participating in UCS, will have been participants for over a decade and their implementation may be substantially different from what it was in the period covered in the impact study.

By using program component activities as the primary criterion to select contemporary schools, we aimed to ensure that the costs that we estimated represent the most common activities in the Yin et al. (2022) school sample. We accomplish this by first limiting our sample to schools that implemented UCS starting in 2022-23. We selected 2022-23 because these schools would be in their third year of implementation in 2024-25, a year where we can feasibly interview school staff to learn about UCS implementation from them directly. Specifically, the interviews

¹ Specifically, the authors note, “These data indicated that a majority of UCS schools implemented at least one activity from each component in a 1-year implementation cycle,” (Yin et al., 2022, p. 319).

for this study occurred in Fall 2025, enabling staff to retrospectively recall their efforts of the 2024-25 school year.

Data for Matching

Identifying contemporary UCS program schools implementing the most prevalent component activities in the Yin et al. (2022) sample required multiple steps and datasets. We first isolated treatment schools in the original Yin et al. (2022) sample, used school-specific NCES IDs to match these to schools in the comprehensive list of UCS program schools for each year, and merged these with data gathered administered annually to UCS school site liaisons that document the specific activities within each program component the schools engaged in.

Similarly, to identify our contemporary pool of UCS schools to select our matches, we merged the UCS program schools implementing in more recent years from the comprehensive UCS school list with the UCS liaison survey data, as well as with CCD demographic data (NCES, 2024a) and Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate data from ED Data Express (2023). These steps created datasets for 2013-14, 2014-15, 2022-23, and 2023-24 that contained comparable information about school demographics and participating UCS activities.

For the 2014-15 and 2023-24 datasets, we identified which combinations of activities UCS program schools participated in by creating an activity “path” variable that captured school participation in each UCS activity in a given implementation year (Exhibit 1-2). This eight-digit binary code (where each digit represents a discrete UCS activity²) was first used to identify the combinations of UCS activities in the 2014-15 impact sample that occurred the most frequently. Once these paths were identified, we used the most prevalent impact sample paths in 2014-15 to identify schools in 2023-24 with the same paths. We opted to use the second year of program implementation, the most recent year for which we had path data on the contemporary schools, to identify schools that were one year settled into their selected UCS program activities.

Paths that were prevalent in the impact study were less so in the more recent schools. However, the benefit of our approach is that we can be more confident that our selected sample and corresponding estimated costs align with the program efforts of schools at the time the original graduation impacts were estimated. Thus, we relied upon 11 paths to identify schools that were possibilities for inclusion in the cost sample. We share these in Exhibit 1-3.

² For example, 10100001 means that the school had either a Unified Sports Team or Physical Education program, hosted either a Youth Summit or Youth Activation Committee, and engaged in a Fundraising whole school activity.

Exhibit 1-2. List of UCS Components and Within-Component Activities by Numerical Placement in the Path Variable

Component	Activity and Path Placement
Unified Sports	1 Unified Sports Team or Unified Physical Education
Inclusive Youth Leadership	2 Unified Club 3 Youth Summit/Activation Committee 4 Young Athlete Volunteers
Whole School Engagement	5 Spread the Word 6 Fans in the Stands/Unified Pep Rally 7 Unified Sports Day/Festival 8 Fundraising

Exhibit 1-3. List of the Most Prevalent Paths in Year 2 of the Yin et al. (2022) Sample and Number of Possible Contemporary Cost Sample Schools

Path	Unified Sports	Inclusive Leadership	Whole School Engagement	Number of Schools
11000100	Sports or PE	Unified Club	Fans in the Stands/Unified Pep Rally	1
11011101	Sports or PE	Unified Club; Young Athlete Volunteers	Spread the Word; Fans in the Stands/Unified Pep Rally; Fundraising	1
11011111	Sports or PE	Unified Club; Young Athlete Volunteers	Spread the Word; Fans in the Stands/Unified Pep Rally; Unified Sports Day/Festival; Fundraising	3
11111101	Sports or PE	Unified Club; Youth Summit/Activation Committee; Young Athlete Volunteers	Spread the Word; Fans in the Stands/Unified Pep Rally; Fundraising	2
10011000	Sports or PE	Young Athlete Volunteers	Spread the Word	0
11001001	Sports or PE	Unified Club	Spread the Word; Fundraising	8
11010001	Sports or PE	Unified Club; Young Athlete Volunteers	Fundraising	0
11011000	Sports or PE	Unified Club; Young Athlete Volunteers	Spread the Word	1
11111001	Sports or PE	Unified Club; Youth Summit/Activation Committee; Young Athlete Volunteers	Spread the Word; Fundraising	3
11111111	Sports or PE	Unified Club; Youth Summit/Activation Committee; Young Athlete Volunteers	Spread the Word; Fans in the Stands/Unified Pep Rally; Unified Sports Day/Festival; Fundraising	8

In Exhibit 1-4, we offer a comparison chart that compares the timing of the two samples. The table shows the years of data covered in the Yin et al. (2022) impact sample with the comparative data in our sample, manufactured to allow for data collection of the 2024-25 school year.

Exhibit 1-4. Comparison of Yin et al. (2022) and Contemporary AIR Samples Used for Matching

School Year	Implementation Year	Yin et al./Contemporary Sample	Path Data Available/Year Used
2013-14	1	Yin et al.	Yes, not used
<i>2014-15</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Yin et al.</i>	<i>Yes, used</i>
2015-16	3	Yin et al.	Yes, not used
2016-17			Yes, not used
2017-18			Yes, not used
2018-19			Yes, not used
2019-20			Yes, not used
2020-21			Yes, not used
2021-22			Yes, not used
2022-23	1	Contemporary	Yes, not used
<i>2023-24</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Contemporary</i>	<i>Yes, used</i>
2024-25	3	Contemporary	No, not used

Note. Italicized rows indicate the years for which contemporary schools were selected based upon the most prevalent UCS program activities observed in year 2 of the Yin et al. (2022) sample.

Our matching efforts yielded a set of 27 contemporary schools from 13 states, clustered as follows:

- a. 6 schools in Pennsylvania
- b. 4 schools in Texas
- c. 2 schools in Arkansas, California, Colorado, New Jersey, Tennessee, and Wisconsin
- d. 1 school in Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, New York, and Oklahoma

Next, we reviewed the student enrollment, disability status, race/ethnicity, gender, free and reduced-price lunch status, and graduation rate at each of the 27 schools. We also tracked whether the school reported having a UCS leadership team as an indicator of quality.

Refining Our Sample

We then worked with Special Olympics to refine the list of 27 high schools. Based on this guidance, we eliminated four Texas-based high schools and one non-traditional public charter

school, resulting in a preliminary list of 22 schools across 12 states: Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Wisconsin.

We conducted outreach with each state's UCS state director. These state-level UCS staff confirmed the program quality of each school, provided guidance on their relationship with the school, and directed us on the best way to contact the schools. Eleven of the 12 UCS state directors responded. State directors steered us away from schools they considered to be below average implementers ($n = 4$) and from schools with extenuating circumstances ($n = 2$). For example, one school's liaison was on parental leave, and another program had not been responsive to its state director. We excluded these schools. We also confirmed that recommended schools had district research approval processes that worked with our study timeline. For example, we avoided schools with approval processes that took several months. Based on feedback from the UCS state directors and research approval requirements, we narrowed our list to 16 possible schools.

Characteristics of the AIR Sample for the Cost Study

When we compare our 16-school short list with those treatment schools identified from the Yin et al. (2022) sample, we find these contemporary schools are similar, though slightly smaller, with fewer white and Asian students, more Black and Hispanic students, and more students eligible for the federal free and reduced-price lunch (FRL) program. Students in the schools on the short list were also more likely to graduate from high school, regardless of whether they had a disability. However, these shortlisted schools are similar with respect to these characteristics to the pool of contemporary UCS program schools overall (the second column in Exhibit 1-5). In addition, we investigated geographic location for participating schools. Shortlisted contemporary schools were less likely to be located within a city and more likely to locate in a town than the original Yin et al. (2022) sample. We compare these characteristics in Exhibit 1-5.

Exhibit 1-5. Comparison of Average Characteristics Between Contemporary UCS Program Schools and Program Schools in Yin et al. (2022) Study

	UCS Program Schools Included in Yin et al. (2022) Study	Contemporary UCS Program Schools	UCS Program Schools in Yin et al. (2022) Study Implementing the Most Prevalent Component Activities from Program Schools	Short List of Contemporary UCS Schools Implementing Most Prevalent Component Activities from Program Schools in Yin et al. (2022) Study
Base Year	2014-15	2023-24	2014-15	2023-24
Number of Schools	354	552	35	27
Teachers	74.54	71.0	77.19	74.67
Students Enrolled	1,303	1,114	1,300	1,134
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.8%	1.8%	0.5%	0.8%
Asian	4.8%	3.9%	5.1%	3.6%
Black	11.7%	13.3%	15.6%	16.2%
Hispanic	17.9%	24.2%	17.9%	29.5%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.5%	0.2%	1.2%	0.1%
White	61.1%	53.8%	56.5%	52.2%
Multiple Races	3.2%	3.8%	3.1%	4.3%
FRL	42.4%	51.6%	40.7%	51.8%
Male	51.0%	51.6%	50.9%	51.7%
School Title I Status ^a	57.1%	62.2% ¹	48.5%	58.3% ¹
Locale				
City	28.1%	24.1%	22.9%	18.5%
Suburban	39.9%	37.7%	40.0%	40.7%
Town	14.7%	15.0%	20.0%	25.9%
Rural	17.3%	23.2%	17.1%	14.8%
Graduation cohort ^b				
Graduation rate for all students	86.6%	88.8% ²	87.2%	90.2% ²
Graduation rate for SWDs	68.1%	74.3% ²	67.3%	75.4% ²
% economically disadvantaged in graduation cohort	43.8%	48.5% ²	41.0%	50.4% ²
SWDs in graduation cohort	12.1%	14.8% ²	12.0%	15.1% ²
Charter School	0.9%	2.6%	0.0%	3.7%

^a Proxy for Title I status calculated as the proportion of schools in which at least 40% of students are economically disadvantaged as defined by free- and reduced-price lunch status. At the time of writing, 2023-24 Title I data is not yet available.

^b For AIR sample, graduation rates and percentages of students in graduation cohort are derived from 2022-23 data because 2023-24 ACGR data is not yet available at the time of writing.

Source: NCES CCD Data (2014-15 and 2023-24) and ED Data Express ACGR Data (2014-15 and 2022-23)

School Outreach

We recruited these 16 schools to participate in our study. Members of our team communicated with the schools following the approach recommended by the state UCS director. (Some state directors facilitated our connection to schools, while others suggested that we contact the schools directly.) We emailed the school liaisons a recruitment packet that included the following (see Appendix E):

1. A transmittal email that explained the study at a high level and introduced AIR as the research organization
2. A one-page study overview
3. An endorsement letter signed by Special Olympics

Many school liaisons responded to our inquiry, and nine school liaisons agreed to participate. We reviewed each school in relation to one another, accounting for geographic diversity, diversity of different sets of UCS activities, and school size. Six schools were identified for inclusion and invited to participate.

For these six schools, we followed the district-specific processes to obtain research approval. These approval processes varied from email correspondence with the superintendent to a formal district research request. By August 2025, we received research approvals for five of the schools (one district declined to participate). These five selected schools were in New Jersey (near Philadelphia), New York (near Buffalo), Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Wisconsin.

Identifying a Final School

With most of our sample located east of the Mississippi River, we sought to recruit a sixth school from the western half of the country to improve the geographic diversity in our sample. For the final school included in our study, we considered any school in the western United States that aligned with our primary selection criteria (e.g., started participating in UCS in 2022-23, is a current UCS school, and offered at least one activity from the three major program components). We reviewed four candidate schools, one from Arizona, two from California, and one from Nevada. Similarly to the previous list of schools, we reviewed the research approval processes for the four additional schools and consulted with Special Olympics about these candidates. Consultation with the California UCS state regional director³ identified one of the California schools as an ideal candidate. A meeting with the school UCS liaison confirmed interest. The district approved our research request in October 2025.

³ Due to the size of California, there are two regional state directors, one for the northern half and one for the southern half of the state.

As shown in Exhibit 1-6, cost study sample schools vary in size and have an average of 1,429 students; larger than the 1,300 students in the impact analysis sample. In addition, school-level graduation rates—the outcome of interest in the impact analysis—vary widely from 75% to 96% for general education students and 37% to 75% for students with disabilities.

Exhibit 1-6. Characteristics, Graduation Rates, and UCS Program Activities of Sample Schools

Characteristic	California	New Jersey	New York	Oklahoma	Tennessee	Wisconsin
Locale	Large suburb	Large suburb	Distant town	Distant town	Large suburb	Rural fringe
School enrollment (2024–25)^a	3,400	924	882	1,783	1,019	563
Number of students with disabilities (2024–25)^b	438	189	106	215	145	51
Number of students with an IDD (2024–25)^c	21	36	29	62	19	11
Graduation rate (2022–23)^d	94%	88%	75%	80%	85%	96%
Graduation rate for students with disabilities (2022–23)^d	75%	62%	74%	58%	37%	73%
Unified Sports activities^e	UST	UST, UPE	UST	UST, UPE	UST, UPE	UST, UPE
IYL activities^e	UC, YSYA	UC, YAV	UC, YSYA, YAV	UC, YSYA, YAV	UC	UC
WSE activities^e	SW, FSUPR, USDF, F	SW, FSUPR, USDF, F	SW, FSUPR, USDF, F	SW, FSUPR, USDF, F	SW, USDF, F	SW, USDF, F

Note. Unified Sports activities: UST = Unified Sports Team, UPE = Unified PE. IYL activities: UC = Unified Club, YSYA = Youth Summit/Youth Activation Committee, YAV = Youth Athlete Volunteers. WSE activities: SW = Spread the Word, FSUPR = Fans in the Stands/Unified Pep Rally, USDF = Unified Sports Day/Festival, F = Fundraising.

^a National Center for Education Statistics. Common Core Public School Data, 2024–25. U.S. Department of Education.

^b Counts of students with disabilities and IDD students estimated based on 2021–22 incidence rates calculated from Civil Rights Data Collection (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2021–22. Office for Civil Rights) and applied to school enrollments from 2024–25 Common Core Public School Data (National Center for Education Statistics Common Core Public School Data, 2024–25).

^c Self-reported values from sample schools.

^d NCES Adjusted Cohort High School Graduation Rates, EdFacts, 2022–23. National Center for Education Statistics.

^e Unified Champion Schools Liaison Survey, Year 16, 2023–24. Special Olympics.

Chapter 2 | Cost of the UCS Program

Cost Estimation Process

As mentioned previously, we use the ingredients approach (Levin et al., 2018) to estimate the school-level cost of implementing the UCS program. The approach involves identifying the types and quantities of staffing and material resources used within each sample school and their corresponding prices to estimate program costs. This was done by gathering information on the types of resources used across UCS activities and how much of each resource is used to operate the UCS activity. Each resource used is then assigned a price, which is multiplied by the quantity of the resource devoted to the program activities. Final dollar amounts corresponding to all resources used in UCS activities at each school are then summed to create a total school-level cost. Thus, to accurately estimate program cost, we must identify both the types and quantities of resources used, as well as the prices of these resources. The estimation of program cost at a given school site can be formally expressed in an equation as follows:

$$UCS\ Program\ Cost = \sum_{a=1}^A \sum_{r=1}^R Price_{ra} \times Quantity_{ra}$$

where *Price* is the price of a given resource used at the site (compensation including both salaries/wages and benefits for personnel and prevailing market price for materials), *Quantity* is the amount of the resource used (time spent for personnel and number of units used for materials), and the subscripts *a* and *r* denote the program activities and resources used within each activity, respectively. Below, we describe the various program activities undertaken by our sample schools, the resources used in these activities, and the corresponding prices used to estimate program costs.

Data Collection Supporting Cost Estimation

We interviewed staff at our six sample schools to learn about the resources used in their respective UCS programs. The interviews provide a comprehensive account of the quantities and types of staff and non-personnel resources used to implement the UCS program. Thus, they provide crucial information for estimating costs. Resources may be fully devoted to the program or shared between the program and other school activities (e.g., gymnasiums; Levin et al., 2018). Gathering information directly from the people implementing the program through interviews allows us to accurately measure the resource effort and cost associated with the program. In total, we conducted 30 interviews with 27 unique school staff, including teachers, coaches, and parents. Each structured interview lasted approximately one hour and asked participants about the amount of time they devoted annually to different UCS activities, and the types and quantities of non-personnel materials they used including uniforms, sporting

equipment and the facilities in which program activities took place, and whether any program events required travel. See Appendix D for the interview questions.

In addition to school-based interviews, we also interviewed the state UCS director associated with each sample school to better understand how they supported these program sites. To ensure parity across programs, we asked only about their contributions to our sample schools. We asked about staff time and funding that directly supported each sample school and excluded discussions about state-level efforts to host regional or statewide UCS events that included multiple schools. All interviews were retrospective; we inquired about the activities that each school participated in during the 2024-25 academic year. With data collection occurring in fall 2025, this approach enabled us to gain a complete picture of costs for the full previous academic year.

Identifying Resources

The first step in data collection was to identify resources for the UCS program. We focused interviews on the activities conducted for each of the three main components of UCS: Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement. We also asked about any cross-component managerial efforts staff undertook to operate the program. The data we collected identified the types, qualities, and quantities of the resources schools used to implement each program component. For example, in New Jersey, the Unified Physical Education (PE) class was taught by the school's PE teacher, and they relied upon sports equipment that was used across all the general and Unified PE classes. To understand quantities of resources used, we asked participants about the length of class periods and how much out-of-class effort went into planning lessons. We also asked about materials, such as the number of basketballs needed for PE and how long those basketballs could be used before being replaced. The qualities of staff (e.g., experience level and highest educational attainment) and materials were obtained through a combination of interviews and extant data. Basketballs, for instance, come in multiple sizes, and ball price is associated with size. Interviews informed us of the quantity of basketballs used in PE and the extant data identified the per basketball price.

Resources used to operate the UCS program were assigned to a UCS component: US, IYL, and WSE. We also gathered resource information on overall UCS management, which included planning time, leadership training, and other activities supporting the program. Resources for US varied by number of sports. As expected, schools offering upwards of six sports teams relied on more resources than those offering one sports team. For Unified Club, an IYL activity, resources most often included the level of effort required through regular meetings. For some schools this meant weekly time commitments while for other schools they only met twice a month.

How sample schools operated their UCS program influenced the resources used to implement the program and thus the school-level cost estimates. For example, one school conducted all its sporting events at the school, thereby skipping any transportation costs. In contrast, in another school, staff and students traveled and stayed overnight to attend a state UCS tournament, incurring hotel, transportation, and meals costs. Additionally, resource interviews surfaced that two schools did not offer a Unified PE class and one school offered neither out-of-school events nor field trips for their Unified Club while another program took their members to regional plays and performances. The latter program, based in New York, had costs that outstripped those of the other programs, but given the many more community-based events that they held than any of the other programs, we would expect this increase in resources (much of which they relied upon grant funding).

Assigning Prices

Once we identified the types and quantities of resources used in each activity, we assigned a price to each resource. In economic cost analysis, prices represent the opportunity cost of a resource (i.e., devoting the resource to a given use instead of its next best use). Prices matter because they serve as our common metric for comparing program costs. We often value a resource based upon the price one must pay to procure it on a well-functioning (competitive) market (Levin et al., 2018). For example, teachers receive compensation (salary and benefits) for working a certain number of hours per year and basketballs can be purchased based on their price per unit. In these instances, the market (whether it be national or local) has ascertained the price of the resource.

We developed a program-specific database of prices that included the personnel, materials, facilities, and other resources that were used to implement the program across the sample school sites. To create this database, we compiled various publicly available sources, such as districts' collective bargaining agreements, benefits (adjusted to national prices), additional salary information from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024), and materials prices gathered from national vendors such as Amazon. For facilities we used other established databases that included national average prices (e.g., Chang, 2024; Wang et al., 2020).

Identifying Personnel Prices

To identify prices for teachers, we relied on salary schedules included in district collective bargaining agreements, which report the salary of teachers at different education and experience levels. Oftentimes, these schedules also report the fringe benefit rates, which we include in a teachers' overall compensation package. Benefits may include district retirement contributions and health insurance and are often reported as a fixed percentage that we apply to the salary to determine overall compensation. In addition to benefits, school liaisons in many states receive a stipend from the state Special Olympics office for their efforts on UCS. We

include this stipend, and any role-specific stipends (e.g., serving as a coach) in their total compensation. We assigned personnel prices at the individual level based on the position, years of experience, and qualifications and adjusted to include benefits and any additional stipends.

Identifying Non-personnel Prices

Non-personnel items include facilities, equipment, transportation, and food. We used market rates to assign prices for these tangible resources. Market rates were determined using national sources such as online vendors and district financial reports. Some of these items are durable, like facilities or basketballs, and can be used for years to come. This means we need to calculate their cost over a period of use. For equipment, we annualize the price of the product over its useful life. For facilities, we either determine a rental rate or rely upon estimated building costs annualized over the life of the facility. We then determine an hourly rate based on overall usage and multiply this by the number of hours the facility was used for UCS. Other items, like food, are consumable. For these resources, we can include their full price in our calculations.

After each resource price was estimated for one year of implementation, we applied adjustments to make sure all prices were in 2024-25 national prices. These adjustments are important because they allow us to be confident that we are comparing equivalent dollars when we compare costs across states and across time.

Adjustments to Prices and Costs

Following best practice, we applied several adjustments to ensure the economic costs of the program are calculated appropriately (Levin et al., 2018; CASP, 2021), including calculations of hourly rates for compensation and non-personnel utilization, conversions from nominal to real dollars, geographic price adjustments, annualization of costs of durable resources, and calculating present value for a common base year. These adjustments support the trustworthiness of the cost estimates and therefore our findings.

Hourly Prices

Because UCS activities use only a portion of a resource during the hours the activity occurs, we identified an hourly rate for many materials, facilities, and personnel. Hourly rates provided us with a comparable, cross-resource metric. How we developed an hourly rate depended upon the resource. For personnel, we calculated compensation on an hourly basis. For salaried staff, we divided salaries by the number of annual work hours as determined by their contract. For materials shared across both UCS and non-UCS activities (such as facilities), we first estimated the annual full-time utilization capacity for each item—the total number of hours each item could reasonably be used in a year. We then divided the annualized cost by this utilization

capacity to determine an hourly rate. Finally, we multiplied these hourly rates by the number of hours each resource was used for UCS.

Price Adjustments from Nominal to Real Dollars

Once a price was identified, we adjusted the prices so that they were comparable across time. Specifically, if the raw prices identified for different resources represented different years, they were harmonized (inflation-adjusted) to reflect a common target year. For this analysis, we report prices in 2024-25 dollars, adjusting prices reported for alternative years using the US Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index (CPI) for Urban Consumers.⁴

Geographic Price Adjustments

We accounted for geographic variation in the prices of staffing resources to account for the difference in purchasing power across locations using the Comparable Wage Index for Teachers (CWIFT), an index that measures how much more or less it costs (relative to the national average) to hire and retain qualified educational staff in different labor markets across the country (NCES, 2022).⁵ For materials, many prices already represent national averages, e.g., the cost of a basketball at Dick's Sporting Goods remains the same whether you are in New Jersey or Wisconsin. For those materials with prices that differ across geographic location, we identified comparable national prices.

Standardizing prices of resources used in different locations across the US is important because estimating costs using national prices for resources ensures we can attribute differences in program costs to program differences rather than regional price differences. This allows for a valid comparison of cost across program schools in different locations, as well as the appropriate calculation of an average program cost across sites.

Annualization of Costs for Durable Resources

Resources that are durable are used across multiple years, despite the monetary outlay for their purchase occurring in a single year. In order to understand their economic cost, these resources must be annualized so we know the cost on a yearly basis. Our estimates are based on the full cost of the resource over the period in which it remains useful. We relied on extant literature to determine the life of a resource (e.g., gymnasiums last for 40 years, basketballs for 4) and calculated an annualized (yearly) cost of the item.

⁴ The CWI is available at <https://www.bls.gov/cpi/data.htm>.

⁵ The CWIFT is available at <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/economic/teacherwage>.

Following best practice, for each durable resource we apply the following annualization rate formula to the full cost of a given durable resource and assume a 3% *Discount Rate* to determine its annual cost:

$$\text{Annualization Rate} = \frac{(\text{Discount Rate} * (1 + \text{Discount Rate})^{\text{Years of Useful Life}})}{(1 + \text{Discount Rate})^{\text{Years of Useful Life}} - 1}$$

Present Value Calculations

To align program costs with the program impacts measured by Yin et al. (2022), we calculated 3 years of program costs based upon the single year of program implementation cost estimated for 2024-25. However, calculating costs for 3 years of operating the UCS program is more than a matter of summing up the one-year cost three times (once per year). We also need to account for the opportunity cost of using dollars in earlier program implementation years rather than using these dollars in other productive ways. Spending funds in earlier years is more burdensome because of the loss in ability to use these dollars productively in future years (Levin et al., 2018). Conversely, spending in future years carries less burden because these dollars could have been used productively (invested) in the interim years. Therefore, before summing the costs across years, we adjusted the dollar values of the costs for years 2 and 3 to reflect their present values in year 1, which accounts for the lower burden associated with using those dollars in later years. We used the following adjustment calculation for each future-year cost where the *Number of Future Years* is the number of years after 2024-25 (i.e., we would enter 2 for 2025-26) and 3% is the assumed *Discount Rate*.

$$\text{Present Value} = \frac{\text{Estimated Annual Cost}}{(1 + \text{Discount Rate})^{\text{Number of Future Years}}}$$

Total Costs by School

With the quantities and prices of resources used to implement the program in hand, we calculated a per-activity cost, first by multiplying the quantity of a resource used for a given activity by its price to find the cost per resource, and then by summing across resources within each activity, and lastly, by aggregating to the program component and site levels.

In Exhibit 2-1, we report on the annual 2024-25 program costs, which reflect the present values of the three-year program costs. We report estimates of both total cost and per-student cost on a site-by-site basis. The site-based per-student costs will support analyses of how costs vary across the six sites and what accounts for this variation. For example, cost variation across sites might be explained by differences in school size, the types and quantities of staff used in UCS, or the numbers and intensities of activities implemented. As expected, total costs vary strongly according to student enrollment, with smaller schools like the one in Wisconsin having a smaller annual cost (\$79,576) than California (\$228,665). The school in New York is the outlier

with a relatively small student body but with the highest annual cost. This is an issue of economies of scale: because the school serves few students, fixed program costs can only be spread over these smaller student counts, which drives up the per-student cost relative to larger schools in the sample. We discuss reasons for this later in this report.

Per-Pupil Costs by School

Exhibit 2-1 shows that the average 3-year program cost per student in 2025 dollars across the six schools is \$367 when the total cost is spread over total student enrollment, and ranges from \$208 to \$1,017.⁶ Economies of scale seem to be a sizable driver of the observed variation in cost, with the Wisconsin school having the smallest student enrollment (563) and second highest per-student cost (\$437), while the California school served the largest number of students (3,400) and had the lowest per-pupil cost (\$208). When total program cost is spread over the 2026–27 graduation cohort, the average per-student program cost is \$1,502 and ranges from \$833 to \$5,094.

Exhibit 2-1. UCS Program Costs by School, Overall, Per Student, and Per Graduating Student (in 2024-25 Dollars)

	California	New Jersey	New York	Oklahoma	Tennessee	Wisconsin
Annual program cost	\$228,665	\$121,572	\$290,070	\$173,662	\$125,188	\$79,576
3-year program cost	\$706,781	\$375,768	\$896,576	\$536,773	\$386,942	\$245,961
Total student enrollment ^a	3,400	924	882	1,783	1,019	563
3-year program cost per student based on total enrollment	\$208	\$407	\$1,017	\$301	\$380	\$437
Average 3-year program cost per student based on total enrollment	\$367					
2026–27 graduation cohort enrollment ^a	848	218	176	465	269	121
3-year program cost per student based on 2026–27 graduation cohort	\$833	\$1,724	\$5,094	\$1,154	\$1,438	\$2,033
Average 3-year program cost per student based on 2026–27 graduation cohort	\$1,502					

^a National Center for Education Statistics. Common Core Public School Data, 2024–25. U.S. Department of Education.

⁶ Note that the reported averages are weighted by school enrollment and represent the average per-student program cost at the school attended by the typical student.

Distribution of Costs Across Program Components

Exhibit 2-2 describes how costs were distributed across the four program components (Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, Whole School Engagement, and Management & Training) at each of the evaluation sample schools. The findings show that the largest share of overall program cost across all schools was devoted to supporting Unified Sports activities, with some sites overwhelmingly contributing to this component (e.g., Tennessee).

The fact that Unified Sports accounts for the greatest share makes sense because of the regular sports practices, events, and travel associated with the sporting events. The portion of cost associated with Inclusive Youth Leadership tended to account for the next largest share of program expense, followed by Whole School Engagement and, lastly, Management & Training.

Exhibit 2-2. Distribution of UCS Program Costs by Component (2024–25)

Program Component	California	New Jersey	New York	Oklahoma	Tennessee	Wisconsin
Unified Sports	60%	67%	78%	54%	89%	43%
Inclusive Youth Leadership	21%	18%	15%	12%	3%	29%
Whole School Engagement	3%	11%	6%	28%	5%	22%
Management & Training	15%	4%	<1%	6%	4%	6%

Note. Values may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Chapter 3 | Benefit-Cost Analysis

The UCS program is expected to have a diverse set of positive impacts on a variety of outcomes. As discussed previously, the impacts we present for students are based on 3 years of participation in the UCS program to align with the implementation period over which impacts were estimated in Yin et al. (2022). The program is expected to generate positive impacts on students' social engagement, their educational status (attainment and achievement), and their health and well-being. In adulthood, these students—both those with and without an IDD—are expected to experience greater economic well-being and more social engagement. Further, these impacts could generate a variety of spillover effects on:

- Students' families, via increased income. When student attendance increases, parental days at work also increase.
- School systems, via resource savings from improved social-emotional and behavior experiences.
- Taxpayers, via increased tax revenues from students' increased labor participation.

We measure the benefits generated by the UCS program through calculating a monetary value of the outcomes the program produces. By expressing these outcomes in monetary terms, we can compare the benefits directly to the program's costs. In theory, all outcomes that were impacted by the program can be expressed in dollars, either because they have a price directly associated with them (e.g., individual earnings) or shadow prices can be developed that measure their value. Shadow pricing enables us to calculate monetary values for program outcomes, like greater well-being, which do not have an obvious price. Calculating shadow prices can be done using a variety of methods to measure the value of different outcomes to individuals and the public (Levin et al., 2018). We draw upon previous literature that has already developed shadow prices for the outcomes generated by the UCS program.

Importantly, data measuring the impacts for all of the potential outcomes produced by the UCS program are not available, so the benefits associated with specific outcomes cannot be measured. Also, some impacts cannot be monetized with adequate precision. For these reasons, many benefits that might be attributable to the program are not included in our analysis. This means the full economic value of UCS benefits is not accounted for here, and our reported benefits estimates should be interpreted as conservative lower bounds. Even so, these conservative estimates of the UCS program are substantial, and exceed the costs of delivering the program. With evidence for all impacts (and thus all benefits), the estimated economic value of the UCS program would be even greater.

Types of Benefits Included

Our estimates include monetizable outcomes that accrue to student participants, their parents, schools, and the public. We consider both outcomes that occur within the period during which students attend high school and those realized after graduation. Benefits generated by the UCS program include those associated with students' social engagement, educational attainment and achievement, employment status, and health and well-being. We expect these benefits to differ for students with and without disabilities. For example, we measure educational attainment through high school graduation. High school graduation improves economic standing through increased employability and wages. However, because job prospects and corresponding salaries vary for students with and without a disability, we expect the estimated benefit to also vary. Improved graduation outcomes also generate savings to the public due to decreased reliance on public health and welfare programs. In addition, our analysis includes benefits that accrue to the parents of students and to the school system in the form of reduced absenteeism and disciplinary action, respectively.

Estimation and Analysis of Benefits

Benefits are calculated for impacts on educational status (high school graduation), reduced disciplinary incidents, and improved work productivity for parents (based on students' improved attendance). The impact of the UCS program on high school graduation was measured to be 1.4% for students with disabilities and 0.9% for students without disabilities (Yin et al., 2022). The impact estimated by Yin and colleagues was based on high schools that had implemented the program for 3 years. We have tailored our estimates to match those impacts by calculating benefits for students who were assumed to be continuously enrolled in a program school for our 3 years of interest. Hence, our benefits calculations are based on the number of students who were in their second year of high school (sophomores) at our UCS program schools in 2024–25. These students belong to the 2026–27 graduation cohort and will have experienced the full 3 years of the UCS program by the time they are seniors before potentially graduating high school.

To estimate benefits for two of the outcomes of interest (high school graduation and disciplinary incidents), we draw upon research literature to ascertain corresponding shadow prices.⁷ For absenteeism, because suitable shadow prices did not exist in the literature we developed our own.⁸

⁷ Specifically, to measure the shadow price for high school graduation we use the findings detailed in Vining and Weimer (2019). For benefits associated with disciplinary incidents we leverage the results in Sorensen et al. (2022) and Pope and Zuo (2023).

⁸ We estimated the shadow price associated with absenteeism through compensation data obtained from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Determining the Shadow Price for Student-Level Benefits

We estimate the benefits of high school graduation by predicting the number of additional potential graduates attributable to the UCS program at each sample school in 2027. To generate these estimates, we apply the impact estimates of UCS to the number of students with and without disabilities in the 2026-27 graduation cohort, defined as each school's sophomore enrollment in 2024-25.

For each additional high school graduate, the economic benefit is derived from the shadow prices reported in Vining and Weimer (2019). As mentioned above, shadow prices represent the monetary values of items that are not bought and sold in a competitive marketplace. These prices must often be calculated for a variety of outcomes produced by educational programs (e.g., better health, reduced reliance on public welfare, etc.) The shadow prices we use – based on representative national data – were deliberately constructed for use in independent benefit-cost analyses such as this study. They are based on life-cycle earnings gains for high school graduates over dropouts plus educational externalities (e.g., on health). Earnings include fringe benefits and are adjusted for economic growth, as well as mortality risk, over the working life. The gains are weighted to account for cognitive and other endowments that are associated with differences in education levels. Finally, the models adjust for the probability of college enrollment (both the additional earnings and the costs of college). Overall, these shadow price estimates are methodologically valid for this analysis of the benefits associated with the additional high school graduate generated by the UCS program.

We transfer the shadow prices derived from Vining and Weimer (2019) to the economic conditions relevant for the UCS cohort. This *benefit transfer* accounts for three factors: inflation-adjusted wages up to 2025; updated productivity growth rates; and demographic differences between the national population and UCS cohorts. Empirically, the wage growth raises the shadow price by 27%; but because productivity growth has slowed, the shadow price is also reduced by 13%; demographic adjustments have a trivial effect. Finally, we calculate the shadow prices separately for students with disabilities. These students earn less than the average worker by 40-70%; therefore, the shadow price for these students is correspondingly lower. In our calculations, we conservatively assume students with disabilities earn 60% less.

For each incremental general education graduate attributable to participation in the UCS program, the benefit from increased earnings is \$250,160; and the fiscal savings from positive externalities (due to enhanced health and a lower reliance on public welfare) amount to \$114,110.⁹ The total shadow price value of these benefits is \$364,270 per student. For students with disabilities, the respective figures associated with increased earnings and positive externalities are \$100,060 and \$45,640, equal to a total of \$145,700. These UCS benefit shadow

⁹ Author calculations from Vining and Weimer (2019).

prices for 2025 represent present values at age 18 and can be directly compared to the estimated program cost.

We can apply these shadow prices to each incremental high school graduate generated from the UCS program. Using the evidence from Yin et al. (2022), UCS yields a 1.1 percentage point increase in high school graduation on average. Broken out by disability status, the impact on high school graduation equals a 0.9 percentage point increase for students without disabilities and a 1.4 percentage point increase for students with disabilities. For example, for a UCS school with 1,000 students in the graduating class (150 students with a disability and 850 without a disability), 2.1 additional students with and 7.7 additional students without disabilities would be expected to graduate because of the program. Expressed in per student terms, the benefits of UCS stemming from the increase in number of graduates for this hypothetical class are \$1,944 in increased earnings and \$887 from positive externalities, equal to \$2,830 per student participating in the UCS program. This social value is not per new graduate but per participating student, defined as sophomores in 2024-25 who belong to the 2026-27 graduation cohort.

Determining Shadow Prices for Reduced Absenteeism and Disciplinary Incidents

The UCS program is associated with reduced absenteeism (more frequent school attendance). This impact is valuable for students because it increases human capital and for parents because it saves them supervisory time. The human capital component is already incorporated into the high school graduate shadow price. For parents, each day of school absence is linked to a missed day of work where these parents must spend time supervising or monitoring their children at home as well as mediating with the school to address absence penalties and compliance. The opportunity cost of parent time is derived from median wages for full-time work (including fringe benefits but excluding employer costs). This opportunity cost is applied across all parental time allocations (including non-working parents). Conservatively, parental time is valued as the median wage per day at \$190 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, female workers ages 25-35). However, the evidence on UCS and absenteeism is not sufficiently precise for impact identification. Nevertheless, the impact on absenteeism is likely to be economically meaningful: with baseline absenteeism in the U.S. at 10 days per school year, if UCS reduces the rate of absenteeism by 10% (1 day), the average benefit is (conservatively) \$190 per year per student family.

Finally, the UCS program reduces externalizing behaviors by students. Externalizing student behavior can influence school resource allocation, including expenditures on counselling services and educators' professional time, as well as social-emotional learning programs. Estimates of the burden imposed by detentions, suspensions, and expulsions are derived from Sorensen, et al. (2022) and Pope and Zuo (2023). These burdens are based on the extra spending incurred by a school for each additional infraction. This spending includes wages paid for the time of teachers, senior school management, and professional personnel such as

counsellors. These personnel must intervene to stop or mitigate externalizing behaviors and must spend time on punishments and on rehabilitation services. Depending on the severity of the infraction, resources are necessary to (1) reassign students to other schools or juvenile detention centers and (2) to pay personnel more for “hazard pay” (workers need to be paid more to compensate for when working conditions are more dangerous or unpleasant). Here, infractions are assumed to be detentions. Conservatively, detentions are based on 3 hours of school personnel time plus costs for facilities where detentions are served. We price school personnel time using the wages from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics for teachers (pay code 25-3099), which in 2024-25 is equal to \$35 per hour plus benefits and employer costs of compensation. Reassignment costs and hazard pay are not counted (as these are for more serious infractions). Expressed as 2025 present values at age 18, the shadow price per detention is \$250. We conservatively assume that UCS reduces the detention rate by one per student per year. If a school experiences a 10% detention rate, then, the annual benefit is \$250 per student.

Discounting Benefits

The UCS program benefits as measured in this study occurs across 3 years of high school. Benefits associated with reduced absenteeism and disciplinary action are measured using this underlying assumption. These additional benefits assume UCS program dosage is 3 years, equivalent across all students in the 2026-27 graduation cohort. These benefits are therefore expressed as present values in 2024-25 dollars to align with the present value of program costs.

Overall Benefits Per-Student

In what follows, we report the estimated benefits across the six schools in our sample and then compare the average programwide benefits and costs. The first two rows in Exhibit 3-1 show the size of the 2026-27 graduation cohort, and the proportion of the class that are students with disabilities. These values are used to calculate the number of additional students with and without disabilities that graduate as a result of the UCS program. The final rows of the table show that the overall per-student benefit associated with graduation, absenteeism, and discipline across the six study schools range between \$4,055 and \$4,180, and the average benefit per student is \$4,131.¹⁰

¹⁰ Note that the reported average is weighted by school enrollment and represent the average benefit per student at the school attended by the typical student.

Exhibit 3-1. Per-Student Benefits by School (in 2024-25 dollars)

	California	New Jersey	New York	Oklahoma	Tennessee	Wisconsin
2026–27 graduation cohort enrollment ^a	848	218	176	465	269	121
Proportion SWD ^b	0.13	0.20	0.12	0.12	0.14	0.09
Additional number of graduating SWD	1.54	0.61	0.30	0.78	0.53	0.15
Additional number of graduating non-SWD	6.64	1.57	1.39	3.68	2.08	0.99
Overall program benefit per student	\$4,135	\$4,055	\$4,146	\$4,146	\$4,123	\$4,180
Average overall program benefit per student	\$4,131					

^a National Center for Education Statistics. Common Core Public School Data, 2024–25. U.S. Department of Education.

^b Proportion of students with disabilities is calculated using the most recent (2021–22) school-based disability rate reported in the Civil Rights Data Collection (Office for Civil Rights, 2025) and applying that rate to the number of students in the 2026–27 graduation cohort.

Comparing Program Benefits and Costs

We define the return-on-investment (ROI) as the degree to which program benefits exceed costs in relative terms expressed as a percentage. Formally, we calculate the ROI using the following formula where average programwide costs are subtracted from average programwide benefits and the difference is then divided by the former:

$$\text{Return on Investment}_{UCS} = \left(\frac{\overline{\text{Total Benefit}}_{UCS} - \overline{\text{Total Cost}}_{UCS}}{\overline{\text{Total Cost}}_{UCS}} \right)$$

We have applied the school-specific and average total benefits and costs across the six sample schools reported above to generate ROI measures.

ROI Across Sample Schools and Programwide Averages

The overall UCS program benefits and costs per graduation cohort student as well as the corresponding ROI for each of the six sample schools and their averages are summarized in Exhibit 3-2. Over 3 years, the average cost per student in the graduation cohort across the sample program is \$1,502, while the average per-student benefit is \$4,131. This yields a programwide estimate of the ROI equal to 175%. This finding suggests that the UCS program is typically socially efficient, but there are instances when this may not be the case. The ROI across the sample schools varies from a high of 396% (California) to -19% (New York) and reflects the wide range in effort that is manifested in the specific costs estimated for each

individual program school. In contrast, the benefits were generated by standard impacts (e.g., a national average earnings premium to high school graduation). It follows that if impacts were also individually measured for each school like the costs were, we would expect them to vary so that a school like the one in New York might have a higher-than-average impact and potentially a positive (rather than negative) ROI.

The negative ROI estimated for the New York school is likely due to the extraordinary program investment made by this site. On a per-student basis the New York school invested 2.5 times as much as the next most expensive school in the sample (Wisconsin). From the cost data collection and analysis, we learned that the New York program is exceptional, offering significantly more social activities and hosting more expensive types of out-of-school trips than the other schools, as well as providing financial incentives for faculty who participate in the program. These practices are above and beyond those provided by the typical school program we evaluated. However, our analysis uniformly applied the benefits that correspond to the typical UCS program high school in the country. We might expect that the quality of the program implemented at the New York school (as proxied by the size of its investment) generates an impact that significantly exceeds that used to estimate benefits for this study. For this reason, the average ROI we have estimated across the sample sites may be a lower-bound estimate of the true return to the program.

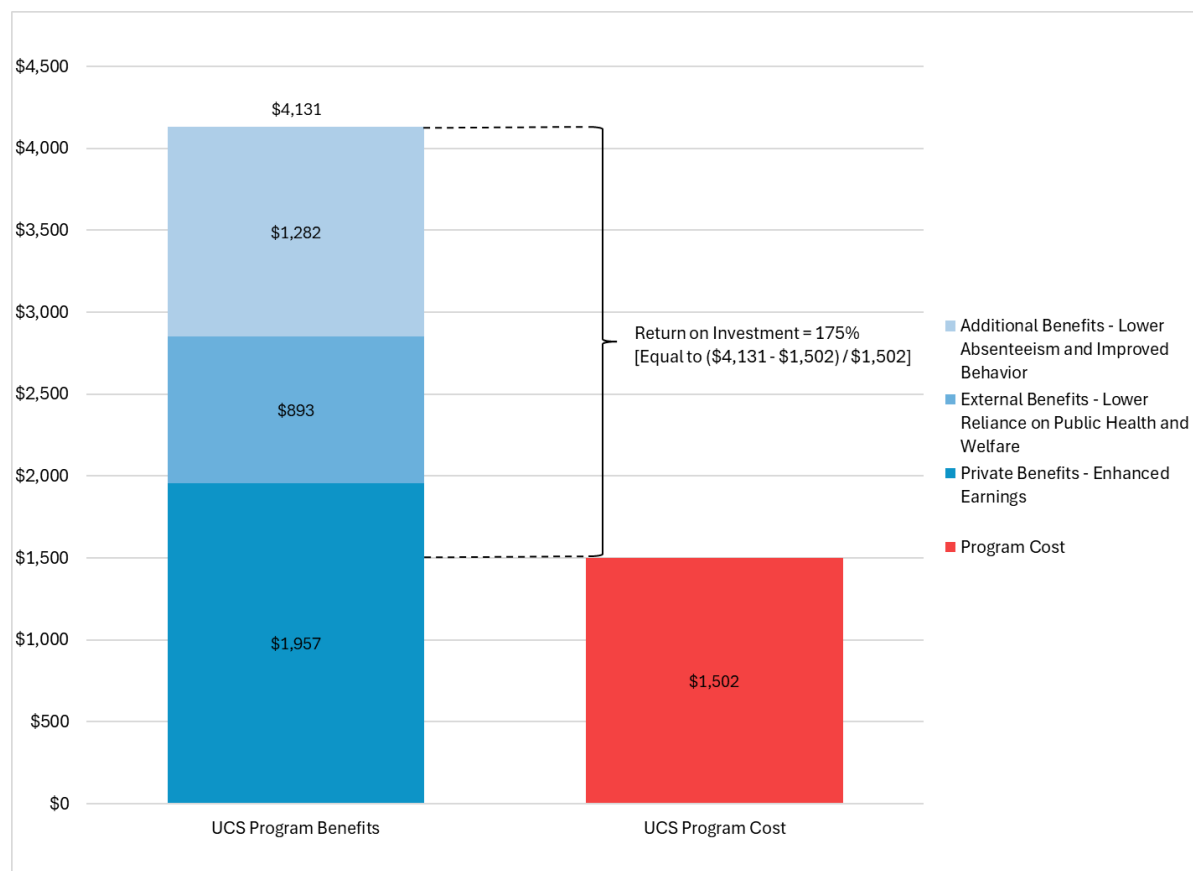
Exhibit 3-2. School-Specific Measures of UCS Program ROI and Programwide Average Based on Overall Benefits

	Programwide Average	California	New Jersey	New York	Oklahoma	Tennessee	Wisconsin
Overall program benefit per student	\$4,131	\$4,135	\$4,055	\$4,146	\$4,146	\$4,123	\$4,180
3-year program cost per student based on 2026-27 graduation cohort	\$1,502	\$833	\$1,724	\$5,094	\$1,154	\$1,438	\$2,033
Program return on investment	175%	396%	135%	-19%	259%	187%	106%

Exhibit 3-3 provides an illustration of the programwide average ROI where the left column, shaded blue, shows the average per-student benefit broken out by source (increased private earnings, external benefits associated with improved health and welfare, and benefits to parents and schools stemming from reduced absenteeism and disciplinary incidents) and the red column on the right represents average per-student program costs. The vertical difference

between the columns denoted by the bracket represents the net benefit (benefit minus cost), which is equal to \$2,629. Dividing the net benefit by the per-student cost yields the return on investment figure equal to 175%.

Exhibit 3-3. Programwide Average of Overall Benefits, Costs and Corresponding ROI



Study Limitations

This study provides the first estimates of the financial benefits of the UCS program. We count the costs incurred by the schools and purposely exclude efforts put forth by the state Special Olympics organizations unless they are in direct service of the school-based program. This means our estimates do not include the costs associated with hosting state or regional Special Olympics events unless they are expressly part of the effort of the school-based program. To this end, the costs we report may represent an underestimate of the program costs for the full state-level UCS experience, but this is likely not by enough to change our qualitative results. The other primary limitation is that we are unable to calculate many of the benefits that likely accrue to UCS program participants, such as reduced engagement with the justice system and improved overall wellbeing of students. Such exclusions likely underestimate the benefits of the

UCS program so that even the upper-bound estimate of the program ROI presented above (175%) should be viewed as conservative.

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Appendix A | Construction of the Path Variable

To learn which UCS activities schools implemented, we constructed a “path” variable that concatenated the various UCS program activities into one string of binary indicators. We used the UCS liaison survey data collected by Special Olympics to identify which activities took place in each school in each year of interest. We then used the data to generate a binary variable for each activity where a “1” indicates a school participated in that activity and a “0” indicates no participation. These were concatenated in the order listed above in Exhibit 1-2 such that each activity is represented by a single digit (i.e., each binary entry within the string corresponds to a particular program activity).

In this eight-digit concatenated variable, or path, the first digit represents the Unified Sports activity, the second through fourth digits comprise the Inclusive Youth Leadership activities, and digits five through eight comprise the Whole School Engagement activities. Exhibit A-1 provides an illustration of the path variable for a hypothetical school.

Exhibit A-1. UCS Path Illustration



We then selected the paths from the Yin et al. (2022) sample that occurred the most often in the data. Matching these identified paths to those in our contemporary sample yielded approximately 27 schools. Exhibit 1-3 shows the list of paths, activities they represent, and number of schools in the current sample with those paths. These paths were used to match program activities from schools in the original sample to program activities that existed in the contemporary sample.

Appendix B | Variation in UCS Program Implementation Across Schools

Exhibit B-1. UCS Program Implementation Across Schools

Implementation Action	California	New York	New Jersey	Oklahoma	Tennessee	Wisconsin
Management and Training						
Regular planning time for UCS?	Yes; 2x a year	Yes; 7x a year	No	Yes; weekly	Yes; monthly	Yes; monthly
Annual UCS start up training from state?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Unified Sports						
<i>Unified Sports Team</i>						
Number of sports teams	4	3	3	6	3	1
Regular practices?	Yes; 1-2 per week	Yes; 3 per week	Yes; 1 per week	Yes; 1 per week	Yes; 5 per week (during season)	No; 2 practices total
Travel involved for sports games?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Overnight travel involved?	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
<i>Unified Physical Education Class</i>						
PE offered?	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Semester or year-long?	NA	NA	Year-long	Year-long	Semester-long	Year-long
Inclusive Youth Leadership						
<i>Unified Club</i>						
Regular club meetings	Yes; weekly	Yes; 2x a month	Yes; weekly	Yes; weekly	Yes; weekly	Yes; 2x a month
Club events/field trips/travel?	Yes; 1 field trip	Yes; 4 additional events	Yes; 3 additional events	Yes; 3 additional events	No	Yes; 9 additional events

Youth Summit						
Participation in Youth Summit?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Youth Activation Committee						
Has a Youth Activation Committee?	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Whole School Engagement						
Spread the Word						
Banner signing	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Expanded programming	Students decorated posters to line the school hallways	No	Administrator created neurodiversity awareness videos shown in all classrooms	No	No	No
Fans in the Stands/Unified Sports Pep Rally						
Number of games attended?	0	8	2	1	0	1
Attended Pep Rally	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Additional elements?	No	No	No	Yes; send off for state game	No	No
Unified Sports Day Festival						
Has Unified Sports Day Festival?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes; extended event	No	No
Fundraising Events/Activities						
Number of Events	5	1	0	4	2	3

Appendix C | School-level Cost Reports

In this appendix, we provide the cost estimates for the UCS program high schools in our sample. The exhibits below detail both the total and per-student costs for each activity implemented under the four program components (Management and Training, Unified Sports, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement) as well as the costs aggregated across all activities within each component. We also provide the annual overall program cost total in the last row of each table for each school.

California

Exhibit C-1. Annual Cost of a California UCS Program in 2024-25

Activity	Total Activity Cost	Per-Student Activity Cost*
Management & Training	34,683	10.20
Unified Sports	138,364	40.70
Unified Sports Team	138,364	40.70
Unified Physical Education	—	—
Inclusive Youth Leadership	47,828	14.07
Unified Club	44,284	13.02
Youth Summit	3,544	1.04
Youth Activation Committee	—	—
Young Athletes Volunteer Program	—	—
Whole School Engagement	7,790	2.29
Spread the Word	4,168	1.23
Fans in the Stands/Unified Sports Pep Rally	1,031	0.30
Unified Sports Day Festival	—	—
Fundraising Events/Activities	2,591	0.76
Special Olympics Play/Performance	—	—
OVERALL	228,665	67.25

Note. The total student enrollment in 2024-25 is 3,400 and includes students in grades 9–12. All figures represent 2024-25 dollars.

New Jersey

Exhibit C-2. Annual Cost of a New Jersey UCS Program in 2024-25

Activity	Total Activity Cost	Per-Student Activity Cost*
Management & Training	4,903	5.38
Unified Sports	81,944	89.85
Unified Sports Team	55,006	60.31
Unified Physical Education	26,939	29.54
Inclusive Youth Leadership	21,713	23.81
Unified Club	21,713	23.81
Youth Summit	—	—
Youth Activation Committee	—	—
Young Athletes Volunteer Program	—	—
Whole School Engagement	13,012	14.27
Spread the Word	4,344	4.76
Fans in the Stands/Unified Sports Pep Rally	3,090	3.39
Unified Sports Day Festival	5,577	6.12
Fundraising Events/Activities	—	—
Special Olympics Play/Performance	—	—
OVERALL	121,572	133.30

Note. The total student enrollment in 2024-25 is 912 and includes students in grades 9–12. All figures represent 2024-25 dollars.

New York

Exhibit C-3. Annual Cost of a New York UCS Program in 2024-25

Activity	Total Activity Cost	Per-Student Activity Cost*
Management & Training	2,425	2.71
Unified Sports	227,070	253.43
Unified Sports Team	227,070	253.43
Unified Physical Education	—	—
Inclusive Youth Leadership	44,003	49.11
Unified Club	30,059	33.55
Youth Summit	13,944	15.56
Youth Activation Committee	—	—
Young Athletes Volunteer Program	—	—
Whole School Engagement	16,572	18.50
Spread the Word	1,184	1.32
Fans in the Stands/Unified Sports Pep Rally	13,013	14.52
Unified Sports Day Festival	1,193	1.33
Fundraising Events/Activities	1,182	1.32
Special Olympics Play/Performance	—	—
OVERALL	290,070	323.74

Note. The total student enrollment in 2024-25 is 896 and includes students in grades 7–12. All figures represent 2024-25 dollars.

Oklahoma

Exhibit C-4. Annual Cost of an Oklahoma UCS Program in 2024-25

Activity	Total Activity Cost	Per-Student Activity Cost*
Management & Training	10,182	5.96
Unified Sports	94,338	55.23
Unified Sports Team	56,450	33.05
Unified Physical Education	37,888	22.18
Inclusive Youth Leadership	20,143	11.79
Unified Club	20,143	11.79
Youth Summit	—	—
Youth Activation Committee	—	—
Young Athletes Volunteer Program	—	—
Whole School Engagement	49,000	28.69
Spread the Word	22,199	13.00
Fans in the Stands/Unified Sports Pep Rally	20,698	12.12
Unified Sports Day Festival	3,228	1.89
Fundraising Events/Activities	2,876	1.68
Special Olympics Play/Performance	—	—
OVERALL	173,662	101.68

Note. The total student enrollment in 2024-25 is 912 and includes students in grades 9–12. All figures represent 2024-25 dollars.

Tennessee

Exhibit C-5. Annual Cost of a Tennessee UCS Program in 2024-25

Activity	Total Activity Cost	Per-Student Activity Cost*
Management & Training	4,872	4.73
Unified Sports	110,932	107.81
Unified Sports Team	77,324	75.15
Unified Physical Education	33,607	32.66
Inclusive Youth Leadership	3,662	3.56
Unified Club	2,494	2.42
Youth Summit	—	—
Youth Activation Committee	1,168	1.14
Young Athletes Volunteer Program	—	—
Whole School Engagement	5,721	5.56
Spread the Word	794	0.77
Fans in the Stands/Unified Sports Pep Rally	—	—
Unified Sports Day Festival	—	—
Fundraising Events/Activities	4,928	4.79
Special Olympics Play/Performance	—	—
OVERALL	125,188	121.66

Note. The total student enrollment in 2024-25 is 1,029 and includes students in grades 9–12. All figures represent 2024-25 dollars.

Wisconsin

Exhibit C-6. Annual Cost of a Wisconsin UCS Program in 2024-25

Activity	Total Activity Cost	Per-Student Activity Cost*
Management & Training	4,795	9.37
Unified Sports	34,442	59.69
Unified Sports Team	1,020	1.77
Unified Physical Education	33,422	57.92
Inclusive Youth Leadership	23,025	39.90
Unified Club	23,025	39.90
Youth Summit	—	—
Youth Activation Committee	—	—
Young Athletes Volunteer Program	—	—
Whole School Engagement	17,314	30.01
Spread the Word	12,070	20.92
Fans in the Stands/Unified Sports Pep Rally	1,289	2.23
Unified Sports Day Festival	—	—
Fundraising Events/Activities	3,955	6.85
Special Olympics Play/Performance	—	—
OVERALL	79,576	137.91

Note. The total student enrollment in 2024-25 is 577 and includes students in grades 9–12. All figures represent 2024-25 dollars.

Appendix D | UCS Liaison Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today! My name is [name] and I work for the American Institutes for Research or AIR. We were commissioned by Special Olympics to conduct a return on investment study for the Unified Champion Schools program. As a part of this study, we are conducting interviews with key personnel responsible for implementing the UCS program at your school. You have been recommended to us as a person who works on the UCS program at your school.

The **purpose** of this research is to conduct a benefit-cost analysis to better understand the costs of implementing UCS, the benefits that are produced by the program, and determine whether benefits of the program outweigh its costs. The purpose of this interview is to understand and accurately capture the time, effort, and resources that each school devotes to their UCS program. **[Procedure]** During this interview, we will ask you questions about how the UCS program is implemented at your school. We are interested in the resources used to implement the program including the staff involved, the equipment and materials they used, and spaces in which program activities occurred. Because we're interested in implementation over the school year, we're going to ask you to think back to what happened last year. Some of these questions may feel very specific, like the specific staff involved in various components, the number of meetings, and the spaces in which activities occurred. We want to assure you that the purpose of these questions is not to assess you or any of your staff or processes, rather it is to get a clearer idea of all the materials and staff time that went into implementing the UCS program at [school name]. **[Risks/benefits]** Participation is completely voluntary and there will be no repercussions to you or your school should you choose not to participate. Further, you may choose to skip any question you do not wish to answer or can discontinue the interview at any time.

Do you have any questions about the study?

We will treat the data collected during this interview as confidential and will not include any school names or individual identifying information in our reports.

Do you agree to participate? [Confirm that all participants say "yes."]

We also would like to record our conversation to accurately capture everything you share with us. The recording is for note-taking purposes only and will not be shared with anyone outside of the AIR team. We do, however, wish to keep a de-identified copy of the transcript of this conversation for future research. Recordings will be kept in a secure location by AIR and will be destroyed at the end of the study. You may request to turn off the recorder at any time.

Do you agree to be audio recorded? [If the participant agrees, begin the recording. If not, plan on taking copious notes.]

Now that we're recording, can you confirm for me again that you consent to participate in this study.

I. Brief Introductions

- a) First, we would like to start with an introduction. Could you please tell me your name and your role at your [school name] during this past academic year?
- b) Tell us a little bit about your responsibilities for the Unified Champion Schools program at [school name].

II. Overview of UCS Program Components

We have reviewed the Unified Champion Schools activities that your school participated in during the previous academic year. Based on our records, we understand that you participated in these/this main component(s) of the UCS program:

- a) [School-specific Unified Sports]
 - a. Sports or PE
- b) [School-specific Inclusive Youth Leadership]
 - a. A Unified Club, A Youth Summit, A Youth Activation Committee, A Young Athletes Volunteer program
- c) [School-specific Whole School Engagement]
- d) Are there any other components of the UCS program that you implemented at your school last year that I did not mention?

[Once fully explained] In that case, we would like to ask you a few clarifying questions about both the UCS program overall and then about each of these main components we just mentioned.

As a reminder, we are primarily interested in the resources needed to run this program in your school. This is not an assessment of you or your staff members. Also, feel free to answer these questions briefly, and a yes or no answer is often a sufficient answer. We really value your time and are grateful to you for speaking with us today.

III. UCS Program Overview

First let's start out by asking you a few questions about your school.

- a) About how many students go to school here?
- b) Do you know the number of students with disabilities at [school] last year?
 - a. What about the number of students with intellectual or developmental disabilities?
- c) Thank you. Now we're going to ask you about [school's] Unified Champion Schools program generally.
- d) How did you get involved with the Unified Champion Schools program?
 - a. [Follow up] Did your UCS work add to or replace any of your other regular responsibilities last year?

- e) Is there a team who led the Unified Champion Schools program at your school last year?
 - a. **If yes:** what does the team do?
 - b. [For each activity named] How much time did you all spend on [activity named]?
 - c. Who were the members of this team? What are their job titles? [Keep a list of these names.]
 - d. For each staff member listed: What are their responsibilities in relationship to the Unified Champion Schools program?
 - e. About how much time do you think they spend on managing the UCS program?
 - f. Do you or any of your team receive additional compensation for your work on the Unified Champion Schools program?
- f) Was there any training participating staff had to go through to be involved in UCS in any capacity? [We are interested in training that occurred at any time, not just the previous year.]
 - a. If so, what did training look like? When did it occur? How many sessions? How long were the sessions? What time of year did they occur? How many people attended? Who led the training?
 - b. **If no,** who led the UCS program last year?
- g) [If not already answered] Did the UCS leadership team have regular meetings to discuss the program?
 - a. If yes: How long were these meetings? How frequently did they occur? Where did they take place?
 - b. If no: Did team members discuss UCS in any other meetings that were not specifically about the Unified Champion Schools program? If so, approximately how much time in a typical week or month did these team members discuss UCS?
- h) Are there any other meetings that discussed UCS? These may be UCS-specific meetings or other meetings where it was discussed?
 - a. If yes, which meetings? Who is at those meetings? How often do they occur? How long do they last?
- i) Did anyone on the UCS leadership team regularly communicate/coordinate with staff from the Special Olympics program? These could be either state or national folks.
 - a. If yes: what did this communication look like? About how many hours a week or a month did you communicate with them last year?
- j) Do you know if your school received a stipend from the Special Olympics program for participating in the Unified Champion Schools program? If so, how much was it?
- k) Did you or anyone on your team participate in any Special Olympics courses?
 - a. This could be eLearning courses, a module for Coaching Unified Sports through NFHS, an educator conference for UCS; etc.
 - b. For each activity/course mentioned:
 - i. Who attended?
 - ii. How long was it?
 - iii. How frequently did it take place?
 - iv. Where did it occur?

- l) For any of the UCS activities that you engaged in, did you provide or rely upon transportation? If yes, what types of transportation did you use?

IV. Component 1: Unified Sports [Skip if not applicable]

Now we will ask you a few questions about the Unified Sports component of the Unified Champion Schools program at your school last school year.

- a) Please provide a general description of the Unified Sports program as it was implemented at your school last year. [Capture information for follow up questions and skip those below already answered.]
- b) [If not already confirmed] Earlier you told us you did (from component overview). Is that right?
 - a. A Unified Sports Team
 - b. A Unified Physical Education Class
- c) Can you please describe what [activity] looked like to implement?
- d) How many students participated?
- e) How many students with IDD? How many general education students?

ACTIVITIES

- f) How often did the Unified Sports activities take place at your school last year?
 - a. Please specify the frequency (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly) and the typical duration of each activity session.
- g) Can you provide the number of students who participated in the Unified Sports program last year? If you are able, please break down the figures into the number of students with intellectual disabilities and the number of general education students.
- h) Where did [school's] Unified Sports activities take place (e.g. in a gymnasium, on a field, off campus)?
 - a. Approximately how many square feet was the space?
- i) How often did these activities take place?
- j) How long was a typical session?

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

- k) What equipment or supplies did your school use to implement your Unified Sports program? (e.g., balls, nets, sports jerseys).
 - a. Was this equipment used in any other school activities?
 - i. If so, what percentage of time would you say were they used for UCS?
 - b. How often did you need to replace [equipment]?
 - c. Did the school already have this equipment, or did you need to purchase them specifically for the Unified Sports program?
 - d. How long did the Unified Sports program use these materials for?
 - e. How many times a month were these materials used?

STAFF

- l) In terms of staff involvement, which school staff were involved in planning, coordinating, or implementing any components of the Unified Sports program at your school?
 - a. For each staff member that you just listed, what is their job title?
 - b. What is their role related to the Unified Sports program at your school?
 - c. How many hours per week would you say that each staff member spent on the Unified Sports program? [This may need to be asked for each staff member.]
 - d. Were staff compensated for their efforts outside of their regular pay? If so, for how much?
- m) Did you have a Unified Sports coach who was not a part of the school staff listed above? If so, did you hire or contract them for this position?
 - a. Do you know how much the contract was for? How long was the contract for?
 - b. What did the training for Unified Sports coaches look like? How long did it take? Who was involved? Where did the training take place?
- n) Did any of the Unified Sports' activities occur off the school's campus?
 - a. If yes, about how often did you go off campus?
 - b. If yes: Can you please describe a typical trip? Where did the students go? What adults went with them? What transportation was used? How far did they travel?
 - c. If yes: How was transportation paid for?
 - d. If yes: Was there a permission process that needed to occur? Please describe. Who was involved? How much time did it take?

MEETINGS

- o) Outside of the time spent implementing Unified Sports activities with students, who was involved in planning the United Sports events/activities?
- p) What types of things did they have to plan for?
- q) How much time did they spend planning these events over the course of the year?

V. Component 2: Inclusive Youth Leadership [Skip if not applicable]

[Possible Activity: (1) A Unified Club, (2) A Youth Summit, (3) A Youth Activation Committee, (4) A Young Athletes Volunteer program]

Next, we want to ask you a few questions about the Inclusive Youth Leadership component of the UCS program at your school last year. [Only ask about topics relevant to participant].

- a) Please provide a general description of the Inclusive Youth Leadership program as it was implemented at your school last year.
- b) **For each activity**
 - a. Can you provide a general description of the [activity] from last year?
 - b. When did [activity] meet? (during regular school hours, after school?)
 - c. If outside of school hours, how many per week? What day of the week? What time of day?

- d. If so, what did it replace in students' schedules, if anything?
 - e. Did the [activity] operate similarly or differently from other [activities] at your school?
 - f. How many [of activity] did you have at your school?
 - g. How often did the typical [activity] meet?
 - h. How long did [activity] meet?
 - i. How frequently (weekly, monthly, daily) did these [activity] meet?
- c) Did [activity] use any supplies or equipment for their meetings?
 - a. Can you describe these? (follow up about food, handouts, tools, swag)
 - b. Was this different than other [activities] at your school?
- d) Did [activity] meet on campus, off campus, or both?
 - a. [If not already provided] where on campus did [activity] occur?
 - b. What was the approximate square footage of [classroom/gym/library]?
- e) Where off campus does [activity] occur?
 - a. [If off campus], did the program look different off campus? If so, how so?
- f) How were students transported off campus? [Mode of transportation] How long did it take to transport them?
 - a. If by bus: how many buses did you use? Who provided the buses? How much did it cost to use them?
 - b. If by car: Who drove? How many cars? Number of people per car?
 - c. If public: What was the per ride cost? How long did the ride take?
- g) How many students participated in the typical [activity] at your school?
 - a. Students with IDD?
 - b. General education students
- h) Which staff ran the [activity] at your school?
 - a. What were their job titles? [count how many are teachers, etc.]
 - b. How long have they been at the school?
- i) How much time did staff devote to [activity]? This includes the time spent planning, cleaning up, drafting notes, conducting follow-up communication, logistics, etc.]
 - a. When did staff plan for [activity]?
 - i. [during the school day] Did planning for [activity] impact existing planning time? By how much?
 - ii. [after the school day] How much time per week after school did staff spend planning [activity]?
 - b. Is this amount typical for planning clubs at [school]? If no, is it more or less?
- j) Did staff receive any additional compensation for their participation?
- k) For any of [activity], were substitute teachers required? For example, to support [activity] or to teach a class when a teacher was at [activity].

If Youth Summit:

- a) Did you ever have guest speakers come to your school for Youth Summit activities?

b) **If Youth Athlete Volunteers:**

- a. How did the Young Athlete Volunteers from your school connect with the Young Athlete Participants across schools?
- b. Did you know which Young Athlete program(s) your Young Athlete student volunteers were connected with?

VI. Component 3: Whole School Engagement [Skip if not applicable]

[WSE: (1) Spread the Word, (2) Fans in the Stands/Unified Sports Pep Rally, (3) Unified Sports Day Festival, (4) Fundraising Events/Activities, (5) Special Olympics Play/Performance]

Next, we want to ask you a few questions about the Whole School Engagement component of the UCS program at your school last year.

- a) Can you please provide a general description of [WSE] from last year?
- b) How many students did [WSE] serve last year?
 - a. How many students with IDD?
 - b. How many general education students?
- c) Approximately, when did [WSE] occur in the school year?
 - a. How many times did they occur in the school year?
 - b. How many hours long were the events?
- d) What staff were involved in [WSE]?
 - a. [If we haven't heard their name before, ask] what is their title?
- e) Were any volunteers involved? [If yes] In what capacity? How much time did each one spend involved in [WSE]?
- f) Were any substitute teachers needed to be able to run the [WSE] programming?
- g) How much time did staff spend on [WSE] including planning, set up, take down, and other follow up activities?
- h) Were there any meetings that occurred to plan or otherwise organize [WSE]?
 - a. If so, where did the meetings take place? How long were they? How frequently did they occur?
- i) How much time did staff spend during the [WSE]?
- j) What supplies and equipment were used to implement [WSE]?
- k) [Spread the Word] Did you purchase Spread the Word campaign merchandise, such as banners, t-shirts, bracelets, or stickers for students?
 - a. If so: how many?
 - b. Do you know how much it cost?
- l) Where did [WSE] occur?
 - a. [If on campus] What event space did you use? Can you estimate the square footage of that space?
 - b. Were any events off campus?

- c. What event space did you use? What was the square footage of that space?
- d. How many miles away was the facility?
- e. How long did it take to get there?
- f. What mode of transportation did you take?
- g. Because the event was off campus, were there any additional permissions required for students to attend? [if so] Is there any time you spent on obtaining permission that you haven't already accounted for?

Spread the Word:

- 12. How many school staff were involved in Spread the Word at your school? What are their job titles? How long have they been at your school?
 - a. How many hours per week would you say each of them spent planning Spread the Word activities at your school?
 - b. How many hours per week would you say each of them spent implementing Spread the Word activities at your school?

Fans in the Stands:

- 13. Did students travel off the school campus to attend a sporting event?
 - a. If yes: what transportation did they use? Where did they go? How far did they travel? How was transportation paid for?
 - b. Did this occur outside of school hours? When?
- 14. Did staff have to travel off the school campus to attend a sporting event?
 - a. Did traveling off-site require substitutes?
 - b. If yes: did staff spend time getting permission forms for students to travel off campus? Who was involved? How much time did it take?
- 15. If on the school campus, where did Fans in the Stands events occur?
 - a. How many square feet was the space?

VII. Closing

- 1. You mentioned [list names from above]. To the best of our knowledge, do you know how long [person] has been at [school]? Do you know if they have an MA degree or any additional certifications?
- 2. Now that you've heard the kinds of questions we are interested in, is there anything else you think we should know that we haven't asked about?

We really appreciate you meeting with us to talk about your experience with the UCS program. If we have any follow up questions regarding our conversation today, may we send those questions in an email?

You will receive emails from us soon with Amazon gift cards as a thank you for participating in our study and for your time. Have a nice rest of your day!

Appendix E | School Recruitment Information

Exhibit E-1. Email Introducing the School to AIR and the UCS Cost Study

Subject Line: Interest in [School Name] Participating in Unified Champion Schools Cost Benefit Study

Dear [Salutation Last],

My name is [scheduler name] and I am excited to reach out to you on behalf of the American Institutes for Research (AIR), a not-for-profit research organization. We have been commissioned by the Special Olympics Unified Championship Schools (UCS) program to conduct a cost benefit analysis of how a school's participation in UCS activities compares to the program's benefits. Your school has been identified by your state director [insert name here] as a prime candidate for our study.

Please let us know if you are interested in participating in this study no later than Friday, August 1st, and we will let you know if you have been selected for this study in the coming weeks.

What participation entails:

- As part of the research process, we would like to interview 6-7 key staff within your school and district who are actively involved in implementing the UCS program at [school name].
- We would also like to interview 1-2 parents whose children with intellectual disabilities participate in your UCS program.
- Interviews will take approximately one hour, and participants will receive an honorarium in recognition of their time spent participating in this interview.

Benefits of participating in this study:

- You will gain a deep understanding of the current UCS programmatic efforts at your school
- You will be able to provide policy recommendations back to UCS
- You will receive school-specific return on investment (ROI) calculations of your UCS program
- Interview participants will receive an honorarium for their time

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to hearing from you.

[AIR Team Member Name]

Exhibit E-2. UCS Cost Study One-Pager



The Special Olympics Unified Champions Schools (UCS) program aims to promote meaningful social inclusion by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities to create accepting school environments, utilizing three interconnected components: Special Olympics Unified Sports®, inclusive youth leadership, and whole school engagement.

The Unified Champion Schools Return on Investment Study

Special Olympics has commissioned a Return on Investment study of the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools (UCS) program. The study will be conducted by the American Institutes for Research, a not-for-profit behavioral and social science research organization with extensive experience conducting these types of investigations.

The study will include high schools across the nation who are currently implementing the UCS program with high fidelity. Return on investment studies provide information on how much a program costs to implement and compares this to the benefits generated by the program. **The purpose of this Return on Investment study is to learn how the costs of the Special Olympics UCS program compare with the program's benefits.**

The study team is currently seeking participation from a select number of UCS program high schools that have been chosen based on their geography, the types of program activities they are engaged in, and how well they have implemented the program.

What Does Participation Involve?

Participation in the study will involve a limited amount of data collection including interviews conducted by members of the AIR study team. The interviews will be administered to approximately six people for each study school including the following: UCS site coordinators, parents, and educational staff such as principals, teachers, and district officials. Interviewees will be compensated for their time. The interview questions will ask about the time effort and non-personnel resources devoted to program implementation at each study school. Interviews will occur in the Fall 2025.

Benefits of Participation

There are multiple benefits associated with participation in the study. First, the information gathered for the study will be used to learn how the current UCS programmatic efforts promote a more inclusive school environment conducive to the learning of all students. Second, the study findings will be used formatively to help inform how UCS programs can improve to better serve students. Finally, the study will show the extent to which there is a positive economic payoff to investing in efforts that advance inclusivity in schools.

Exhibit E-3. Endorsement Letter from Special Olympics



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**

July 22, 2025

Dear UCS School,

Special Olympics has partnered with American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct a Return on Investment (ROI) Study on the Unified Champion Schools (UCS) program. The study will compare the costs and benefits of implementing the UCS program in a set of schools across the country. The study findings will shed light on the costs associated with implementation and the extent to which program benefits exceed its costs.

As part of this study, AIR will be interviewing individuals from a select sample of UCS high schools about their efforts in implementing the program. If your participation is requested, we would appreciate your joining in this important study.

Should you have any questions, please reach out to the study director Rachel Feldman (rfeldman@air.org). Thank you for your time and help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrea Cahn".

Andrea Cahn
Senior Vice President, Unified Champion Schools
Special Olympics
2600 Virginia Ave NW, 11th Floor
Washington, DC 20037

About the American Institutes for Research®

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