

DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL SERVICES
Township of Union Public Schools
M-E-M-O-R-A-N-D-U-M

TO: Dr. Gerald Benaquista

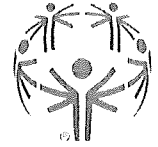
C: Dr. Jose Rodriguez, Marissa McKenzie, Yolanda Koon, Kim Conti, Bernadette Watson,
Diane Cappiello

FROM: Stefannie Buthorn 

RE: Board Agenda

DATE: July 2, 2026

Approve Lauren Kohn to serve as a member of the 2026-2027 Unified Champion Schools Education Leaders Network (ELN) and attend four meetings during the 2026-2027 school year, at no cost to the district, in accordance with the information appended to the agenda



Dear Lauren,

On behalf of the Special Olympics New Jersey Unified Champion Schools team, I am pleased to invite you to serve as a member of the **2026–2027 Unified Champion Schools Education Leaders Network (ELN)**.

The Education Leaders Network is a statewide advisory group of educators and school leaders who help shape the future of Unified Champion Schools in New Jersey. Membership is by invitation and is extended to individuals whose leadership, experience, and unique perspective have demonstrated a commitment to creating more inclusive school communities.

You are receiving this appointment because of the valuable voice you bring to Unified Champion Schools. Whether through innovative programming, administrative leadership, community partnerships, National Banner achievement, emerging program development, or your commitment to inclusive school culture, we believe your experience will strengthen Unified programming across New Jersey.

Membership in the Special Olympics New Jersey Unified Champion Schools Education Leaders Network is extended by individual invitation only. This appointment is intended solely for the person who received this email directly from the Special Olympics New Jersey Unified Champion Schools team and is not transferable. If you are unable to accept this appointment, we would be grateful if you would let us know, but please do not forward this invitation or designate another individual to participate in your place. Additional members are selected by SONJ to ensure balanced representation across geographic regions, grade levels, school roles, and Unified Champion Schools experience.

Purpose of the Education Leaders Network

The ELN serves as a collaborative leadership team that works alongside the SONJ Unified Champion Schools staff to:

- Share successful practices and innovative ideas from schools across New Jersey.
- Provide strategic feedback to strengthen Unified Champion Schools statewide.
- Help shape educator professional development, statewide initiatives, and new resources.
- Identify emerging needs, trends, and opportunities across New Jersey schools.
- Support the growth of Unified Champion Schools by sharing expertise and mentoring other educators.

Membership Expectations

As a member of the Education Leaders Network, you will:

- Attend four collaborative meetings during the 2026–2027 school year.
- Participate actively in discussions and planning.

Special Olympics New Jersey Sports Complex

1 Eunice Kennedy Shriver Way, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648 **Tel** 609.896.8000 **Fax** 609.896.8040 **www.sonj.org**

GENUINE JERSEY PRIDE



- Share successes, challenges, and promising practices from your school or district.
- Help identify statewide priorities and opportunities for growth.
- Provide thoughtful feedback on new initiatives, resources, and professional learning opportunities.
- Serve as an ambassador for inclusive school communities and Unified Champion Schools throughout New Jersey.

2026–2027 Kickoff Meeting

Our first meeting will be held **July 23, 2026** at the Special Olympics New Jersey Sports Complex in Lawrenceville.

This year's summer kickoff will allow the ELN to play an active role in shaping our statewide priorities from the very beginning of the school year, including planning Regional Educator Conferences, professional development opportunities, and other key Unified Champion Schools initiatives.

The meeting agenda will be shared the week before the meeting.

One-Year Appointment

Membership in the Education Leaders Network is a one-year appointment. Each spring, SONJ reviews membership to ensure the network continues to reflect diverse grade levels, geographic regions, program experience, and educational perspectives from across New Jersey. This approach allows the ELN to remain dynamic while ensuring that a broad range of voices help guide Unified Champion Schools across the state.

If you are interested in serving on the 2026–2027 Education Leaders Network, please reply by **July 8** to confirm your participation. Once your commitment is confirmed, SONJ will gladly provide a letter for your district administration outlining the purpose of the ELN, meeting dates, and expected commitment to support any necessary approval for attendance.

Thank you for your continued leadership and dedication to inclusion. We are excited about the opportunity to collaborate with you this year and look forward to the impact we can make together for students across New Jersey.

Warm regards,

The Special Olympics New Jersey Unified Champion Schools Team