

General Statement of Eligibility

Special Olympics training and competition is open to every person with intellectual disabilities who is at least eight years of age and who registers to participate in Special Olympics as required by the *Special Olympics Incorporated General Rules*. Please see the page in the *Sports Training and Competition Policies and Procedures Manual* for clarification of eligibility for Unified Sports Partners.

Age Requirements

There is no maximum age limitation for participation in Special Olympics. The minimum age requirement for participation in Special Olympics competition is eight years of age. Special Olympics Illinois permits and encourages children who are at least six years old to participate in age-appropriate Special Olympics training programs offered by Area Programs or in specific (and age-appropriate) cultural or social activities offered during the course of a Special Olympics event. It is accepted that such children participate in events or sports in conjunction with Area Competitions but in separate venues. However, such events must be participation only and conducted in a manner that does not recognize place finishes and encourages the spirit of participation. Such children may be recognized for their participation in such training or other non-competition activities through certificates of participation, the use of the participation ribbons, or through other types of recognition approved by Special Olympics Incorporated. The place finish awards cannot be used. No child may participate in Special Olympics competition (or be awarded medals or ribbons associated with competition) before his or her eighth birthday.

Motor Activities Training Program Participation

The Special Olympics Motor Activities Training Program (MATP) is designed for persons with the greatest physical need who do not yet possess the physical and/or behavioral skills necessary to participate in official Special Olympics sports. This program provides a comprehensive motor activity and recreation training curriculum for these participants. MATP emphasizes training and participation rather than competition. In addition, the program provides the means for athletes to participate in appropriate recreation activities geared to their ability levels. Athletes who are at least six years old may participate in the MATP program. The official Special Olympics Challenge Ribbon or Medal must be used at MATP events.

Degree of Disability

Participation in Special Olympics training and competition is open to all persons with intellectual disabilities who meet the age requirement regardless of the level or degree of that person's disability, and whether or not that person also has other mental or physical disabilities, so long as that person registers to participate in Special Olympics as required by the *Special Olympics Incorporated General Rules*.

Identifying Persons with Intellectual disabilities

A person is considered to have intellectual disabilities for purposes of determining his or her eligibility to participate in Special Olympics if that person satisfies any one of the following requirements:

1. The person has been identified by an agency or professional as having intellectual disabilities as determined by their localities: or
2. The person has a cognitive delay, as determined by standardized measures such as intelligent quotient or "IQ" testing or other measures which are generally accepted within the professional community in that Chapter's nation as being a reliable measurement of the existence of a cognitive delay; or

3. The person has a closely related developmental disability. A "closely related developmental disability" means having functional limitations in either general learning direction or self-care. However, persons whose functional limitations are based solely on a physical, behavioral, or emotional disability, or a specific learning or sensory disability, are not eligible to participate as Special Olympics athletes, but may be eligible to volunteer for Special Olympics as partners in Unified Sports, if they otherwise meet the separate eligibility requirements for participation in Unified Sports which are set forth in the *Special Olympics Incorporated Unified Sports Handbook*.

Preserving Flexibility in Identifying Eligible Athletes

The state may request limited permission from Special Olympics Incorporated to depart from the eligibility requirements identified in the section *Identifying Persons with Intellectual disabilities*, above, if the Chapter believes that there are exceptional circumstances which warrant such a departure, and so notifies Special Olympics Incorporated in writing. Special Olympics Incorporated will consider such requests promptly, but shall have the final authority in determining whether any departure or exception is appropriate.

Unified Sports

Special Olympics Unified Sports competition involves athletes (individuals with intellectual disabilities) and partners (individuals without intellectual disabilities) competing together. Eligible athletes must meet the criteria previously described in this section. Special Olympics Unified Sports training and competition is open to any partner who is at least eight years of age and who registers to participate in Special Olympics as required by the *Special Olympics Incorporated General Rules*. To be a Unified Partner requires completion of the Unified Sports Partner Application for Participation, completion of the Special Olympics Illinois Class A Volunteer Form, and meet the separate eligibility requirements for participation set forth in the *Special Olympics Incorporated Unified Sports Handbook*.

IHSA Eligibility

The Illinois High School Association bylaw 3.11 prohibits a student from participating on a non-school team or in non-school competition in the sport or any skill of a sport at the time the student is a member of a school team in that same sport. Exceptions may be granted by the IHSA's Executive Director for competitions sponsored and conducted directly by the National Governing Body of the sport. Athletes/students should contact their local school principal to obtain the form needed to file for this exemption.

Young Athletes Program

The Young Athletes program is an innovative sports play program for children ages 2-7 with intellectual disabilities and their peers, designed to introduce them into the world of sports. The benefits to this program have been proven worldwide. First and foremost, these activities will help the children improve physically, cognitively and socially. This program will also raise awareness of the Special Olympics program and serve as an introduction to the resources and support available within Special Olympics Illinois.

This program is designed to address two specific levels of play. Level 1 includes physical activities focused on developing fundamental motor tracking and eye-hand coordination. Level 2 concentrates on the application of these physical activities through a sports skills activity program and developing skills consistent with Special Olympics sports play. The activities will consist of foundational skills, walking & running, balance & jumping, trapping & catching, throwing, striking, kicking and advanced skills.