



By Amy Sylvestri

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Forget London – Olympic action happened right here in San Leandro – at Jefferson Elementary

School special education students participated in their own version of the games and did events like gymnastics and track.

Garry Grotke, who is overseeing summer school in the San Leandro district and is principal of Madison Elementary, said he planned two weeks of sports to get the kids to be more active and social and to teach them about the real Olympic games.

They have had an opening ceremony and a torch “burned” brightly in the school’s front office (a fan propeled fire-colored cloth strips) during the games.

“The kids have just been eating this up,” said Grotke as he showed off a video on his cell phone of the previous day’s track and field competition, where one special needs student with movement difficulties launched a discus several feet after painstaking practice.

The kids are participating in events like relays, wheelchair races, soccer, basketball, and tumbling.

The students in the Jefferson games receive certificates of participation rather than gold, silver, or bronze medals, but that doesn't mean they don't get an Olympic-size confidence boost from doing well in their chosen sport.

"Look, I'm going to do it," said student Eric Trong enthusiastically as he planted his feet on a mat and executed a somersault.

Grotke said that the teachers are having a lot of fun too, and they are participating in lots of the events with the kids. Next year, Grotke hopes to team up with the Special Olympics in some capacity.

"Anything that gets them engaged and moving is a good thing," said Grotke. "And even when they are challenged there is that moment when it comes together and they succeed and want to do it over and over again."

CAPTION: Summer school student Eric Trong does a somersault during the Jefferson Olympic games.

PHOTO BY AMY SYLVESTRI