

COOL SCHOOLS SUCCESS STORY

The students of Columbus High School's Unified Champion School club have mastered the art of fundraising. For the 2018 Polar Plunge, they raised an incredible \$17,000.

They even raised so much money, their principal had to take the Plunge with the team after they had made a friendly wager about if they would meet their ambitious fundraising goal. But for 2019, the high-achieving Columbus crew had upped the ante, aimed for \$20,000; which they surpassed by the time of the Plunge.

As you might imagine, the students had to get quite creative with finding ways to fundraise. Over the last few years, they've done bake sales, held raffles, gone door-to-door, approached businesses, organized miracle minutes at school basketball games, and held Culver's Nights. They even used a school snow day to shovel driveways and sidewalks for donations.

Columbus' culture makes it fun

But putting in all this hard work isn't so hard for the students at Columbus because of the friendships that the club fosters. The cohesion displayed by the club doesn't come as a surprise to their principal. Although he ultimately had to take the plunge thanks to the club's impressive fundraising skills, Principal Jake Ekern knows a group of successful students when he sees one.

"Here, with the Project Unify (Unified Champion Schools), you see freshmen, and sophomores, and juniors doing a lot of things that you don't normally see freshmen, sophomores and juniors doing. They are the leaders. They are the ones taking the reins," he said. "It (the UCS club) is all about getting kids involved, all about including people... and I've just never seen anything like it."



A group of students used a snow day to raise money for the Polar Plunge by shoveling sidewalks and driveways for donations.

Cool Schools Rebate rewards Columbus for their efforts

Some of the club's ideas for using their considerable rebate money include purchasing adaptive equipment for Unified physical education, hosting Unified events for nearby UCS schools and Special Olympics athletes, and hiring a guest speaker to talk to the school about the importance of an inclusive school culture.

Whatever the money ultimately goes toward, the students are happy to be leaving a legacy of inclusion at Columbus and beyond.

"Inclusion is important to me because I think it's really important in schools that everybody has a friend, and everybody has somebody to talk to. So, raising money is really important to me so it can give all the athletes an opportunity to do Special Olympics," said senior Emma Weirough.