As students, families and staff prepared for the new school year, SSD extended a warm welcome to Dr. Elizabeth Keenan, the District's new superintendent.

Keenan, who joined SSD on July 1, has a strong background in special education. That background combined with her belief in and support of career and technical education, and a goal of one day being a school district superintendent seemed to fit the unique opportunity at SSD.

“When I learned about the superintendent position at SSD, it spoke to me,” said Keenan, who previously worked for Chicago Public Schools where she supported and led the special education programming for more than 515 schools and 52,000 students with special needs. “Special education is near and dear to my heart. While I ultimately wanted to serve as a school district superintendent, I didn’t want to lose that piece.”

Keenan said she is honored to be SSD’s superintendent and knew from her research that SSD is nationally recognized for providing high quality services in special education, and career and technical education. She said she was impressed with the District’s more than 500 collaborative partnerships with local businesses throughout the region that provide real-life settings and work experience for students with disabilities.

“What I heard most often though were comments about the District’s exceptional high-quality staff who are committed to ensuring that all students succeed,” she said. “That is what ultimately convinced me to apply for the superintendent position, and why I am so proud and delighted to be here.”

Keenan's philosophy is to make sure that all students receive the help and encouragement needed to succeed, and that each student with a disability is supported in accordance with his or her individualized education program.

“I will support the current programs and seek input from staff and stakeholders on what areas we need to improve and continue to expand on,” she said. “I will always seek feedback from the people who are the most knowledgeable and closest to our students.”

In the coming months, Keenan will continue to meet with staff, students, families, partner districts and other stakeholders to talk about what’s going well, ways in which SSD can improve, and how all groups can work together for student success.

“I look forward to the many successes the school year will bring,” said Keenan.

Keenan holds a doctorate in Leadership Studies from Marian University in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. She also earned a specialist's degree, a master's degree in special education and a bachelor's degree in elementary education.
Students Lead by Participating in Student Council Programs

Student council members not only gain valuable leadership skills when they serve their schools, but their activism also benefits other students, their school and the community.

Hunter, who attends SSD’s Neuwoehner High School, likes being a member of the student council. “It’s really cool,” he said. “I like discussing and planning different events. We discuss dances and help design senior shirts.”

The student council has been active at Neuwoehner for more than 15 years.

Anna Davis, an SSD social worker at Neuwoehner and one of the student council sponsors, said, “At the beginning of the year, we work together surrounding our mission: ‘To make Neuwoehner High School and the community a better place by demonstrating school rules and values, being responsible role models, and helping others.’”

Council members meet twice a month to brainstorm, plan and organize different activities throughout the school. This last school year, they went trick or treating with students from SSD’s Litzsinger School, and participated and planned activities for Red Ribbon Week, The Great Kindness Challenge and a candy gram fundraiser for Valentine’s Day.

“We help make choices about dances, and we decorate for dances and events like Family Fun Night,” said Charlie, a student at Neuwoehner. “I like that it gives me some say in things.”

At SSD’s Northview High School, student council members created candy grams for the holidays to raise money for Northview. Students were responsible for creating, selling, collecting money, and delivering the candy grams around school.

Abigail, who attends Northview, said, “I help the school. I made and sold candy grams to be nice.” She said her favorite part of student council is being responsible.

“Student council brings students together,” said Katie Burris, SSD teacher at Northview and student council sponsor. “We have students on very different ability levels working with each other. The blend of these students may not have happened in any other way, so learning to work with others is a big piece of student council.”

The student council members at Northview meet about once every other week. They are responsible for selling prom tickets and often volunteer to help with activities such as Special Olympics.

Davis said the student council gives students the opportunity to learn and practice leadership skills, teamwork and organization skills.

“Student council members are encouraged to be role models in the school by following the school rules, having good attendance, and actively participating in meetings and activities,” said Davis. “An added benefit is that meetings and activities provide opportunities for students to interact with peers outside of their classroom to build new relationships and practice social skills.”

It’s that added benefit that Danny likes the most. His favorite part of being a member of the Neuwoehner student council? Hanging out with his friends.
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.

The PAC typically meets at 7 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month at SSD Central Office, 12110 Clayton Road in Town & Country. Meetings for the 2019-2020 school year are scheduled for Aug. 14, Sept. 11, Oct. 9, Nov. 13, Dec. 11, Jan. 8, Feb. 12, April 8 and May 13.

For more information, visit the PAC’s website at https://tinyurl.com/SSDPAC or email pac@ssdmo.org.

Special Education Foundation

Farewell to a Friend
The Special Education Foundation (SEF) mourns the passing of JoAnn Hejna, founding executive director of The Saigh Foundation. Since 2004, JoAnn and The Saigh Foundation have supported SEF’s Leadership Program. Based on Leadership St. Louis, the program broadens the horizons of approximately 20 students with disabilities. The yearlong curriculum introduces and develops leadership skills through involving students in issues that face the community. JoAnn often spoke at the program’s graduation ceremony, expressing how much she valued the students and their potential to contribute to society. She greeted them enthusiastically each year when they visited her to present canned goods they collected for her drive.

The SEF also congratulates Mary Kemp, associate executive director of The Saigh Foundation, on her retirement.

Fred Saigh Leadership Program Fundraiser, Applications
The new class of the Fred Saigh Leadership Program will hold its car wash fundraiser in the circle drive of SSD’s Central Office from 9-11 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 28.

Applications for the 2020-2021 Fred Saigh Leadership Program class are due Jan. 28 and are available at sef-stl.org/applications.

Danny’s MacNificent Kids
Dan McLaughlin hosted students from SSD’s Neuwoehner High School and their families on June 17 in a fun program called Danny’s MacNificent Kids. This lucky group watched batting practice on the field before the Cardinals game and toured the dugout. Then they visited with Dan in the broadcast booth. He provided T-shirts and food vouchers, and the Cardinals donated game tickets.
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 each student’s success

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

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. 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.

Let’s Talk — Tell Us What’s on Your Mind

Let’s Talk is an online tool that allows you to submit feedback at your convenience directly to the SSD staff member who can help. Just visit the SSD website at www.ssdmo.org and look for the Let’s Talk button on the homepage.

Once you click on the Let’s Talk link, you’ll be able to choose an interest area related to the message that you want to submit. Let us know what’s going well, offer suggestions, submit a concern or make a general comment.

As we work to continuously improve the District’s communication with stakeholders, we look forward to starting a conversation with you.