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OUR STORY

Unified Theater dissolves typical barriers between youth through transformative, school based performing arts programming. At Unified Theater, young people with and without disabilities, of all backgrounds, come together as equals to put on a production. The production is entirely organized, written, and directed by the students themselves. In over sixty schools across the country over 6,000 students with and without disabilities have performed to almost 10,000 audience members. The concept is simple: let teens lead, let creativity rule, and put the Spotlight on Ability.

Watch Micaela, our founder, share our story as a Social Innovation Fellow at Chicago Ideas week...



How We Began

Unified Theater began with Kelsey and Micaela. As cousins born three months apart, Kelsey and Micaela were united by their love for music, roller coasters, long drives, and beach side picnics rather than divided by the fact that Kelsey was born with disabilities that limited her ability to walk and talk. Kelsey taught Micaela, and the entire world, to see ability first, to savor each moment of joy and the people that bring them, and to never ever take life too seriously. As a child, Micaela had another love too, theater and music. But she was always frustrated to see no kids with disabilities, like Kelsey, in her music and theater programs. So, influenced by Kelsey, Micaela started the first Unified Theater group at the age of 15 at Conard High School, launching a creative youth led movement towards full inclusion.



Our founding story is still very much a part of who we are today at Unified Theater. We still focus on real inclusion and seeing ability first. We're still driven by youth for youth. Just like Micaela started and led the first Unified Theater group in her school, youth across the country are building and leading programs in their own schools. And, we still let creativity rule, understanding that theater, music, and art have a unique ability to dissolve typical barriers, unite diverse communities, and tell stories that transform the lives of performers and audiences alike.

Join a Production

Join a Unified Theater Spotlight School and participate in the cast or crew of a production! [Find your Spotlight School here](#) and complete the registration form to participate!

Make a Donation

Unified Theater is a not-for-profit organization that relies on gifts from our generous donors. [Donate](#) now to help us keep the Spotlight on Ability!

SPOTLIGHT CENTER

Student Leaders and Advisors - new to the Spotlight Center? [Click here](#) to create an account. Already registered? [Click here](#) to login.



OUR APPROACH

Our mission is simple at Unified Theater:

empower youth to lead | let creativity rule | spotlight on ability

This foundation drives everything we do here and informs all of our curriculum, program design and evaluation.

While our program is flexible to meet each Spotlight School's needs, each Unified Theater production must adhere to our Five Must-Dos.

The Unified Theater Five Must-Dos

1. **The program is entirely student-led**
2. **There are no buddies, partners, or different roles based on ability.**
3. **The production is an original, student-produced show that incorporates music, movement, and acting.**
4. **Participants are peers in middle school, high school, or college.**
5. **The group includes students of all abilities, interested, and backgrounds and is flexible to different student needs.**

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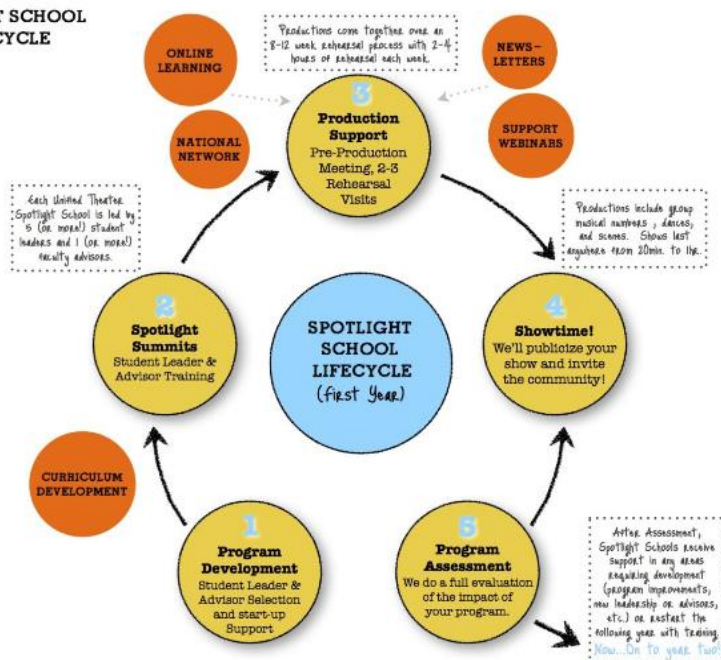
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Spotlight School Process (click to enlarge)

SPOTLIGHT SCHOOL YEAR CYCLE



TRAINING & CURRICULUM

Each Unified Theater school receives tons of awesome support from our team throughout the entire Unified process!

- The **Unified Theater Handbook** offers 50+ pages of guidance on everything from inclusion etiquette to creating a show from scratch to group management tips. Each student leader and advisor receives a newly updated copy of the Handbook during the Spotlight Summit training.
- **Pre-production meetings** are held at or just after a school attends a Spotlight Summit. During these meetings, leaders and advisors bring together their best ideas for recruitment, themes, and inclusion in order to piece together a plan for their rehearsals.
- **Rehearsal visits** are conducted by our affiliate theaters or by UT staff members. Twice during each school's production process, a teaching artist will attend rehearsals and give student leaders feedback. They'll be able to workshop problem areas, help the group create goals for improvement, and offer suggestions to help build a more cohesive show. The first rehearsal visit is usually held as scene writing is wrapping up. The second rehearsal visit happens about 2 weeks before a final performance.
- **Spotlight Summits** are trainings attended annually by student leaders and advisors. Typically a day-long event, leaders learn about all things UT and go back to their schools ready to lead their productions. [Here's a great video](#) to explain what our Spotlight Summits are all about and you can [click here](#) for even more information!
- **The Spotlight Center** is an area of our website made just for advisors and student leaders. Leaders can access group rosters, post questions or other topics for discussion, learn more through files and videos, and communicate with other leaders and advisors across the country.



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SERVING STUDENTS OF ALL ABILITIES

Least Restrictive Environment:

Unified Theater productions are entirely inclusive of students with and without disabilities. Students with and without disabilities participate in productions at equal levels with no labeling or separation based on ability. Accommodations are made as needed.

Meeting IEP Goals for students with disabilities:

Teaching and generalizing social skills and other 'softer' IEP goals are difficult to do within a classroom. When a student enters a Unified Theater group, many IEP goals are generalized naturally and seamlessly.

Promoting Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS)

Unified Theater productions are written by the students themselves. Often schools will ask the Unified Theater group to create a show around a theme focused on tolerance, respect, community, positive behavior, and kindness. Productions help model positive behaviors and promote a safer, more supportive school community.

PRAISED BY PARENTS, STUDENTS, AND ADMINISTRATORS

"It fostered greater communication skills, social skills, good decision making skills, and taking responsibility for his actions and choices."

90% of parents said that IEP goals were supplemented through Participation in Unified Theater.

"UT gave my daughter her first experience with students of varying abilities and as a direct result she has planned a career in either occupational or speech therapy."

83% of students said their career and educational goals were influenced by participating in UT.

"Collaboration at UT is everywhere - the production team collaborates with each other and with adults throughout the school, and community, and local businesses to produce an amazing product."

Students, parents, and administrators all agree that Unified Theater helps students feel included and involved within their communities.

"A few students who are really shy surprised me when I saw the performance- it brought them out of their shell."

95% of students said that Unified Theater improves their self-confidence.

"The greatest gift from the experiences was learning new ways to communicate and connect with other students."

95% of students said that they made new friends through Unified Theater.

EXTENDING LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Students participating in or leading Unified Theater groups may touch on the [Common Core Standards](#), [National Core Arts Standards](#), and [21st Century Learning](#) skills as they brainstorm, write, rehearse, and perform their original works.

For a full view of how Unified Theater takes learning beyond the classroom, take a look at how our curriculum aligns with [Common Core](#), [National Core Arts Standards](#), and [21st Century Learning](#) standards.