



**For Immediate Release**

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**Cleveland High School receives national recognition from  
Special Olympics for achievements with inclusion**

**Rio Rancho, NM, February 21, 2017** – Special Olympics New Mexico has announced that Cleveland High School will be named a *Banner Unified Champion School* for its efforts to provide inclusive sports and activities for students with and without disabilities. Cleveland 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 took place at the school on Friday, February 17.

Cleveland High School is the first New Mexico high school 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.

More than 30 schools are currently participating in Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools programming in New Mexico, as part of more than 5,000 schools across the country engaged in the program. Special Olympics has a global goal of creating 100,000 Unified Champion Schools by 2020.

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools model is supported by 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 *Banner Unified Champion School* 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. *Banner Unified Champion 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 New Mexico**

SONM provides year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community. Today, Special Olympics New Mexico serves over 3,300 athletes, offering training and competition in 12 sports. Across the world, more than 3.5 million children and adults with intellectual disabilities participate in more than 200 programs in 180 countries. SONM is sponsored year-round and state-wide by New Mexico Knights of Columbus, New Mexico Law Enforcement Torch Run, French Funerals & Cremations, Wells Fargo, Mark's Casa Auto Group, Blue Cross Blue Shield of NM, 7-Eleven, Blake's Lotaburger, Cumulus and New Mexico Chevy Dealers.