



# SPECIAL EDITION



Issue 5, 2017

## SSD Has a Rich History of Community and Taxpayer Support

On Dec. 10, 1957, a decision was made in St. Louis County that would ultimately impact hundreds of thousands of children.

After years of hard work and advocacy by parents of children with disabilities whose educational needs were not being met by the existing public school system, St. Louis County voters passed a referendum establishing what is now known as Special School District (SSD).

The St. Louis community was ahead of its time in understanding and believing that children of all abilities have the right to a free public education, said SSD Superintendent Don Bohannon.

“The citizens of St. Louis County showed compassion, caring, and I think a forward-thinking attitude that equity was important and that all children have potential and that all children deserve a chance,” Bohannon said.

It wasn't until 17 years later that a federal law was passed mandating public education for students with disabilities.

SSD began as a humble operation with four teachers and a social worker in 1958 serving 166 students.

The first students who received services from SSD were taught in schools owned and operated by other school districts throughout the area. Soon, however, SSD began construction on several special education schools. Today, SSD operates five special education schools across the county.

In the 1960s, SSD expanded into the area of technical education — a mission separate from the District's work in the special education field. SSD first began providing technical education in 1966. In the fall of 1967, the District opened the doors to South Technical High School in South County. The following year, SSD opened North Technical High School in North County.

As legislators locally and nationally grappled with special education and disability-related issues, SSD strove to keep up with local demand for education services for children and young adults with disabilities. In 1974, the District began serving students with more profound disabilities. As a result, many of these students, some with multiple disabilities or medical fragility, were now being educated in a school setting for the first time.

SSD also began educating preschool-aged children in 1976. The students served at the outset of this early childhood program were deaf or hard of hearing or had vision impairments. By the end of the decade, a federal grant enabled the District to expand its early childhood offerings to meet the needs of young children with various disabilities.

Rising costs and decreasing revenues for SSD marked the early 1980s. In April 1986, voters overwhelmingly approved a tax levy increase for the District, allowing SSD to continue to grow and expand its program offerings.

In 2000 and again in 2006, St. Louis County taxpayers voted to support tax levy increases to allow SSD to continue serving a growing number of students.

By approving a 19-cent tax increase in November 2012, voters showed their support for SSD once again allowing the District to expand job training and placement programs, improve safety and security, and repair and renovate schools. A new state-of-the-art school was constructed to replace an outdated school in North County.

Today, 60 years after its inception, SSD employs more than 5,200 full-time staff who work in more than 260 schools and sites throughout St. Louis County.

This year, more than 24,000 students receive a quality education from SSD thanks to the long-time support of the St. Louis County community and taxpayers. ■



**Celebrating 60 Years  
of Student Success**

**Throughout the 2017-2018 school year, SSD will be celebrating the District's 60th anniversary. Watch for this logo in the coming months for stories about our staff, students, families and others throughout our community who have partnered with SSD to help all students achieve success.**

**Share your SSD memories and stories with us: [www.ssdmo.org/ssd60.html](http://www.ssdmo.org/ssd60.html)**

# SSD's Impact on Family Inspires Teaching Career

Shannon Combs began her SSD journey as the mom of two kids with medical issues and educational challenges.

Over the years as her children received services from SSD, she learned a lot about the District and its mission. And it eventually led her to go back to school and get her bachelor's degree in special education so she could teach and advocate for all children.

This is Shannon's story. She is now a teacher for SSD's Community-Based Vocational Instruction (CBVI) program at Hancock Place High School.



Shannon Combs and her family

*In November 1995, my life changed forever.*

*My 17-month-old little girl was given a diagnosis of mild to moderately deaf. How could that be? My daughter was not able to hear.*

*We began with hearing aids and speech therapy, and in 1997 she had surgery to get a cochlear implant. Her deafness was progressive and is now at a moderate to profound level. Speech and language therapy was a constant in our lives.*

*Taylor mainstreamed in first grade and began receiving services from SSD in the Rockwood School District. It was scary to see our daughter adjust and grow in a hearing society after attending a school for the deaf and hard of hearing.*

*Having the supports in place and utilizing the services available from SSD was a major part of her success. By the time high school came around, there were less and less accommodations and modifications needed, just some itinerant services through SSD and that's it!*

*I am not saying that it has been an easy road. There were many, many times I would cry myself to sleep and wonder why, why her and why us?*

*At the age of 6, Taylor was also diagnosed with Type 1 juvenile diabetes.*

*But nothing has stopped our daughter. Throughout high school she worked part time, played softball or lacrosse and maintained a grade-point average to enter and complete the A+ program.*

*And in May 2017, Taylor graduated from the University of Missouri—St. Louis (UMSL) with a bachelor's degree in social work and a minor in psychology.*

*How proud am I? Extremely! It was because of the vision and the motivation of my daughter as well as the help of SSD and the great teachers, staff and therapists along the way that contributed to her wonderful success.*

*I am continually inspired and amazed by my daughter and her achievements. She is definitely my hero.*

*Our son Austin was born in 2001 and his medical complications began on day one.*

*A heart defect and reflux were apparent at birth; however, developmental delays, and diagnosis of Kleefstra syndrome, autism and epilepsy were accumulated over a few years.*

*Austin has also experienced great success with the help of SSD services. His teachers in the Rockwood School District have been phenomenal.*

*He is a junior in high school this fall and will begin the CBVI program to gain vocational and daily living skills.*

*He is also my hero. I am truly blessed with such amazing children. I have learned more from them than they will probably ever learn from me.*

*After going through these medical trials with my children and advocating for them, I had the determination and desire to go back to school and get my bachelor's degree in special education.*

*I want to continue to advocate for other children. I graduated from UMSL in 2009 and began working for SSD soon after as a paraprofessional.*

*I eventually took a position with SSD in the Hancock Place School District as a high school CBVI instructor. I love my job and working with special needs students on a daily basis.*

*I have come to realize the truth to the saying "I had a calling."*

*I certainly did. My children were my inspiration and my motivation for my career path and for what I love to do each day.*

*I hope to have many more years as an SSD teacher. I am lucky to have children who continue to inspire me — at home and in the classroom — every day.*

# Honor SSD Staff or Community Members for Making a Difference in Your Child's Education

NOMINATION DEADLINE IS DEC. 6, 2017

SSD has developed a wide range of award programs to recognize staff and community members for their work to benefit students. Recipients are honored annually at the SSD Salutes Banquet.

Visit <http://bit.ly/ssdawards> to download nomination forms. For more information, contact Wes Buchek at [wbuchek@ssdmo.org](mailto:wbuchek@ssdmo.org) or 314.989.8102.



## Building Block Award

The SSD Building Block Award honors outstanding paraprofessionals from around the district. Nominees for the Building Block Award are judged on their skills and on their dedication to students.

## Key to the Classroom Award

With more than 2,500 teachers, SSD boasts a remarkable wealth of excellent educators. The Key to the Classroom/Teacher of the Year Award recognizes the achievements of these dedicated individuals. One Key to the Classroom recipient will be selected as the district's Teacher of the Year. Nominees for the award must be classroom teachers who are employed during the current school year.

## Lasting Impression Award

The Lasting Impression Award recognizes the achievements of dedicated individuals, working both in and outside of the classroom, who stand out in their role at SSD. The Lasting Impression Award is open to all SSD staff except teachers or paraprofessionals.

## Special Ambassador Award

The Special Ambassador Award is the highest recognition given by SSD. The award is presented to individuals or groups who demonstrate an extraordinary commitment to the students and/or staff of SSD. ■



## Apply for Grants, Scholarships

Application deadlines are approaching for the Special Education Foundation (SEF) Dana Brown Teacher Mini-grants and John Cary Scholarships. Application deadlines are Dec. 8 and Dec. 11, respectively. Online applications are available at [www.sef-stl.org/programs](http://www.sef-stl.org/programs)

## 15 Years of Golf

This year marks the 15th Annual Dan McLaughlin Golf Tournament to benefit the Special Education Foundation. The event, which is set for Oct. 9 this year, is the largest source of funding for the SEF and its programs, which help students with disabilities. It will feature electronic bidding for the first time. Even if you can't attend the tournament or dinner, you can bid on silent auction items at [www.SEFAuction.gesture.com](http://www.SEFAuction.gesture.com) beginning Oct. 2.

## Pizza with a Purpose

Mention the SEF when you dine in, carry out or cater at California Pizza Kitchen's four area locations any Tuesday in October, and 20 percent of your check will be donated to the SEF.

## Transition

The SEF welcomes Executive Director David M. Diener, who took the helm of the organization on July 1. The Foundation will honor previous executive director, Diane Buhr, at its Heroes with Heart event on Thursday, Nov. 30, at the Bogey Club. For more information and to sponsor or register for the event, visit [www.sef-stl.org/events/heroes-with-heart](http://www.sef-stl.org/events/heroes-with-heart) ■



Diane Buhr



David M. Diener

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**MISSION:** In collaboration with partner districts, we provide technical education and a wide variety of individualized educational and support services designed for each student's successful contribution to our community.

**VISION:** Partners for every student's success

**VALUES:** student success • collaboration  
• integrity • stewardship • continuous improvement • equity

**Special School District Notice of Non-Discrimination and Accommodation:**

Special School District does not discriminate or tolerate discrimination, harassment, and/or retaliation against an individual based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation, ancestry, disability, veteran status, age, or activity protected by federal or state law in its programs, activities and employment and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. Direct inquiries and complaints under this policy to Special School District's Director – Compliance Liaison, 12110 Clayton Road, St. Louis, Missouri 63131, telephone (314) 989-8100 or to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, One Peticcoat Lane, 1010 Walnut Street, 3rd Floor, Suite 320, Kansas City, Missouri 64106, telephone (816) 268-0550, fax (816) 268-0599, TDD (800) 877-8339, email [OCR.KansasCity@ed.gov](mailto:OCR.KansasCity@ed.gov). Information about the existence and location of services, activities, and facilities accessible to impaired persons can be obtained from the Special School District's Director – Compliance Liaison at the phone number and address listed above.

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314.989.8288 / [communications@ssdmo.org](mailto:communications@ssdmo.org)

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## NEWS FROM SSD



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of St. Louis County**  
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## SSD Academic Engagement for Families Video Series



Looking for resources to use at home to help your child learn? SSD has a great video series for families looking to do just that. From selecting “just right” books to mastering fractions, these videos make learning fun. Visit [www.vimeo.com/channels/familyengagement](http://www.vimeo.com/channels/familyengagement) to view the entire collection. ■

**APPLY NOW:** The James E. Westbury Memorial Board of Education Scholarship is open to any graduating senior who receives a service from SSD or attends an SSD technical high school. Visit [www.ssdmo.org/student\\_scholarships.htm](http://www.ssdmo.org/student_scholarships.htm) for details. ■