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10 Pennsylvania Schools Receive National Recognition from Special Olympics for Achievements with Inclusion

(Norristown, PA, September 3, 2020) – Special Olympics honored 10 Pennsylvania schools as 2020 National Banner Unified Champion Schools due their outstanding efforts to provide inclusive sports and leadership activities for students with and without disabilities. The schools received this honor as a result of meeting 10 national standards of excellence in the areas of inclusion, advocacy and respect. Only 121 schools nationally received this distinction.

The 2020 Special Olympics Pennsylvania National Banner Unified Champion Schools include:

HIGH SCHOOLS

Central York High School (York County)
Dallastown High School (York County)
Franklin Regional High School (Westmoreland County)
Norwin High School (Westmoreland County)
Pennridge High School (Bucks County)
Springfield Township High School (Montgomery County)
Sun Valley High School (Delaware County)
Upper Merion Area High School (Montgomery County)

MIDDLE SCHOOLS

C.C.A. Baldi Middle School (Philadelphia County)
The first middle school in the state to receive this honor

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Slippery Rock University (Butler County)
The first university in the state to receive this honor

“We are so proud of all of these schools for their commitment to inclusion and for earning this national recognition,” said Matt Aaron, Special Olympics Pennsylvania President & CEO. “These institutions set a wonderful example for other schools around the state; and, we are thrilled to have the third highest number of schools honored this year among the 121 recognized in 36 state programs.”

A Special Olympics Unified Champion School has an inclusive school climate and exudes a sense of collaboration, engagement and respect for all members of the student body and staff. A Unified Champion School receiving national banner recognition is one that has demonstrated commitment to inclusion by meeting [10 national standards of excellence](#). These standards were developed by a national panel of leaders from Special Olympics and the education community. Since the program’s inception in 2017 more than 500 schools nationwide have achieved national banner recognition.

The primary activities within these standards include: [Interscholastic Unified Sports®](#) (where students with and without disabilities train and compete as teammates), [Inclusive Youth Leadership](#) and [Whole-School Engagement](#). Banner Unified Champion Schools are also able to demonstrate that they are self-sustainable or have a plan in place to sustain these activities into the future

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools model is supported by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs at the U.S. Department of Education. Research has proven this model to be an effective and replicable means to providing students, both with and without disabilities, the opportunity to form positive social relationships and promote a socially inclusive school climate.* Among the findings were:

- 94% of teachers/school staff say the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program increases opportunities for students with and without intellectual disabilities to work together.
- 98% of involved teachers believe participation in the program has increased the confidence of students with disabilities.
- 92% credit the program with reducing bullying, teasing, and offensive language.

**Evaluation conducted by the Center for Social Development and Education (CSDE) at the University of Massachusetts Boston*

Nearly 200 schools are currently participating in Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools programming in Pennsylvania as part of more than 7,600 schools across the country engaged in the program. Since 2017, there have been a total of 17 National Banner Unified Champion Schools located in 9 counties throughout Pennsylvania.

About Special Olympics Pennsylvania

Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) provides year-round training and competition in 21 Olympic-type sports to more than 20,000 children and adults with intellectual disabilities or closely related developmental disabilities. For more information about how you can join “The Inclusion Revolution,” visit www.specialolympicspa.org.