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# Voorhees High School making strides toward inclusive education

Maren Smagala, North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District 4:10 p.m. EDT March 23, 2016

*Voorhees High School has made great strides in this area as four students who have a disability have been fully included in after-school activities.*



(Photo: ~Courtesy of North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District)

School districts across New Jersey are tasked with educating all students in a supportive, inclusive environment as well as including students who have a disability in athletic activities.

During the 2015-2016 school year, Voorhees High School has made great strides in this area as four students who have a disability have been fully included in after-school activities: one student has joined the Voorhees Varsity Cheerleading squad for the winter season and three are members of the Voorhees Concert Choir, with two participating in the winter concert in December.

The special education staff members at Voorhees High School worked extensively with these four students to provide specific instruction that helped them sustain attention for long periods of time on stage for the concert, and taught them memorization skills so that they could learn and remember the necessary songs or cheers.

Students also had to work on becoming accustomed to the lights on stage, crowds, the setup or formation, and being front and center, which can be difficult for any person, much less someone who has a disability. Voorhees High School provides special education services to all students who have disabilities ranging from mild intellectually disabled to students who have multiple disabilities.

**See all of our Voorhees High School stories here (/search/voorhees/)**

"The students involved in the choir and cheerleading squad have made great strides socially and emotionally, expanded their friendship base, and the families are experiencing something they may have previously thought was not possible for their son/daughter's high school involvement," said Kelly Anne Kieffer, supervisor of Special Education at Voorhees High School.

Chuck Natale, father of Wyatt who is a member of the Concert Choir said, "I'm grateful for the way in which all of the students in the choir integrate and support Wyatt into their process. What an amazing group of young people. I know how much he loves the energy of all of those beautiful voices coming together."



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(Photo: ~Photo courtesy North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District)

"Ensuring that all students are able to participate in typical high school activities is a strong focus at Voorhees High School. The Voorhees staff members have been extremely supportive as we move forward with this initiative to include all students to the best of their personal ability. Most importantly, students participate fully in the activity, and will earn all of the accolades that go along with the activity, such as earning a varsity letter in cheerleading," Kieffer said. "I feel an enormous sense of pride for what Voorhees has been able to do thus far, and am hopeful that other high schools will follow in our path towards full inclusion."

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Laura Krupa, whose daughter Kelly joined the cheerleading squad said, "Our daughter enjoyed being a part of a high school sports team. She felt good about herself in uniform, learning something new, and forming friendships that may never have been possible. It gave her, and us, an opportunity to experience high school sports at a level we didn't think was possible."

**WATCH: South River student with autism connects to world through wrestling** ([/story/sports/high-school/wrestling/2016/02/06/south-river-student-autism-connects-world-through-wrestling/79931328/](http://story/sports/high-school/wrestling/2016/02/06/south-river-student-autism-connects-world-through-wrestling/79931328/))

While Voorhees has successfully been able to fully include students who have a disability in current school activities and will continue to do so, participation in currently offered activities may not be possible for all students who have a disability. Thus, the next step for Voorhees, and its sister school, North Hunterdon High School, is to implement the state's initiative for unified sports.

The idea of unified sports is to give all students the opportunity to participate in an athletic activity to the best of their ability. Therefore, if a student's ability level does not support him/her to participate in the junior varsity or varsity level, unified sports is another option. Special Olympics of New Jersey has created a Unified School Partnership Program to assist schools in implementing unified sports programs.

According to its brochure, "Special Olympics Unified Sports® joins people with and without intellectual disabilities together as teammates, each one a meaningful and equal part of the team. Teams are made up of people with intellectual disabilities and ability who play together in developmental, recreational or competitive settings. The Unified School Partnership Program offers schools and districts grants, professional and coaches training, equipment and technical assistance to support them in designing and implementing robust, sustainable fully inclusive sport, fitness and extracurricular programs." Limited Time Only

The North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District will be pursuing grants to implement these programs for students with disabilities in the coming year.

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