

FINDING HIS STRIDE

HOW INCLUSION HELPED NICK TAP INTO HIS TALENT

All it took was a keen eye to spot the hidden talent of Nicholas Salisbury.

At the start of the school year, Tiffany Eimers noticed Nicholas, known as Nick, an 8th-grader at Shelburne Middle School, running during P.E.

She watched as he effortlessly ran up the hill off Grubert Avenue near the middle school numerous times. Eimers is a special education coordinator for Staunton City Schools and a runner herself.

“That seemed pretty easy for him,” she said. “I thought, ‘Well, daggone; that’s untapped talent right there.’ ”

Nick has Autism and has been cared for by his guardian and stepfather, Dwayne, since he was a year old.

When Eimers approached Dwayne and Nick about cross country, they were all in.

“He couldn’t wait to do it,” Dwayne said.



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“Anything having to do with school or being around kids more, he loves it.”

Working as a team, Eimers and the Special Education staff found a way to help Nick run cross country safely, considering his limited communication ability.

“We needed to find a way to make it work, not reasons why it couldn’t,” she said.

Eimers supports Nick by running alongside him during practice and is present at all his meets in case he needs guidance on the trail.

At his first meet, 119 runners strong, Nicholas finished 65th, and he’s performed increasingly well ever since. Fast forward to present day, and Nick just received an invitation to compete on the biggest stage of all at the state meet.





“His teammates told me that Nick has become an inspiration to them, which was really touching to hear,” Eimers said.

SCS operates with inclusion as a guiding principle for its exceptional learners, and participating in an extracurricular activity is another way for Nick to be fully included in the educational experience in SCS.

“He doesn’t stand out at the meets; he fits right in. He’s just another runner, which is exactly what we want,” Eimers said.

Since joining the cross-country team, Dwayne said Nick’s communication has improved, and he’s talking more.

“He’ll sit and try to have more of a conversation with you,” he said. “He’s the sweetest kid in the world, and it’s great to see him do this with everything he’s got going on. It’s really special, and I’m thankful for that.”