



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Canton High School to receive national recognition from Special Olympics for achievements with inclusion

**Marlborough, Mass., Aug. 22, 2019** – Special Olympics Massachusetts has announced that Canton High School a Special Olympics Unified Champion School, is receiving *national banner recognition* for its efforts to provide inclusive sports and activities for students with and without disabilities. Canton High School is receiving this honor as a result of meeting national standards of excellence in the areas of inclusion, advocacy and respect. An award presentation will take place at the school on a later date, to be determined.

Canton will be amongst a select number of schools to receive this distinction. They will be presented with a banner to hang in their school and be included on a list of other schools around the country who have achieved this distinguished status.

“Receiving National Banner recognition is truly an outstanding and well-deserved achievement for these 16 schools. It shows that they have truly embraced what it means to be inclusive both on and off the playing field, in the classrooms and in their communities,” said Patti Doherty, director of schools and youth engagement for Special Olympics Massachusetts. “Not only do these schools offer Unified sports, youth leadership and whole school engagement within their school, but they have elevated it to the next level and have reached the standards of excellence set forth at a national level.”

More than 180 schools are currently participating in Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools programming in Massachusetts as part of more than 6,500 schools across the country engaged in the program. Special Olympics has a global goal of creating 10,000 Unified Champion Schools by 2020.

Once a school has become a Unified Champion School they are eligible to apply for National Banner Recognition. 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.

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. This model has been proven, through research, to be an effective and replicable means to providing students with and without disabilities the opportunity to form positive social relationships and promote a socially inclusive school climate\*. Key data points include:

- 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% credit the program with reducing bullying and teasing in their schools.

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.

The primary activities within these standards 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.

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

#### **About Special Olympics Massachusetts:**

Special Olympics Massachusetts provides year-round sports training, athletic competition and other related programming for over 13,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities across the state in over 450 sporting competitions each year. Through the power of sport, the Special Olympics movement transforms the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. <http://www.specialolympicsma.org>