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NEWS RELEASE

NFHS, Special Olympics Sign Memorandum of Understanding in Support of Programs for Students with Disabilities

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Lindsey Atkinson

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (December 20, 2017) — The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and Special Olympics North America (SONA) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to continue their collaborative efforts of advancing inclusion programs for students with disabilities.

While working through the organizational structures of both organizations, the stated goals of the partnership are to 1) increase participation of students with intellectual disabilities through interscholastic Special Olympics Unified Sports® and other inclusive school programs; 2) support official partnerships between NFHS member state associations and/or local schools and Special Olympics state Programs; and 3) increase the quality of inclusion programs in schools nationwide by serving as a resource for NFHS state associations and SONA state Programs.

Unified Sports is a fully inclusive sports program that unites Special Olympics athletes (individuals with intellectual disabilities) and partners (individuals without intellectual disabilities) as teammates for training and competition. There are more than 5,000 schools in the United States that currently offer Unified Sports, with a growing number participating in varsity-style interscholastic leagues. This resulted in more than 200,000 students experiencing Unified Sports during the 2016-17 school year. In a recent evaluation report, 97 percent of high school seniors say that the Unified Champion Schools program is changing their school for the better.

“Essentially, this MOU brings together and re-affirms all the tremendous work being done by both organizations in offering programs for students with disabilities and the desire on the part of both groups to continue moving forward to serve these students in our nation’s schools,” said Bob Gardner, NFHS executive director. “Through our online course, our online materials and working cooperatively with Special Olympics at conferences and in other projects, we look forward to continuing this important work through our member state associations.”

To kick off the agreement between the two organizations, the NFHS and Special Olympics have released the revised online education course **“Coaching Unified Sports”** on the NFHS Learning Center at www.NFHSLearn.com.

The updated course, which is hosted by Kevin Negandhi of ESPN’s SportsCenter, is offered at no cost for coaches and educators wishing to implement Special Olympics Unified Sports in their schools. The “Coaching Unified Sports” course is one of 58 online offerings through the NFHS Learning Center, which has delivered more than six million courses since its launch in 2007.

Other goals for the partnership include continued education on inclusion programs at NFHS conferences, increasing awareness of Unified Sports programs by posting success stories on the NFHS website and through social media, and development of a Unified Sports Experience model program for use at the local and state levels.

The NFHS currently offers numerous resources and articles related to the inclusion of students with disabilities on its website at <http://www.nfhs.org/resources/student-services-inclusion/inclusion-of-students-with-disabilities>.

In addition to providing content and resources for the newly updated online course on the NFHS Learning Center, Special Olympics will continue to provide its Unified Sports Experience at the annual NFHS National Student Leadership Summit each summer in Indianapolis, and will assist the NFHS with the collection of success stories and provide training and education at various state conferences.

“We are proud to have partnered with the NFHS, the NFL Foundation and the U.S. Office of Special Education Program at the U.S. Department of Education on the creation of the Coaching Unified Sports Course,” said Marc Edenzon, Regional President of Special Olympics North America. “This new and improved online coach course is vital to achieving the goal of having 15,000 certified

coaches by 2020 while also providing training to ensure coaches are equipped with the knowledge to offer the best possible experience to all Unified Sports teammates.”

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About the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

The NFHS, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, is the national leadership organization for high school sports and performing arts activities. Since 1920, the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic sports and performing arts activities that help students succeed in their lives. The NFHS sets direction for the future by building awareness and support, improving the participation experience, establishing consistent standards and rules for competition, and helping those who oversee high school sports and activities. The NFHS writes playing rules for 17 sports for boys and girls at the high school level. Through its 50 member state associations and the District of Columbia, the NFHS reaches more than 19,000 high schools and 11 million participants in high school activity programs, including more than 7.9 million in high school sports. As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings; sanctions interstate events; offers online publications and services for high school coaches and officials; sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, speech and debate coaches, and music adjudicators; serves as the national source for interscholastic coach training; and serves as a national information resource of interscholastic athletics and activities. For more information, visit the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org.

About Special Olympics

Special Olympics is a global movement that [unleashes the human spirit through the transformative power and joy of sports](#), every day around the world. Special Olympics empowers people with intellectual disabilities to become accepted and valued members of their communities, which leads to a more respectful and inclusive society for all. Using sports as the catalyst and [programming around health](#) and education, Special Olympics is fighting inactivity, injustice and intolerance. [Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver](#), the Special Olympics movement has grown to more than five million athletes and Unified partners in more than [170 countries](#). With the support of more than one million coaches and volunteers, Special Olympics delivers [32 Olympic-type sports](#) and more than [108,000 games and competitions](#) throughout the year. Special Olympics is supported by individuals, foundations and partners around the country and the world. [Click here for a full list of partners](#). Engage with us on: [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), [Instagram](#) and [our blog on Medium](#).

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Bruce Howard, 317-972-6900
Director of Publications and Communications
National Federation of State High School Associations
bhoward@nfhs.org

Chris Boone, 317-972-6900
Assistant Director of Publications and Communications
National Federation of State High School Associations
cboone@nfhs.org

Tara Baker, 202-824-0279
Director of Marketing and Communications
Special Olympics North America
tbaker@specialolympics.org