



## Respect Campaign

A respect campaign is one of the most popular and effective Unified Champion Schools activities for elementary schools. The campaign is designed to promote acceptance and respect for students of all academic abilities.



Some schools have a weeklong awareness campaign, while others declare one day Respect Day. Activities vary from school to school, but are often planned to coincide with the Spread the Word annual day of awareness (held yearly the first Wednesday in March). Check out the ideas below and use the checklist on page 73 to plan your school's event.

- **We're alike but different days:** Designate a different theme for each day of the school week, just as you might for a spirit week. For example, you might have a "Dare to Be Different Day" and invite students to wear silly accessories or outfits, a "Unity Day" on which students wear their teacher's favorite color, and "Literature Lovers Day" when students dress like a character from one of the books listed below. Each day, point out how students are different but also have traits in common.
- **Lessons from books:** Share books about respecting individuality, such as the ones below. Guide students to discuss what each book teaches them.
  - *It's Okay to Be Different* by Todd Parr
  - *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes
  - *Spaghetti in a Hot Dog Bun* by Maria Dismondy
  - *Spoon* by Amy Krouse Rosenthal
  - "The Sneetches" from *The Sneetches and Other Stories* by Dr. Seuss
- **Special Needs Awareness Day:** Events for the day might include activities such as visiting with therapy dogs and their owners or trainers, learning about sign language and braille, listening to a Special Olympics adult athlete tell about his experiences, and watching kid-friendly videos about living with disabilities. Classroom teachers might also read aloud books about children with special needs such as *My Best Friend Will* by Jamie Lowell and Tara Tuchel, a photo-illustrated book about an 11-year-old girl and her friend who has autism.





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- **Rally:** Have a schoolwide assembly to generate enthusiasm for promoting a respectful school climate. Consider incorporating elements like these:
  - a motivational speaker such as a Special Olympics athlete.
  - a pledge for staff and students to use respectful words and actions.
  - students performing a song that celebrates individuality.
  - a student performance of the play "Looking for Leaders" on pages 92–98.
- **Banner:** Check with your state's Special Olympics office to get a campaign banner. Ask all students and staff members to sign the banner and pledge to use words of respect. Display the banner in a prominent school location. Create a smaller version that the "class of the week" can display outside their classroom.
- **Displays:** Ask each class to come up with a way to showcase the idea that we should treat others the way we want to be treated. Students might create a poster, a bulletin board, or a sign for the classroom door, for example. Invite other staff members, such as the kitchen staff and media specialist, to display those, too. The message will be clear—respect is a schoolwide expectation.
- **Kindness rocks:** Start a schoolwide hide-a-rock project. Invite every student to bring in a small rock and paint a kind word or a cheerful picture on it. Have students hide the rocks around the school or in the community. When someone finds the rock, the painting is sure to brighten his or her day. Search online for tips about tagging the rocks and using social media to enhance the project.



### Words Matter

Instead of a Respect Campaign, some Unified Champion Schools have a **Spread the Word to End the Word** campaign. The campaign is committed to eliminating the use of the R-Word, which includes the terms "retard," "retarded," and "mental retardation," while promoting words of respect and acceptance.

Some elementary students are familiar with these words, while many others aren't. Since every school is different, it's up to you to decide whether a Respect Campaign or an R-Word campaign is a better fit for your school. For information and resources for an R-Word campaign, go to <https://www.r-word.org/>



## Checklist for a Respect Campaign

Use the ideas on pages 71–72 and the checklist below to make your school's Respect Campaign a success.

- 1. Meet with the Unified Champion School Leadership Team to discuss holding a Respect Campaign in your school. Discuss whether to include a Special Needs Awareness Day. Develop a timeline for organizing and planning the event.
- 2. Meet with the principal to discuss plans for the campaign and ensure the administration's support and approval.
- 3. Check with your state Special Olympics office for resources.
- 4. Communicate with school staff about the purpose of the campaign. Seek their input on activities to include. Invite student input, as appropriate.
- 5. Decide what activities the campaign will include. Clear the activities with the necessary school personnel before releasing the information to others.
- 6. Develop a plan.
  - Schedule the campaign activities.
  - Invite members of the parent-teacher organization to help plan or carry out activities.
  - Create a plan for each task that needs to be completed, including deadlines and a list of who is responsible for carrying out each step.
- 7. Share the details of the event with the school staff. Consider asking staff to assist with communication through announcements, the school website, letters sent home, the school newsletter, and local news media.
- 8. After the event, thank everyone involved in making it a success.

