



Press Release

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Santa Fe High ‘Make A Difference’ Baseball Game Brings Athletes, Special Needs Students Together

WHITTIER – Wearing batting helmets and fielders’ mitts, students in the special education program at Santa Fe High School swung their bats, ran bases and fielded their positions in a baseball game as part of the third annual Make A Difference (M.A.D.) game – a cheerful event organized by student-athletes and the school’s Associated Student Body.

Guided and assisted by the student-athletes, dozens of students wearing commemorative M.A.D. T-shirts had their names announced over a loud-speaker as they approached the field, with friends and family cheering them on in the stands.

“The students in our program know all of the athletes, so they are super excited to play in the baseball game,” special education teacher Rebecca Larsen said. “It’s the biggest day of the year for them.”

With the baseball diamond and students’ classrooms located near each other, baseball players regularly interact with the students. Head Baseball Coach Pierre Romo asked the players how they could include the students and give them a better high school experience.

“It was the student-athletes who came up with the idea and it turned out to be such a tremendous success,” Romo said. “They take a lot of pride in putting together the game and are always looking to take it to another level. That’s why the M.A.D. game is so special. It’s 100 percent student-organized.”

The M.A.D. event is an extension of Chieftain Friends, a weekly volunteer social enrichment program.

“We are committed to helping our students in the special education programs interact with their peers, to give them increased visibility on campus,” said Christine Garcia, who teaches students with moderate to severe disabilities. “Many of the students have known each other since elementary school, so they have already established a friendship. With others, they are meeting someone new, and they begin a special bond together.”

At the beginning of the school year, general education students apply for a mentor position in Chieftain Friends. Once selected, they are paired with a special education student – their “buddy” – and meet with them once a week for lunch in the school library.

Chieftain Friends maintains a 1:2 mentor/buddy ratio, ensuring that students always have a friend to spend time with, play games with, dance with or listen to music on the quad. The group also hosts themed events throughout the year, including Halloween, Christmas and other holidays.

This school year, there are 85 students in Chieftain Friends.

“Santa Fe is committed to ensuring that every student has a chance to socialize and enjoy extracurricular activities, especially those for whom their educational experience will translate into learning skills for life,” Principal Craig Campbell said. “I’m so proud of our student-athletes and ASB members for creating such an inclusive event that will not only enhance the high school experience of our students in special education, but give everyone the opportunity to make long-lasting friendships and memories.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

012617_WUHSD_MADGAME1: Santa Fe High School special education students pose with members of the Santa Fe baseball team and ASB leaders before the third Make A Difference baseball game on Dec. 2. The game allows students in the special education program a chance to swing a bat and run the bases with the varsity team, while family and friends cheer them on.

012617_WUHSD_MADGAME2: Members of Santa Fe High School’s Chieftain Friends share a laugh with their classmates at a holiday party held in the school library on Dec. 8. Chieftain Friends is a volunteer social enrichment program that brings together Santa Fe’s students in the special education program with general education students. The students meet once-a-week for lunch throughout the school year.

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