

November 22, 2023

Dear HVCHS Community,

We recently received the exciting news that Hopewell Valley Central High School is one of only two schools in New Jersey to receive national recognition as a 2023 Special Olympics Unified Champion School. The Special Olympics states: "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."

Our progression toward being a Unified Champion School began several years ago, when our Athletic Director Tripp Becker and Coach Chris Fossel introduced Unified Track to HVCHS. Since that time, Special Olympics has selected the HVCHS Unified Track team to represent New Jersey at national and international competitions. We have expanded our Unified Athletics offerings over the years to include Unified Soccer and Unified Basketball. HV Athletics has taken an inclusive approach to athletics in general; many other teams, including cross country, swimming, and cheerleading, have students with and without disabilities competing.

In recent years, we have created multiple groups designed to foster friendships among all students. In 2019, the HVCHS Unified Club was developed by teachers Meaghan Chaves and Michelle Brennan to provide social opportunities and unite students with and without disabilities. Many of our clubs and teams, including FBLA, HV Basketball, Photo Club, and Baking Club have hosted Unified Hours in support of the group. Most recently, HVCHS Child Study Team members Holly Kaufman and Brooke Garcia-Andrews started a chapter of Best Buddies, an international organization dedicated to developing meaningful friendships.

I'm incredibly proud of the various ways in which HVCHS has made inclusivity a priority, and I appreciate the efforts of each and every one of the students and staff members who made this national recognition possible. We are honored to be selected as a 2023 Unified Champion School.

Sincerely,

Patricia Riley
Principal, HVCHS