



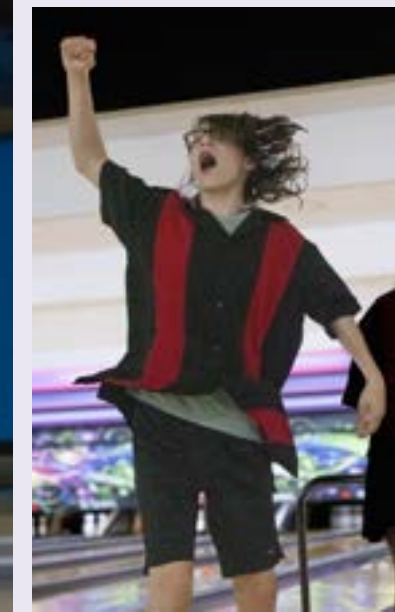
**ALL SMILES**, junior Libby Cramer congratulates freshman Ashley Aguirre Gonzalez for a strike. As the Unified Bowlers competed against the other Sunflower League schools, Cramer helped Aguirre Gonzalez throughout the season. "Bowling with this group of kids was the best part of my week," Cramer said. "I was so happy for Ashley and we were making jokes back and forth." *photo by teryn debey*



**SHOCKED**, junior Holden Churchill cheers while watching everyone bowl. Churchill bowled and helped keep score while competing with different schools. "I felt like we were going to do great in all of our meets in bowling and I felt happy," Churchill said. "The best part of the activity is when I got a spare or strike." *photo by laurel hansen*



**THUMBS UP**, coach David Langton cheers on the unified bowlers, during senior night at Mission Bowl. "It's always fun watching the students perform and enjoy the experience regardless of the outcome," Langton said. *photo by laurel hansen*



**CHEERING**, freshman Aedan Dillard celebrates a good throw. Dillard helped set up a ramp during the bowling meet and cheered after a strike. "During this meet, I had a ball perfectly go down the center into the nicest strike," Dillard said. "Bowling and unified bowling are both great sports to join, and I encourage everyone else to join as well, we would love to see new faces." *photo by teryn debey*

**ABOUT TO BOWL**, sophomore Zoe Schwieger chooses her bowling ball. "Bowling has helped Zoe to become more outgoing and she has shown great ability and a competitive nature," coach David Langton said. *photo by laurel hansen*

# STRIKE UP A FRIENDSHIP

Unified Bowling provides opportunity for special education students to be part of a team environment

**EMPTY BASKETS OF FRIES AND PIZZA-STAINED PAPER PLATES** scattered around the bowling alley tables. Junior Elizabeth Cramer stood up after wiping off her hands of the grease, picking up her ball, ready to play the seventh frame for her special ed Unified Bowling partner.

"It's the best part of my week," Cramer said. "They don't have room to be mean or unkind, like most kids in your daily school. Just being there and them simply getting one pin makes them so excited, they don't have room to be mean. It's not really about winning or anything. They don't even care

about winning. They just knock down pins and have so much fun."

In 2020 the Unified Bowling program, a KHSAA sanctioned sport, started in the district after support from various schools. With the two now head coaches being approached by the Special Olympics of Kansas to get North involved in more unified sports.

"The first year was pretty disorganized," Head coach David Langton said. "It was the first time anything had been done like this. Nobody knew exactly how it was going to run or what the expectations were. The

second year had its bumps as well. But this year was by far the best year that we've had. Every year is enjoyable because it's so interesting to watch the level of support that the kids share, and to see them just have a lot of fun with it. That's always been our number one priority."

With the new program, Langton had a lack of coaching experience, but would bring his years of experience as a special education teacher to bring the team together and create a positive environment.

"Robyn (Co-head coach) and I don't

really have a background in coaching bowling," Langton said. "I mean, that's not really where we come at it from, we come at it more from the special education support side of it. We try to make it a point to have snacks every time we have a practice. So we have like, they all get pop and fries and sometimes we get pizza, we try to make it so that they can make it fun."

Despite the sport being no pressure, low-intensity, and focused on positivity, the biggest problem the group faced was student participation in the fall sport.

"Our goal is always to increase

numbers," Langton said. "With the sport starting in the fall, it's kind of hard to advertise, we have to hit the ground running from day one. It's hard for students to find the time to commit. We're hoping to continue to grow our numbers and, if we've got kids from the bowling team, it'll also be a little bit more competitive, which makes it a little bit more enjoyable for the kids in turn."

Unified Bowling took a combination of regular and special ed students to compete in bowling matches together, alternating turns, but most students weren't

familiar with the format and sport as a whole.

"I wish more people knew about it," Cramer said. "I know they announced it over the intercom but I wish more people would come out and support these kids because some of them aren't in the hallways and they're more in the West Wing. Some of those kids are at lunch and people don't know them at all. So I think if it was more advertised people would know about it. These kids are just like us. I mean, same thing, they can do exactly what we can do." *story by adriano peralta*