

Student-athletes from 30 schools shine at Acalanes' Special Olympics event



Photos Jeff Heyman

dents with disabilities the opportunity to play a variety of sports alongside students without disabilities.)

This was the first time at the event for Bergen Woodberry and her 8-year-old son, Alex, who is a student at the Wagner Ranch School. "Alex is really excited to be here," Woodberry said. "Alex is a great runner and swimmer and has been practicing a lot. We're just happy to be here and see what it's like and get the feeling of it. For me, it's just so inspiring to see all these kids and to have the whole community come out and support them is really wonderful."

For Max Nunez, a senior at Acalanes, it was his first time participating in the Special Olympics. "It's been a lot of fun and I've done a lot of practicing," Max said. "I'll be in a running event and also the jumping event." Max was true to his word as he won the 100-meter dash running past his father Mauricio, who was proudly videotaping the whole race.

Besides the joy, pride and satisfaction that the student-athletes get out of participating in the Special Olympics, Walton's desire is that the students all gain a new viewpoint after witnessing the effort put forth by these special student-athletes: "The students in my class and the many volunteers who aren't in the class don't get any prizes or awards.

What I hope they get out of this is to see that these opportunities can exist for all, and they can make a great day for a set of marginalized kids that don't always get the same opportunities as they do. I hope that they can carry that perspective with them every single day because we have 24 Acalanes students who competed here today, and my hope is that they have that that same spirit and bring it to campus every day."

... continued from Page A1

Sophomore Miles Blackhart and junior Alexandra Van De Poel are the two leadership students who were put in charge of the meet. "I really love hanging out with the special education kids on campus," Van De Poel said. "I was a volunteer last year and this was an opportunity for me to lead and do something that I felt was meaningful."

Both put in a lot of time to make certain everything was set up correctly. "The past couple of months, we've been dedicating every class period to just organizing the different aspects of the event and making sure that we wouldn't be rushing into things at the last minute," Blackhart said. "It's been a lot of work, but it's definitely been worth it."

The leadership class is involved in many other causes like blood and clothing drives within the community, but the Special Olympics is most important to Van De Poel. "It stands out because we involve a number of other schools with their special education programs and when they continue to come back to Acalanes, it means that we did a good job."

Hayley Takeshima, a sophomore volunteer, sees the event as a way to create a bond within the Acalanes community but says it's also deeper than that. "It's also the interconnection between all the schools that come to the Special Olympics," Takeshima said. "It's being able to create new bonds and seeing new faces and getting to know them. As the host school, we get to be around people that need to be celebrated for their incredible athletic performances and by volunteering I can help do that."

Parent volunteers Yanni Rho and Melissa Chen learned of the need for volunteers in the parents' newsletter. "This is a nice way for me to give back to the community," Chen said. "I love the fact that Acalanes was hosting this for so many schools and students so that they could compete in sports and have fun doing it."

Rho echoed those sentiments: "I believe that it's critical that students with special needs be able to participate in these types of events and it's something that called to me."

Mariia Petukhova, the special-ed teacher at Acalanes, appreciated the support she gets from the school.

"Acalanes has been great about mainstreaming our students," Petukhova said. "We have two classes, and they were all very excited about this event. They prepared a lot by playing the Kahoot game (a game-based learning platform designed for students to create, share, and play) and they watched a lot of videos and participated in United Sports (a program that provides stu-



Lafayette plans response to HCD

... continued from Page A2

Council briefly discussed if a letter from the city attorney in defense of the final HE draft they present would protect the city from future legal action that might be taken; not by HCD, but by other interest groups objecting to specific new development projects. Elrod said it will be discussed by staff, but predicted "it is not really worthwhile because the HCD is what it is" and a letter might even stall the certification process.

Discussion about the impact of using SB9 as a tool to address HCD's "missing middle" comments showed it would not be helpful, but other opportunities to develop housing strategically are possible. Examples include multi-unit projects on corner lots, sections of streets instead of entire streets zoned for multi-family units (sometimes known as spot zoning), or

modeling after other cities with overlay districts for developments designated for faith-based housing or other specific categories. Staff will bring their findings for realistic options after more research is conducted.

Public comments primarily focused on specific findings in HCD's response, new and existing ADUs and how best to track their number and usage, cooperation with neighboring cities to solve housing cost and availability problems, and a list of policy ideas to support the city's efforts from board members of Inclusive Lafayette. (An addendum to the online staff report includes a letter from Inclusive Lafayette.)

In a separate letter from HCD dated March 16, Elrod said it was stated that only HCD has the authority to deem whether or not a city's HE is in substantial compliance, despite case law and

state codes to the contrary. She said an attachment to the draft HE submitted by the city stated at length how Lafayette was in compliance, but HCD had declined accepting those statements. Although she said there are no specific deadlines for completion of revisions to the draft HE, Elrod confirmed that Lafayette plans to complete the required rezoning by Jan. 31, 2024, regardless.

Council closed the discussion by asking if time could be saved by making policy changes rather doing further analysis. Elrod said the city may certainly need to add or change policies, but HCD has asked explicitly to provide more analysis and the request must not be declined. If additional staff or staff hours must be added to complete the research and revision work ahead, staff will bring the matter to council for approval.



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