



UNIFIED SOCCER TEAM BUILDS ON DISTRICT'S INCLUSION EFFORTS

With a goal of furthering the ideals of inclusion, acceptance, and respect among students, the Fox Chapel Area School District recently added a Special Olympics Unified Soccer program at Dorseyville Middle School. Special Olympics Unified Sports aim to foster an appreciation of players of all abilities.

One of the hopes for DMS' Unified Soccer program, which joins Unified Bocce and Unified Track and Field teams at Fox Chapel Area High School, is to continue to promote inclusivity among students, according to Timothy Mahoney, the district's director of special education and pupil services.

"By developing a middle school program, we have created an opportunity for our students to build friendships while competing together and participating in one of the more popular club programs in our community," Mr. Mahoney says.



He also hopes the new program will lead to greater involvement and student leadership in Unified Bocce and Unified Track and Field at the high school level.

"Unified Soccer at the middle school will also foster opportunities for earlier friendships between teammates and help with the transition for all

students when they move from Dorseyville Middle School to Fox Chapel Area High School."

Dorseyville Middle School special education teacher Jill Bennett echoes that sentiment.

"We had five incredible high school students come to help coach our team," says Mrs. Bennett, a co-sponsor of the Unified Soccer team. "As we send many of our athletes on to the high school next year, the faces will be familiar and comforting to our students."

While students learn about the fundamentals of the game during Unified Soccer practices and competitions, those aren't the only lessons they receive.

"Students come to understand the importance of kindness, inclusion, and that everyone has his or her own strengths," says Caryn Campbell, a co-sponsor of the team.



"Our Special Olympics athletes receive a sense of achievement and accomplishment," Mrs. Campbell says. "They love working alongside their typical peers and forming relationships with each other."

Dorseyville Middle School Program Principal Dr. Laura Miller knows first-hand the benefits that a soccer program can provide.

"Having played soccer for 12 years, I'm passionate about soccer," Dr. Miller says. "Students have enjoyed the time playing and have had the opportunity to work on team-building skills, communication among team members, and also working on overall health and fitness."

The Unified Soccer program fits nicely into some of the district's long-term goals, according to Mr. Mahoney.

"We are working in support of the diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives," Mr. Mahoney says. "We hope that this program is a model for schools in our region to support the type of districtwide inclusion that provides opportunities for individuals to grow beyond the classroom."

The district already has experience setting a standard for inclusion. In 2019, Special Olympics named Fox Chapel Area High School a "Unified Champion School," a prestigious honor given by the international headquarters of Special Olympics to a small number of schools that demonstrate a commitment to meaningful inclusion and quality Unified Champion Schools programming.

