PARTNERS IN TRANSITION: Working Together Toward the Next Step

Whether it’s switching to a new job, moving to a different school or an unknown city, or simply swapping out cell phones, transition can be challenging.

But for several SSD students, transition from school to the work world is off to a tremendous start with the help of Accent Group Solutions.

“It’s just been a few weeks,” said Sydney, a student in SSD’s Vocational Skills Program at Accent. “I love it—I love working in the warehouse doing different kinds of jobs.”

SSD’s Vocational Skills Program (VSP) and the Community Based Vocational Instruction (CBVI) program are keystones of the District’s emphasis on transition.

“Our mission is to provide a continuum of supports and services to students and families to assist the students in gaining the skills needed to achieve realistic and meaningful post-secondary goals,” said SSD’s Director of Transition Services Casey Wisdom.

At Accent, students learn job skills, as well as “soft skills” that they will use inside and outside of the workplace.

Accent Group Solutions is an all-encompassing service provider that offers clients warehousing, order fulfillment, printing, packing, distribution, and more.

“We deliver tangible marketing through intelligent fulfillment,” said Accent CEO Erica Hughes. “Intelligent fulfillment means no order is the same.”

And that’s where SSD students come in. One job that the students work is filling orders for clients by going “shopping” through the multiple aisles of shelving to get the order assembled and packed before it is shipped out to customers. Other students count out promotional items to send to clients, while other students work on assembling boxes, affixing labels, or working on graphic design programs.

“Anything we can figure out how to do, they will give us a shot at it,” said SSD teacher Kim Gettemeier. “That’s empowering—students come in with different needs, and they have different chances to do things.”

The idea for Accent to become a VSP and CBVI site for the District came about because Hughes’ son receives services from SSD. And as he’s gotten older, the idea of transitioning out of school became an important topic for the family.

“It was something in our lives we were learning about,” said Hughes. “We have a big facility here, so we talked with people at SSD and it worked out. So far, it’s been great!”

As a VSP teacher, Gettemeier said everything she does with students is for a function. “Life skills, plus job training,” she said.

“Teaching the job skills happens quickly and the students do it quite well,” Gettemeier said. “The soft skills—stamina, problem solving, greetings, eye contact—tend to be the barriers to employment.” Continued inside »
Each day includes 90 to 120 minutes of lessons for students that focus on those skills—which align with their Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals. This includes practicing filling out job applications, dealing with money and learning how to use public transportation.

Thus far, Accent has been a welcoming environment for students to learn these skills. As students walk from building to building, Accent employees are quick to greet each student as they go by to their next task.

“It’s a family here,” said Hughes. “The people that work here are on board with our new partnership with SSD—it’s an attitude we’ve taken on with all the workers.”

The District’s VSP and CBVI programs allow students to learn vocational training and work skills beyond the school building setting—and SSD partners with dozens of companies and organizations throughout the area.

“Relationships with community partners are vital in preparing students for life after school,” said Wisdom. “They help us provide students with ‘real world’ experiences that allow students to more easily transfer skills learned in school to post-secondary life. Community partners also help us build a bridge from the support services provided during school to the adult support systems.”

When asked why it is important for him and his fellow VSP students to learn these skills, Johnny, who has already learned numerous jobs at Accent answered: “Because we like to work!”

“Eventually, one day, we want to get a job at the warehouse,” Sydney said.

If your organization or company is interested in partnering with one of SSD’s transition programs, contact Casey Wisdom at cwisdom@ssdmo.org.

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

NOMINATION DEADLINE IS DEC. 5, 2016

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 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 awards recognize 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.
Free Event Offers Families One-Stop Access to Disability Resources

SSD’s Parent Education and Diversity Awareness Program will sponsor a Disability Resource Fair on Oct. 27 that will feature information about programs and resources available through SSD and other community agencies.

The resource fair is scheduled for 4–7 p.m. Oct. 27 at SSD Central Office, 12110 Clayton Road in Town & Country. Please park and enter on the lower level of the building.

Representatives from SSD will include early childhood behavior facilitators, effective practice specialists for autism, social/emotional/behavioral and transition, assistive technology, augmentative communication, and Family & Community Resource Center. Other organizations represented will include Department of Mental Health-St. Louis Regional Office, Recreation Council of Greater St. Louis and other agencies that provide support and resources for students and families.

This event is free and open to the public. For more information, call 314.989.8108 (711 Deaf/HOH).

Student Scholarships Available

SSD and other organizations, including the Special Education Foundation (SEF) and the Bonhomme Lions, provide multiple opportunities for graduating seniors to earn scholarships for their post-secondary education. Any senior receiving SSD services or attending an SSD technical high school is eligible to apply for these scholarships.

Each reward is unique, and has its own history and specific requirements.
Application deadlines start in January.


The mission of the Special Education Foundation (SEF) is to assist children with disabilities in St. Louis County achieve success in areas not supported by tax dollars. One of the Foundation’s most successful programs is Dana Brown Teacher Mini-grants. Through this program, the SEF funds innovative teaching approaches that help students with disabilities learn, communicate, interact and grow. For the 2016-2017 school year, the SEF is providing funds for approximately 100 programs totaling $55,000.

Learn more about the Dana Brown Teacher Mini-grants in the Programs section of the SEF’s website at http://sef-stl.org/programs. The mini-grant page includes a link to the application, as well as a list of the recipients and links to abstracts describing their programs. SSD teachers may apply for grants for the 2017-2018 school year by Dec. 9, 2016. Grants will be awarded at a reception in February 2017.

The SEF also provides scholarships for college-bound seniors. Last year, the Foundation initiated the John Cary Scholarship to honor the memory of the late superintendent of SSD and awarded $5,000 in his name, as well as making 14 other grants ranging from $1,200 to $3,000 to other students.

After considerable discussion, the SEF board voted to provide scholarships of $5,000 in the belief that the increased amount would have a far greater impact for students. To that end, the Foundation will award five or six scholarships in the amount of $5,000 each for the 2016-2017 school year. Applications are available in the Programs section of the SEF website and are due March 1, 2017. The Foundation will award the scholarships at an event in spring 2017.
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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 Petticoat 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

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