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Superintendent John C. Cary congratulates Mary Pat Gilliam on being named the 2009 Missouri School Social Worker of the Year by the School Social Workers Association of Missouri. Gilliam, who has been with SSD for more than 17 years, works with students in the Ferguson-Florissant School District.



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What's Happening at SSD

Understanding Asperger Syndrome

7 to 9 p.m., Nov. 2 and 9 (two-session workshop), SSD Central Office – Room 57

This workshop will help participants to identify and understand the social, sensory and behavioral characteristics of Asperger syndrome. The second session will focus on successful strategies, with time for discussion and questions.

Understanding Learning Disabilities

7 to 9 p.m., Nov. 5, SSD Central Office – Room 57

Parents and teachers are invited to this introductory workshop on specific learning disabilities and how they impact academic performance.

Understanding ADHD

6 to 9 p.m., Nov. 6, SSD Central Office – Room 61

What is attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)? Who can diagnose it, prescribe medications and offer counseling? Does a child with ADHD automatically qualify for an Individualized Education Program (IEP)? These and many other questions will be answered in this three-hour workshop.

Strategies for Learning Disabilities

7 to 9 p.m., Nov. 12, SSD Central Office – Room 57

This workshop focuses on ideas for helping a child learn more effectively, including tips for reading, spelling, math and memory tasks.

To register for these events, call 314.989.7807 or 314.989.8552 (TTY) or register online at www.solutionwhere.com/ssd.



SPECIAL EDITION

Investing in PRECIOUS RESOURCES



Issue 5, 2009

Last year, SSD received some welcome news that ultimately benefits school districts and students across St. Louis County. Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the district was allocated about \$39 million in one-time stimulus funding over the next two years to be used for special education needs.

Since SSD provides special education services to all students with disabilities in the 23 school districts in St. Louis County, it was our responsibility to determine how these funds, for which our district is accountable, could be best spent. And at the outset we knew that it only made sense to consult with our partner districts in the county to help us answer the question, “How would this funding best benefit our students?”



John C. Cary

SSD received about \$18 million for this first year. Because each of our partner districts has unique needs, SSD met with superintendents and others to ask for spending requests and recommendations. We knew that a portion of the funding — a little more than \$3 million — could be used for Early Intervening Services (EIS), in which learning strategies are put in place for struggling students before the student is evaluated for special education services.

For the first step, SSD determined how much funding each partner district would receive for EIS based on the number of students receiving special education services in that district. Each partner district then decided how to best use its portion of the funding. Partner districts’ EIS budgets include: a part-time school psychologist, a part-time primary reading specialist, a differentiated instruction coach for algebra and communications arts, stipends for teacher-level staff for after-school tutoring, reading intervention materials and progress monitoring software and hardware.

SSD also is using an additional \$3.1 million to fund other recommendations made by partner districts, which include the installation of Smartboards and other technology in partner district classrooms, professional development for staff, and materials and supplies, as well as the addition of several staff members county-wide, such as data/instruction and language/literacy coaches.

A portion of the funding also will be used in the district’s five special education schools to provide enhanced related services and assistive technology, and network upgrades and facilities repair, as well as school bus purchases.

As we move forward in carefully spending this stimulus funding to best benefit our students, I want to thank our partner districts for helping us carefully consider the most effective ways to use the money. It is through these types of positive collaborations that we all can achieve our top priority of meeting the unique needs of our students so that they can be successful.

Sincerely,

Board appoints new member

Zella Williams to fill seat vacated by Lorenzo Winston

There's a new face on the Special School District Board of Education.

The Board of Education appointed Zella Williams at its Sept. 8 meeting. Williams will represent Subdistrict 1, which includes the Hazelwood and Riverview Gardens school districts. The seat was formerly held by Lorenzo Winston, who resigned in June.

Williams will serve until March when the Governing Council will hold an election for the remaining year of the term.

A retired administrator with the Hazelwood School District, Williams knows the importance of a quality education. During her 38-year career in education, she served as a classroom teacher, guidance counselor, principal and assistant superintendent. She was named Hazelwood School District's assistant superintendent for school accountability in 2003, a position she held until her retirement last year.

Williams said she is excited by the opportunity to serve on the SSD Board.

"After being retired for a year, I am anxious to be in the position again of helping children, parents and the community," Williams said. "Serving on the SSD Board of Education will afford me that opportunity."

Williams and her husband Will have been married for 36 years and have three grown sons. She also is an active community volunteer and belongs to many civic and professional organizations, including the American Association of School Administrators, the Charmaine Chapman Leadership Society of the United Way and the Kiwanis Club of Florissant Valley, where she serves on the Board of Directors. ■



Zella Williams

EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOCUSES ON STUDENT SUCCESS

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) has accredited the school psychology program at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and that's good news for Special School District.

The program, started just a few years ago, is a graduate degree program focusing on data-based problem solving. The program prepares future school psychologists to work in school settings. SSD is Missouri's largest employer of school psychologists, and UMSL's program is the only one in the state accredited by the NASP.

Janice Brooks, director of related services for SSD, said the district supported the development of UMSL's school psychology program.

"The school psychology program at UMSL helps SSD meet the needs of our students," Brooks said. "It's important to have a quality program to train new professionals. We're thrilled that UMSL received this accreditation. It speaks highly to the quality of the program."

In collaboration with the university, SSD offers practicums and internships to students in the school psychology program and has hired several graduates of the program.

Donald Gouwens, clinical assistant professor and coordinator of the school psychology program at UMSL, joined the university with the sole purpose of creating an outstanding accredited program. Gouwens worked with SSD administrators while developing the curriculum needs for the program.

"Recognition as a NASP-approved program puts UMSL on the national school psychology map," Gouwens said. "It communicates ... that graduates of our program are highly trained professionals who will provide children, youth and their families with the best school psychological services available."

NASP supports school psychologists in enhancing learning and mental health of all children and youth. Visit <http://www.nasponline.org/> for more information about the association. ■

Southview experiences bumper crop Grant helps fund new rainwater harvesting system

"Mmmmmmmmm!" "This is good!" "Yum!"

Those were the sounds that could be heard in Southview's life learning classroom during a recent lesson on spaghetti squash. The students were enjoying the perfectly seasoned squash steamed with butter along with some fried zucchini. But this lesson was about more than cooking.

It was a lesson in the reward of seeing a project through. It was the tangible — and tasty — end to a project that involved lessons in science with a big helping of conservation. The squash and zucchini these students were eating were harvested from Southview's student gardens.

"We planted seed squash. We put a little seed in the dirt, then we gave it water and sunshine," student Ramona Kennedy said. "We like to pick squash. It's really good. It tastes so good."

And this year the students are enjoying a bumper crop, due largely to a new irrigation system installed at the school. A rainwater harvesting system was installed in June as a way to keep the students' young seedlings hydrated during the summer months.

In previous years the students' seedlings rarely survived the St. Louis summers.

"That's the problem," SSD teacher Julie Wobbe said. "We would plant seedlings in the spring when you're supposed to, and then they would die because we had no way to keep them watered during the summer."

But that's all changed this year thanks to the new irrigation system powered by rainwater. The system was funded by a \$4,800 Lowe's Toolbox for Education grant from the Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation.

The system collects rainwater runoff from a garage located on Southview's property and then stores it in two 275-gallon tanks where it can be reused as irrigation water for the gardens.

The highly sophisticated system includes an electronic device that regulates when the plants are watered based on a programmed watering schedule. The system also monitors how much rain has fallen so it will not overwater the plants.

The system was installed by Water Tech Irrigation, which specializes in rainwater harvesting systems. Steve Krieger, certified irrigation contractor and president of Water Tech Irrigation, said the system at Southview is the first of its kind.

"This is the first time it's been done at a school, and it was exciting to know this was for an educational purpose," Krieger said.

Krieger said although the concept of collecting rainwater is nothing new, it is a fairly emerging concept in St. Louis.



Matt Balsman helps Superintendent John C. Cary pick spaghetti squash in Southview's garden. The students planted seedlings in the spring, which were watered throughout the summer by a new rainwater harvesting irrigation system.

"People have been collecting rainwater and reusing it for centuries, but it's just catching on in St. Louis," he said. "To my knowledge, we're the only company in this area to be doing this type of installation."

Southview's system is only the fourth one Water Tech has installed in the St. Louis area. He said the system at the school has the potential to collect 11,500 gallons of water during a year of typical rainfall.

SSD teacher Jeanne Carbone said allowing students to experience the outdoors and learn about the conservation involved with the new system has opened new learning opportunities.

"It's tremendous," she said. "All of the sensory input they can get from being outside is amazing. And this new system is helping us to make that even more rewarding." ■

Special Edition is a publication of the Communications Department of Special School District of St. Louis County.

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