

# The Mission of Special Olympics

The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills, and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

***Special Olympics***



# What makes Special Olympics Unique?

- No charge to athletes
- Awards for all
- Advancement to higher levels of competition
- All ability levels
- Divisioning

***Special Olympics***



# UNIFIED SPORTS®

## Introduction



Special Olympics Unified Sports® is a program that combines Special Olympics athletes (individuals with intellectual disabilities) and partners (individuals without intellectual disabilities) on the same sports team. Unified Sports® is an important program because it expands sports opportunities for athletes seeking new challenges and dramatically increases inclusion in the community.

### **Unified Sports® is a unique and important program because it:**

- Integrates athletes with and without intellectual disabilities in a setting where all teammates are challenged to improve their skills.
- Provides valuable sports opportunities to individuals with intellectual disabilities who may not be presently involved with Special Olympics, especially those with mild intellectual disabilities and those in communities where there are not enough Special Olympics athletes to create teams.
- Prepares athletes for participation in school or community sports.
- Increases public awareness of the spirit and skills of individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- Models genuine inclusion for the entire school community.

# Goals of Unified Sports

## Goals of Special Olympics Unified Sports®:

- Sport skill development – under the direction of certified coaches, participants will have the opportunity to develop sports skills to prepare themselves for participation in other community sports.
- Competition experience – athletes benefit from physical and mental challenges participating in a variety of competitions organized by Special Olympics or by community sports organizations.
- Meaningful inclusion – Unified Sports® rules and guidelines on age and ability help ensure all teammates play important, meaningful and valued roles on the team.
- Friendship and socialization – this program provides a forum for positive social interactions.



# Special Olympics vs Play Unified Sports

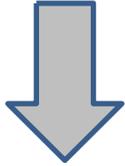
- **Special Olympics** is the world's largest sports organization for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, providing year-round training and competitions to 5.7 million athletes and Unified Sports partners in 172 countries. Special Olympics competitions are held every day, all around the world—including local, national and regional competitions, adding up to more than 100,000 events a year.
- **Unified Sports** brings together athletes with and without intellectual disabilities as teammates. The basic concept is that training together and playing together can create a path to friendship and understanding. The program has expanded beyond the U.S. and North America: more than 1.4 million people worldwide now take part in Special Olympics Unified Sports. The goal is to break down stereotypes about people with intellectual disabilities and promote unity. This is authentic school inclusion and important to creating the Least Restrictive Environment for our students with disabilities.



# Unified Sports at School 21

In the Spring of 2017, we brought the Unified Sports Program to Victor Mravlag School #21 of the Elizabeth Public Schools. Pre-k – 8<sup>th</sup> grade school with approximately 645 students.

## School 21's Student Population



Student Group	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Female	49%	48%	48%
Male	52%	52%	52%
Economically Disadvantaged Students	47%	51%	46%
Students with Disabilities	14%	14%	12%
English Learners	16%	22%	22%
Homeless Students			1%
Students in Foster Care			0%
Military-Connected Students			0%
Migrant Students			0%

## About the Elizabeth Public Schools



## 4th Largest District in New Jersey

### Pre K -8 Schools:

- 29 Schools
- 2 Gifted and Talented Schools
- 4 Magnet School
- 20 Neighborhood Schools
- 3 Early Childhood Schools

### High Schools:

- 7 Theme Based Academies
- 91% Free and Reduced Lunch
- 71.7% -General Education
- 16.7%-ELL
- 10.6%-Special Education
- 1%-Special Ed. & ELL

**Total Number of Students: 27,970**

# Unified Track Team @ School 21

In the Spring of 2017, School 21 announced that we would be forming a Unified Track & Field Team.

We sent home a flyer and we received a good amount of feedback and questions from parents.

We decided it would be best to have a parent meeting to explain the program and answer questions and ease concerns.

On May 2, 2017 we conducted a parent meeting at School 21.

We had approximately 15 parents of students show up.

## **Some parent concerns and questions were:**

1. When does the program begin and end?
2. What paperwork needs to be completed?
3. Where/when are the practices and games?
4. How many students are on the team?
5. What skills do students need to be on a Track Team?
6. Is there any transportation provided?
7. Will they have to wear a uniform?
8. What are the benefits to being on the team?



# School 21 Unified Track

- 16 total students
- 9 General education / 7 Special Education Students
- Practice 2 times per week in the school gym or students were bussed to local park about 1 mile away
- Participated in the Paramus Unified Track Invitational Meet
- Participated in the Unified Game Day at TCNJ

In addition to the social benefits I discussed before....

Team members also benefitted from getting some much needed physical Activity.

## **Why is this important?**

- Students also benefitted from being active and getting exercise.
- It's been proven that children who are active:
- Have stronger muscles and bones
- Are less likely to become overweight
- It significantly decreases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes
- Lowers blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels
- Have a better outlook on life



# Benefits to Play Unified Sports

**Presence** – Young people with intellectual disabilities can become more visible in their local community taking part in Unified Sports.

**Participation** – Athletes develop a role in their communities which is valued and is based on a recognition of ability rather than disability.

**Relationships** – Relationships are the glue that bond people. Unified Sports provides a particularly valuable form of bonding namely with peer partners (their teammates, their new friends) which prior to joining a Unified Team they would not have had access to these relationships.

**Equality** – There is no difference between team members on the sports field and they are equal as people as well as players.

One student stated: “The Unified Program is one of the most positive and impactful programs we have at our school.”

Another stated that “We learned how important sportsmanship was.”

Another student shared: “I ended the season with so many new friends and people I can now say hi to in the hallway.”

# WHY UNIFIED SPORTS MATTERS

Young people with disabilities don't often get a chance to play on their school sports teams, but more and more U.S. states are adopting the unified sports approach that Special Olympics pioneered. The governor of New Jersey just signed a bill into law that encourages school to make opportunities for sports participation available to all students. Special Olympics New Jersey, which championed the new law, is cited in the new law as a consulting organization.

For almost 20 years, Special Olympics has offered sports teams that blend people with and without intellectual disabilities, and this is a model that encourages sports and fun, and which also gets people together to learn more about each other.