

## **New DHS Unified Sports Team Brings Together Athletes with & without Disabilities**

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Amid the field of Spring sports teams, there was one group of Darien High School athletes that made a debut wearing their Darien blue.

The DHS Unified Sports team participated in their first track and field event at Fairfield Ludlowe High School recently, competing against seven other area schools.

Led by Coach and DHS staffer Paul Brager, the team (*pictured*) participated in a variety of events, including: 2 x 25, 2 x 50, 4 x 100, 4 x 200 meter relays, turbo javelin, shot put, tennis ball throw, long jump and running long jump.

“We competed side by side with other teams for the races, but then traveled as an individual team where all students participated in the throwing and jumping events,” said Brager. “The Ludlowe meet was our only track event and all athletes were recognized for their athletic accomplishments.”

Unified Sports brings together individuals with and without disabilities to inspire inclusion and respect for everyone on and off the field. It is a program that combines approximately equal numbers of athletes with and without a disability on sports teams for training and competition.

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Through Special Olympics Connecticut’s partnership with the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC), Special Olympics Unified Sports is offered in more than 245 elementary, middle and high schools across the state.

The idea for the Unified Sports Team was sparked by the Special Education Parent Advisory Committee, Athletics Director Chris Manfredonia, and a meeting with Beau Doherty, CT Director of Special Olympics. After working with Coach Laurie LaRusso at a Unified Basketball Clinic, Brager (*pictured above, left*) moved forward along with Middlesex Middle School staffers Brett Donatelli and Sarah Burns.

Brager stated one of the important take-aways for students who participated in the program was that, “You can be part of a larger community and team working toward a united goal regardless of academic or physical ability.”