



SPECIAL EDITION



Issue 1, 2018

Special Olympics Program Benefits Students

The SSD Special Olympics program has provided opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in sports for more than 27 years.

While the longevity of the program is certainly worth noting, it's the collaboration with area high school students who plan and host the athletic events at their schools that makes SSD's program unique.

"Seeing high school kids get involved, especially in the early 1990s, when a lot of students hadn't been exposed to kids with disabilities, was pretty amazing," said Mike VanHecke, a former SSD physical education teacher who is now retired.

In fact, VanHecke said some of the student volunteers went on to become special education teachers because of their interactions with kids during Special Olympic events.

"They figured that's what they wanted to do," said VanHecke. "They really took to those students. It opened their eyes and made them feel good and made our students feel good."

Students have a great time at a variety of SSD Special Olympics events throughout the year including soccer, bocce ball, bowling, basketball, softball, and track and field. In addition, at every event, each athlete is matched with a host-school buddy for the day.

"At the Special Olympics track and field event, the buddies don't judge anyone. They accept you for who you are," said Mickeal Phillips, a junior at SSD's Neuwoehner High School. "Good players from other schools make it fun. I like seeing others have success."



Students participated in a Special Olympics bocce tournament hosted by Lutheran South High School.

Eunice Kennedy Shriver founded Special Olympics in 1968, and in 1971, Missouri Special Olympics was incorporated as a charitable organization. SSD began its Special Olympics program in 1990. In 1998, the name of the state organization officially changed to Special Olympics Missouri.

"We started with a charter from the state to begin our program," said Jackie Rahm, coordinator of SSD's Special Olympics program from 1997 to 2010. "When I inherited the program, there were nine events that were hosted at various high schools."

During Rahm's time with the District, the program expanded to include partnering with several local private and parochial schools in addition to SSD's partner districts. "That really opened up another set of schools that were willing to receive our athletes," said Rahm. *Continued inside »*



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 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

Continued from front cover

By the 2010-2011 school year, the number of SSD Special Olympics events had grown to 27.

Rahm said her favorite part of the program was working with various high schools.

“The day of the event was always amazing,” said Rahm. “Seeing the lengths they went to in order to put on a wonderful event was awesome. Then seeing the SSD teachers and students leaving with great big smiles on their faces was very special.”

VanHecke said he considers Special Olympics to be one of the best programs SSD has incorporated into its curriculum. “It really benefits our students and the students at the other high schools. It’s collaboration at its best,” said VanHecke.

In the past seven years, the program has grown significantly. The number of participating students has more than doubled. Currently 37 SSD Special Olympics events are held at partner schools and area locations.

Unified Sports, which joins individuals with and without disabilities on the same team, also has experienced growth. Today, SSD Special Olympics offers a unified division in every sport. Approximately 900 athletes participated on unified teams during the 2016-2017 school year.

Kerrie Townsend, the current SSD Special Olympics facilitator, said it is very rewarding to see the relationship and acceptance that general education students develop and gain through working with and competing with the athletes.

“I often tell people that I have the best job in the District. It is wonderful to see the sense of accomplishment, increased self-esteem and self-confidence that the athletes gain through athletic competitions,” said Townsend. “The smile on each of their faces as they receive their ribbons and medals is very rewarding.” ■

Parent Leadership Institute Provides Opportunities for Learning and Friendship

Gaining knowledge, developing leadership skills and building relationships are just a few of the benefits for parents who have participated in SSD’s Parent Leadership Institute (PLI).

“I hoped to gain some insight on helping my child transition into adulthood with as much information as I could get,” said parent Karen Fischer, who attended PLI last fall.

Since 2007, the PLI has provided training to parents of children with disabilities on topics designed to help them with their child’s educational journey. Training ranges from how to be a part of a productive meeting to how to positively interact and collaborate with other parents and school officials.

Participants, who are chosen through an application process, attend three full days of training on Saturdays once a month for three months during the fall.

“Meeting other parents has been a great bonding experience. It is easier to relate to other parents who have a child with a disability similar to your own,” said Fischer. “There are a lot of resources for parents who have students with individualized education programs.”

Rebecca O’Laughlin, a PLI participant and parent of a student who receives services from SSD, said the program has helped her articulate the importance of inclusion and to envision what she wants for her child’s future and how to get him there. She also has benefitted from developing relationships through the PLI.

“I connected with another parent in my partner school district whom I didn’t know before this program. We are both becoming increasingly involved with our school district’s parent advisory council, which is such a great way to meet parents in our district, particularly parents with older students,” said O’Laughlin. “It’s a great way

for us to know what we might expect as our kids enter middle school and high school and what challenges — and good things — we can anticipate.”

Parent Wengheng Li wanted to learn more about the special education system and find the best opportunities for her daughter when she applied for PLI.

“I have learned to explore opportunities for my daughter. I also learned that I could educate others. I gave an online presentation to about 15,000 parents. I used some of the information from the first day’s workshop,” said Li. “It’s great to chat with other parents and exchange information.”

The PLI is accepting applications for its 2018 program. There is no cost to participate.

“I would recommend the PLI to other parents. It’s a great way to think about your child’s diagnosis in a new way, approach disability with a new perspective, connect with other parents, learn about available resources, and become more proactive about helping your child live his or her best life,” said O’Laughlin. ■

SSD PARENT LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE – APPLY BY MAY 4

The Parent Leadership Institute (PLI) is accepting applications for its 2018 program to be held in three sessions on Sept. 8, Oct. 6 and Nov. 3.

There is no cost to participate. Applications are due May 4.

Parents from St. Louis County whose children receive special education or 504 services, First Steps and early childhood services are encouraged to apply.

Download the application at http://bit.ly/PLI_application or contact Debra Fiasco by phone at 314.989.8108 or by email at dmfiasco@ssdmo.org.

SSD Presents Alumni Awards

Two individuals have been recognized with the first-ever SSD alumni awards for their commitment to helping other students succeed.

Michael Walker received the SSD Young Alumnus Award for his outstanding leadership and dedication to others with disabilities.

As a student in SSD's Vocational Skills Program (VSP), Walker received on-the-job training in the Pharmacy Department at St. Mary's Hospital, while also gaining expertise in technical and communication skills. Through this collaboration and his hard work, Walker not only excelled as a student, but is now excelling as a St. Mary's employee.

The second alumnus award was presented to Derrion Henderson. He received the Distinguished Alumnus Award for his commitment to students by sharing his expertise, time and talent to further their goals.

Henderson was a student at South Technical High School before transferring to North Technical High School during his junior year and



Derrion Henderson receives the Distinguished Alumnus Award

graduated from North Tech in 2010. He is a broadcast reporter with KTVI/KPLR.

Walker received his award at a ceremony on Nov. 30 at St. Mary's. Henderson was honored at an SSD Board of Education meeting on Dec. 12. Going forward, the two alumni awards will be presented annually.

Visit <http://bit.ly/ssdalum> to read more about Walker's and Henderson's accomplishments. ■



Michael Walker receives the SSD Young Alumnus Award

Special Education Foundation

Success Beyond the Classroom

The Special Education Foundation (SEF) Women Leaders is a group committed to helping children and youth with disabilities. They raise money through an annual Boutique, Fashion Show and Luncheon, which will be held this year at 10 a.m. on Friday, April 20.

The group heard presentations in September by principals from SSD's Litzsinger School, Neuwoehner High School, Southview School, Ackerman School and Northview High School about how the SEF could help their students.

Due to the success of the fashion show and with authorization from the SEF board, the Women Leaders chose to fully fund the schools' requests totaling \$9,656:

- \$1,080 for Wonder-ful T-shirts for Litzsinger
- \$1,170 for an ice cream truck visit at field day and a petting zoo for Neuwoehner
- \$1,500 for a projector, projector wheel inserts and floor tiles for Southview
- \$3,506 for arts and culture experiences at Metro Theater Company, City Museum and National Blues Museum for Ackerman
- \$2,400 for picnic supplies, prom and graduation clothing, support of family PTO events at the school, cheerleader pom-poms and uniforms, yearbook subsidies, prizes and supplies for fall barbecue and Spaghetti Bingo, and prom photos for Northview

To round up to an even \$10,000, the group designated \$344 as seed money for an emergency fund. Teachers often call the Foundation needing clothing or shoes for students during the school day. Members contributed additional funds, reaching \$569 by November. According to Tom Bamvakais, SSD Vocational Skills Program teacher at Jefferson Barracks, who has accessed the funds, "Teaching is not just about helping students in the classroom. So many of our kids are in need of the basics. As a teacher, I think helping a student get a pair of decent shoes or a pair of pants that fits is the least we can do. We are very grateful to the Special Education Foundation."

To contribute, visit sef-stl.org/donate and specify SSD emergency fund.

The SEF also encourages applications for grants to help students. Campership applications are due March 9 and April 3, and assistive equipment applications may be turned in at any time. Applications are available at sef-stl.org/programs. ■



Niki Tedoni, principal at SSD's Southview School, speaks to the SEF Women Leaders.

Board of Education

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www.ssdmo.org

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

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NEWS FROM SSD



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SSD Parent Advisory Council

The SSD Parent Advisory Council (PAC) is comprised of families advising and collaborating to improve the education, confidence and social outcomes of each student served by SSD.

The PAC consists of five parents or guardians — one member and four alternates — from each of the 22 St. Louis County school districts and from each of the five SSD special education schools. The parents or guardians of students receiving special education services in that district or school elect SSD PAC members.



For more information, visit the PAC's website at <https://tinyurl.com/SSDPAC>, email pac@ssdmo.org or call 314.989.8448 ext. 6650. ■