

SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Schools Partnership Program?

It's a unique partnership between Special Olympics and individual school districts that provides sports training and competition opportunities within the school day for developmentally disabled students.

How is it different from the Special Olympics Community Program?

Unlike our community program, the Schools Partnership Program is designed to take place within the school day with training and fitness integrated into the classroom activities. The school program serves developmentally disabled students of all abilities between the ages of 6-22. Our community program serves athletes of all ages, beginning at the early age of six years old (eight years old to compete). Bringing the program directly to the school during the day provides an excellent opportunity to provide physical activity to the Special Education population. For many students, it is the first time they have participated in sports, worn a uniform and are able to be a part of a team

How does the Schools Partnership Program work?

Special Olympics provides training guides, curriculum, activity resources and equipment to participating classes. We also provide a grant to offset the cost of a new district employee position – a Teacher on Special Assignment (TSA). As a district employee, the TSA is in an ideal situation to work within the district to coordinate and support the program.

Students train from a minimum of eight weeks in soccer, basketball and track and field, culminating in at least one tournament. Both the training and the tournament takes place within the school day.

When did the program begin?

We piloted the program in San Mateo County in 2001 and offered two sports for 50 students. Today, San Mateo County has 720 athletes participating in four sports through 24 school districts. In 2003, we added the Clark County School District in Las Vegas. The San Francisco School District started up last year, as did the Contra Costa County Office of Education.

Is the program successful?

It is the newest and fastest growing Special Olympics Program in Northern California and Nevada. More than 4,000 students participated in the program in 2007, and that number is expected to grow substantially over the next few years.

What results have you experienced?

The positive impact of the program is immediate and easy to see. Student athletes learn specific skills, participate in real sports, get to be part of a team and compete in tournaments wearing uniforms. They grow in confidence, strength and stamina. They learn about teamwork and working hard without giving up. Teachers report improvements in

academic performance, the ability to focus in the classroom and overall improved fitness. Teachers discover they have one more tool to grow the minds and bodies of their students. Most importantly, students experience feelings of acceptance and success. [Comments from athletes, teachers and parents.](#)

Because the program is highly visible on school campuses during training and competition, it creates a better understanding of the athlete students and their abilities among many different groups. Traditional students have the opportunity to appreciate and even support Special Education students at competitions at school or nearby. Parents and their families have a chance to feel the pride and accomplishments of their children.

How much does it cost the schools and/or athletes?

As with all Special Olympics programs, the Schools Partnership Program is completely free to all participants.

Who pays for the Program?

Special Olympics pays for all equipment and uniforms, sports training guides and curriculum. We also provide a grant to help offset the costs of a Teacher on Special Assignment (a school district employee) to coordinate the program.

Who is eligible to participate?

Students of all abilities between the ages of 6 and 22 years of age are eligible to participate.

Can *any* school district work with the Special Olympics to develop the School Partnership Program?

Currently programs exist in San Mateo County, Clark County (Nevada), Contra Costa County and San Francisco County. These are areas that have the highest potential for participating students and can support a fulltime TSA position. We will be looking for other districts that have the enthusiasm and desire to integrate our sports and training program into their curriculum. Some of these may have smaller student bases, and a scaled down version of the program might be more suitable.