Special School District Notice of Non-Discrimination and Accommodation

Special School District does not discriminate or tolerate discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, ancestry, disability, veteran status, age, or activity protected by federal or state law in its programs, activities and employment. Direct inquiries and complaints under this policy to Special School District’s Compliance Coordinator, 12110 Clayton Road, St. Louis, Missouri 63131; telephone 314.989.8117 / caregazzi@ssdmo.org

Special School District Notice of Accommodation

Special School District does not discriminate or tolerate discrimination based on the existence and location of services, activities, and facilities. Direct inquiries and complaints under this policy to Special School District’s Compliance Coordinator, 12110 Clayton Road, Town & Country, MO 63131

TEACHER ROUND UP

Speech/language pathologist Abby Carlisle has been accepted to Harvard University to study education policy next year. Carlisle has been an SLP with the district since 2006 and works at McNair Elementary in the Hazelwood School District. Starting this fall, she will begin working toward her master’s in education policy and management. She plans to research fair educational assessment of students receiving special education services in the public school system.

Lynn Wyen-Chamberlain, an SSD teacher at Pattonville High School, took part this summer in a weeklong fellowship sponsored by the St. Louis Science Center. Last month, she spent a week exploring at Mount Rainier and Mount St. Helens national parks. Upon her return, she will volunteer with the Science Center and write a lesson plan from the experiences to be posted on the Science Center’s website for other educators to use.

www.ssdmo.org

NEWS FROM SSD

SPECIAL EDITION

Know Your PAC

Parent Advisory Council can help ease back-to-school transitions

A new school year can be an exciting time full of new possibilities, new experiences and new goals. But a new school year can also be a time of new challenges.

Several changes can take place at the beginning of the school year — new teachers, new schools, new classmates — and those changes can sometimes be difficult for all children to navigate and manage. The road can be especially challenging for children with special needs.

The Special School District Parent Advisory Council (PAC) is one of numerous supports available to parents and students to help them adjust. The SSD PAC is comprised of families advising and collaborating to improve the education, confidence and social outcomes of each student served by SSD.

Members of the SSD PAC are parents or guardians of students receiving services from SSD. One voting member and up to two alternate members represent each of SSD’s 22 partner school districts and from each of the five SSD special education schools.

Reaching out to other parents and collaborating with SSD staff are the primary roles of the PAC representatives. When adjusting to a new school or new school year, this role can make a tremendously positive difference for everyone involved. Here, two parents share their stories:

Lynn Wyen-Chamberlain was sponsored by the St. Louis Science Center to explore at Mount Rainier and Mount St. Helens national parks.

We were 835 miles from the home, community, friends, family and school we knew. Although we were very careful in making our decision to move to Webster Groves — and that decision was determined in large part by the school district that would share our responsibility for educating our son — we knew we’d have a lot to learn. Educating and appropriately supporting our son’s academic and social progress had proven challenging in the context of a community we knew well. Now he was entering a new school, in a new district, in a new state, where we didn’t know a soul. We were anxious. That is, until we set foot inside Avery Elementary on our son’s first day of second grade.

We were immediately met by his teacher Mrs. Debbie Jordan. She recognized him from the picture and background information I’d mailed to the principal a couple weeks earlier. With open arms and a broad smile, she welcomed our son and us. After hugging all of us, she extended her hand and passed me a large folder. She explained that when she learned she’d be receiving a new student who had some complex developmental and medical history, she reached out to a parent of another Avery student. Debbie knew that Lisa Liss, a parent of two delightful Avery All-Star students, was well informed about services and supports available to kids with disabilities and their families. She also knew that Lisa was leading the school’s Parent Advisory Council (PAC).

Before my family ever had to ask for help navigating the educational and disability systems in St. Louis County, my son’s general education teacher and a parent leader were plotting out a plan to welcome and support us.

continued on page 2
**Why I Walk for Autism**

Amy Blumenfeld is an effective practice specialist in the area of autism spectrum disorders. She supports SSD staff with effective programming for communication, sensory, cognitive, behavioral and social needs of students with autism. For the past two years, Amy has served as the Autism Speaks Annual Walk Chair for St. Louis. Last year, 22,000 walkers raised more than $900,000. Amy’s passion for supporting student’s with autism is evident in the speech she gave at the event kickoff this summer.

"The question of why I walk isn’t an easy one for me to answer. My story is very different from the stories of the talented and passionate previous walk chairs over the past eight years. I don’t have a child with autism. I don’t have a sibling with autism. I don’t have a niece, nephew, cousin, aunt, or uncle with an autism spectrum disorder. I do, however, have hundreds of students in my life and have been fortunate enough to be a part of their journey."

My journey into the field of education is what I call a wonderful accident. It started in 1995, when a teacher gave me the following assignment: “Walk a mile in the shoes of your future self.” I was assigned to work in my future career, and I really thought this would be a simple task.

I knew I was going to be an endocrinologist, so I contacted St. Louis Children’s Hospital and inquired about shadowing one of the doctors within the endocrinology department. Little did I know that privacy laws would restrict my access to seeing patients. Defeated, I went to a take a turn, what I learned later was called a full meltdown, took place. This young boy continued to scream and cry as he grabbed my hands and squeezed them. Not knowing exactly what to do, I sat quietly with him and squeezed his hands each time he squeezed mine, not really knowing why that made him get quieter each time I returned the squeeze. After a few minutes, I noticed the staff in the room watching the two of us sitting there just breathing while he cooled down. The teacher again approached me and stated that the student must really like me to allow me to hold his hands and to give him pressure. In my head, I was thinking that this student must be crazy or she must have missed the fact that I caused him to cry when I took a turn. I thought they were going to thank me for my time and send me away before I caused any other meltdowns, but two hours later I was still there tagging along with this student. As the afternoon progressed, the teacher shared with me that the students in the room all had a disability called autism and that’s why they weren’t communicating with me in a way that I was familiar with. As I left the classroom that afternoon, I remember being thoroughly impressed by the teacher’s ability to know what the students wanted when they weren’t using spoken language and many times were crying, stomping or not looking toward the adults.

I headed home fast as I could and looked up the word “autism” to see what it meant. A few hours later, I stepped away from the computer absolutely fascinated by this disability that meant so many different things for each person it affected. When Monday rolled around the following week, I returned to the Early Childhood Center and secretly hoped the original classroom was still down with the flu. (Know, that’s horrible to wish the flu on anyone, especially children, but I really wanted to go back to the special education room.) Sure enough, the teacher asked if I’d be okay working with the special education room. Week after week, I returned and worked with the students. The progress the students made over the course of the year was astonishing; I found myself not having the dreaded Sunday night blues because I knew Mondays meant I get to go see how the students were doing. As the month passed, the teachers in the room showed me different techniques for working through behaviors with the students and allowed me to lead activities with them. Little did I know that my dream of becoming a doctor was slowly changing into a dream of becoming a special educator. The director to walk a mile in my future self’s shoes took place, just not in the fashion that I expected it to."

Read more of Amy’s story at www.ssdmo.org/rotate_features/amystory.html.

---

**Why Will You Walk?**

Join the SSD Walk Team, “Aiming for Answers” on Oct. 15, 2011. Event information begins at 11:30 a.m., 5K at 12:15 p.m. and the walk begins at 1 p.m.

Register at http://www.walkforautismspeaks.org/lsouts/aimingforanswers.

Contact Amy Blumenfeld at ablumenfeld@ssdmo.org or Lesley McGillic at lmcgillic@ssdmo.org with questions.