

## PRESS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Monrovia Unified Blood Drives Held in Support of Student Athlete Diagnosed with Leukemia

**MONROVIA, CA** – More than 220 students, teachers, and community members have stepped up to donate blood during a drive benefitting Monrovia High School student-athlete James Speranta, who is facing an unexpected battle against leukemia.

The numbers double the typical signups received by the American Red Cross, triggered by news of Speranta’s sudden diagnosis in mid-March.

“The community came together to do this, and I needed to be a part of this as well,” said Joanne Wallace, Speranta’s fifth-grade teacher at Mayflower Elementary. “Speranta family – my heart, thoughts, and prayers are with you.”

Speranta is a member of Monrovia High’s swim and water polo teams and San Gabriel Men’s Water Polo Club, and regularly trains at the local Fitness Factor gym. All of his sports and physical activities came to a halt on March 16 when he was diagnosed with leukemia.

“The whole thing is a bit of a shock, like this is a bad dream that I need to wake up from,” his mother, Nicola Speranta, said. “It’s going to be life-changing.”

Nicola Speranta noticed her son was looking pale after strenuous activity in early March. She took him to the local doctor on March 13. After checking his vitals and blood levels, his hemoglobin level was about a third of what would be normal, signs his body was struggling to transport oxygen in his blood.

They were sent to emergency and then sent to Miller Children’s Hospital in Long Beach. James Speranta was given three bags of blood to stabilize his condition and lower his heart rate. A bone marrow sample revealed on March 19 he was facing childhood leukemia.

“Childhood leukemia is a devastating diagnosis for a child, and as for treatments, it’s pretty brutal,” Nicola Speranta said. “People don’t realize the long-term effects of chemotherapy, that children are affected for the rest of their lives and need to live with it.”

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Inspire students to engage in meaningful learning in a safe and nurturing environment that embraces diversity.

Challenge students to be ethical, productive members and leaders of the community.

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Our students will be ethical, compassionate individuals who:

- graduate from high school prepared for college and career,
- contribute and adapt to an ever-changing world by being resourceful and responsible citizens, and
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James Speranta underwent intensive 28-day chemotherapy treatments at Miller Children’s Hospital, where he stayed in the hematology/oncology ward so doctors can monitor his progress in a sterile environment. Monrovia High students, teachers, and staff recorded encouraging messages, which they sent to James to view and listen to while he was hospitalized.

“We were very saddened to hear the sudden news that one of our students have been diagnosed with a terrible disease,” Monrovia Unified Board President Terrence Williams said. “James is a bright and inspirational student at Monrovia High and we look forward to his healthy return.”

James Speranta was recently sent home to continue with follow-up treatments at City of Hope for another year or more, depending on how well he recovers. He will be home schooled during this time.

Donations from Monrovia High’s blood drive went to City of Hope to help Speranta and other leukemia and cancer patients in need. Each pint of blood will help up to three people because the blood platelets, plasma, and blood cells will be used from each donation.

“I’m trying to turn this into a positive situation so that when he does overcome this, he can pay it forward and help others who are coming behind him,” Nicola Speranta said. “We discuss everything together and decided that ultimately, James has the last say on his treatment, empowering him during this time.”

Nicola Speranta said she was overwhelmed by the support from the Monrovia community and hopes to create a James Speranta Foundation to host an annual blood drive to support children with leukemia. Her younger son, Andrew, designed a T-shirt on which a child’s name can be printed so schools and individuals can champion a fellow student who may be diagnosed with leukemia.

“The compassion of our students and community is evident through their contributions at the blood drive and also through their continued support to the Speranta family,” Monrovia Unified Superintendent Dr. Katherine Thorossian said. “I am proud of the strength of our community for coming together to support James as he is overcoming this very challenging time.”

Another blood drive will be held in support of James Speranta on June 2 at Clifton Middle School from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., hosted by Monrovia Unified, the James Speranta Foundation, and Red Cross.

### PHOTO:

**042018\_MONROVIA\_JAMES1:** Monrovia High student-athlete James Speranta (left) and his mom Nicola embrace each other after receiving news that James can go home after completing chemotherapy treatments over 28 days at Miller Children’s Hospital.

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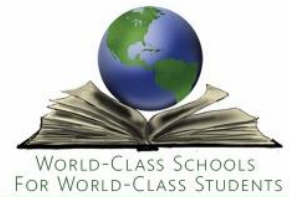
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## PRESS RELEASE

**042018\_MONROVIA\_JAMES2:** Clifton Middle School student Andrew Speranta designed a T-shirt for the James Speranta Foundation, named after his older brother who was diagnosed with leukemia mid-March. The T-shirt design can be changed to have another child's name be printed so schools and individuals can champion a fellow student who may be diagnosed with leukemia.

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