

Four DHS Students Learn Leadership Skills to Support Unified Sports

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Four Darien High School (DHS) students had a chance to hone their leadership skills by attending an annual conference hosted by Special Olympics Connecticut.

The Unified Youth Leadership Summit held last month in Hartford featured motivational speaker Scott Backovich and actor, author, and advocate John Franklin Stephens. The students also had a break-out work session led by students from Newtown High School.

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DHS students Juan Pablo Perfumo, Nick Cardone, Lucas Thompson, and Liam Sweeney represented Darien. Paul Brager, a district behavioral analyst, who has coordinated the Unified Sports program, selected the four to attend.

They either showed outstanding leadership in at least two seasons of Unified Sports or volunteered time across seasons. Volunteering can include help in transitioning student athletes, managing equipment, and recruiting to expand the program.

Unified Sports is an inclusive athletic program bringing together athletes with and without disabilities for fitness and competition. Unified Sports at DHS has participated at tournaments in track and field and soccer, and will be adding basketball to the list by the end of this winter season. ???????

The summit sessions focused on ways to support student athletes both on and off the field, and to connect with those who may be struggling or fearful of participating. The students were taught different team-building activities to facilitate team communication and camaraderie. At DHS, Unified Sports has included a peer leadership component. Practice warm-ups have been led by a different Unified Sports athlete each week, for example. They have also led practice drills and competed in scrimmages in soccer, and track and field events.

“The amount of support the program has had from the student body at DHS has been outstanding,” said Brager.