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## Special Olympics Bay Area Games Come Back to Acalanes

By Marissa Harnett



Photos Ohlen Alexander

It was a beautiful day - literally and figuratively. The sun was shining and so were more than 300 students from 22 schools who turned out to compete at the Second Annual Special Olympics Bay Area Games on April 30.

Hosted by Acalanes High School and supported by Chevron, more than 100 Acalanes students volunteered to assist at the games. Local law enforcement was on-hand to light the torch and award medals. Community and corporate leaders were present and sports announcer Dick Callahan rounded out the event as master-of-ceremonies.

The primary goal of this event is to provide an opportunity for kids with disabilities to train, compete, and succeed. "The mission of the Schools Partnership Program is to instill in all students the confidence to succeed in life," explained Cathy Domanski-DeVries, vice president of Special Olympics schools programs. "What isn't obvious out on the field or track is the carry over to the classroom. Students that feel successful perform better in many different aspects of life."

After the Opening Ceremonies which was complete with the Pledge of Allegiance, the National Anthem by the Acalanes Chambers Singers, the parade of classes, two cheers by the Acalanes Cheer Squad, and the Flame of Hope, the students were released to the field to commence competition. The events included the 50 and 100 meter

dashes; softball, tennis ball, or turbo javelin throw; and the standing long jump.

Acalanes sophomore Megan Brazil, one of the student volunteers, enjoyed the games. "It makes a lot more people aware of how to get involved to help and make it a community atmosphere," she said. "It's great and a lot of fun."

There is no understating the magnitude of peer support. Springhill Elementary School special education teacher Erin Caldwell said, "The biggest smiles came when 110 of their general education peers arrived with banners and stomping feet to cheer them on. They were loud and proud. It was a wonderful day for everyone."

One of Caldwell's students, Danny Tinley, said it best: "Wow, I can't believe all our friends came to watch us." It isn't just the participants who gain something from the event, campus life is improved as well.

"The benefit to the general education students is best interpreted by them but I do know that friendships and understanding sky-rocket and bullying is decreased at schools where our program exists." Domanski-DeVries said.

The Games have been so successful that Caldwell's class is already looking to the future. "We will definitely be there again next year. With the amount of general education support our school shared, I think it just might become a school tradition," she said.



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