

## UCS PROGRAM EVOLUTION – UPDATE

Dear educators,

Following the pandemic, Special Olympics Ontario made a commitment to ensure that an annual School Championships would take place. This was an important step in welcoming schools and students back to meaningful sport experiences and rebuilding community connection. We also recognized that this commitment required significant investment to deliver these events successfully.

As we look ahead, we know the time has come to evolve the UCS program toward a more sustainable model; one that places a stronger emphasis on in school programming and locally delivered opportunities. For some, this shift may feel like a loss, particularly for those who deeply value the excitement and sense of belonging that largescale events can bring. We want to acknowledge that feeling and express our sincere appreciation for the impact these events have had on students, educators, and entire school communities.

Moving forward, School Championships will remain an important part of our two-year cycle. However, similar to our community programming model, Major Games are not something we can sustainably support on an annual basis. This evolution allows us to reinvest in strong local programming, expand participation opportunities, and meaningfully increase the number of students who can benefit from Special Olympics experiences.

As part of this transition, we are continuing to engage in ongoing dialogue with UCS leaders and partners across the province. Your insights and experiences help us understand what is working, what needs strengthening, and where new opportunities should emerge. This feedback is vital in shaping the next iteration of the UCS model and ensuring it remains responsive to the needs of schools, educators, and students.

### Why We Are Evolving the Program

Our current annual School Championships model has become increasingly difficult to sustain both financially and operationally. The average cost to send a single athlete or partner to Games is **\$850**, making annual largescale championships no longer feasible.

At the same time, only a small portion of eligible athletes and schools actually participate:

- **7%** of registered SO athletes attend School Championships each year
- **20%** of active schools are represented annually

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- **150** unique schools have attended across four years, despite more than **550** being active during that period

To ensure more students benefit from UCS; not just those who advance, we are shifting toward a **year round program model** that is predictable, accessible, and designed to reach more schools, more athletes, and more communities.

This evolution reflects our commitment to growing UCS in a way that is inclusive, sustainable, and impactful for years to come.

Sincerely,

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