



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Abraham Lincoln High School to Celebrate National Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools Banner Presentation for Inclusion Achievements, Dec. 6th

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, November 26, 2018 – Special Olympics has announced Abraham Lincoln High School is receiving *recognition as a national banner* Special Olympics Unified Champion School® for its efforts to provide inclusive sports and activities for students with and without disabilities. The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program is aimed at promoting social inclusion through intentionally planned and implemented activities affecting systems-wide change. With sports as the foundation, Unified Champion Schools is based on a comprehensive three component model that combines Unified Sports®, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement to create school and community climates of acceptance and inclusion. Abraham Lincoln High School is receiving this honor as a result of meeting national standards of excellence in the areas of inclusion, advocacy and respect.

Abraham Lincoln High School is among 132 schools to achieve recognition in 2018. A banner presentation will take place in the school's gymnasium, located at 3201 Ryan Ave. in Philadelphia, on December 6, 2018 beginning at 1 p.m. The special school assembly will include a small program featuring cheering students, athlete and Unified Partner testimonials, guest speakers, a banner unveiling, and more. The school will also be included on a list of other schools around the country who have achieved this distinguished status.

When asked about the program, Abraham Lincoln High School coach and liaison, Michael Turchi said, "It [the Interscholastic Unified Sports Program] is an incredible partnership and the feedback and responses from the community, athletes, and partners has been awesome."

Special Olympics has a global goal of creating 10,000 Unified Champion Schools by 2020. Currently, there are approximately 6,000 schools are currently participating in Unified Champion Schools programming, including more than 125 in Pennsylvania.

A Special Olympics Unified Champion School has an inclusive school climate and has an environment 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. In 2018, only 132 schools

nationwide achieved national banner recognition, including just one in 2017 and four in 2018 for Pennsylvania.

Special Olympics Unified Champions Schools that receive national banner recognition include Special Olympics Unified Sports® (where students with and without disabilities train and compete as teammates), Inclusive Youth Leadership and Whole-School Engagement. *National banner schools* should also be able to demonstrate 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:

- 84% of students regard participation in the program as a turning point in their lives.
- 72% of involved teachers believe participation in the program has increased the confidence of students with disabilities.
- 88% of involved teachers credit the program with reducing bullying and teasing in their schools.

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

About Abraham Lincoln High School

Abraham Lincoln High School was founded in 1869 and believes in creating a challenging high school experience for all of their students, supported by staff, parents and guardians.

About Special Olympics Pennsylvania

Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) provides year-round training and competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports to nearly 20,000 children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, and experience joy. For more information, visit our web site at www.specialolympicspa.org.