



SPECIAL EDITION



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Garden Provides Students with Calming Space and Academic Opportunities

A memorial garden at SSD's Litzsinger School was designed to help students learn about insects, plants, vegetables and nature. The space is also used as a calming and reflection space.

"The Litzsinger garden is a beautiful way for our students to experience nature in an accessible and safe way," said SSD social worker Kelli Traxler. "I love that the garden provides a natural and simple way to teach and practice mindfulness. Kids are drawn to it."

The garden contains flowering plants, vegetables and herbs, whimsical birdhouses, stepping-stones and potted plants.

An accessible playhouse, which was built by students from SSD's North Technical High School, and a wooden shed for tools and supplies built by students from SSD's South Technical High School also are a part of the garden.

Angel, a seventh-grader at Litzsinger, said, "My favorite part of the garden is catching bugs, and it makes me feel happy. I like to look for flowers and animals."

According to Traxler, the garden helps many students experience comfort and peace. "It eases stress and worries and helps them relax," she said. "It allows them to feel rejuvenated and clear headed."

Sixth-grader Ella said she loves the garden and it's beautiful. "I love watching the rabbits nibble on the grass. The fairy garden is my favorite," she said. "I just love being there. It's so peaceful."

SSD teacher Angela Slape said students use the garden as a break area to relax when frustrated, to practice leisure skills, and for sensory time. "Students may choose to sit on a bench, take a stroll, or try and find insects, including butterflies and moths as well as bees."

The garden also provides learning opportunities.

"Students benefit with a hands-on learning environment, specifically for science," said Slape. "Students can study the native flowers and various fruit trees, and search for various insects that populate the garden."



Ella, a student at Litzsinger School, enjoys the school's garden.

Teachers conduct science experiments in the garden and use the area for cooking classes.

"Recently one of my students brought in a peach pit and wondered how it grew," said Slape. "I was able to take him to the peach tree in the garden and provide a hands-on learning opportunity. We are now trying to grow a peach pit in my room to possibly add to the garden later on."

The garden was created in 2010 in memory of Mark L. Taylor. As a senior at Christian Brothers College High School, he performed service hours at Litzsinger. After being diagnosed with brain cancer shortly before his high school graduation, he passed away in 2009. Peggy Oge, a now-retired SSD teacher, and Patty Benner, an SSD audiology assistant, designed and created the original garden using funds raised by Taylor's friends and family.

"Mark wanted to become a teacher and I think through this amazing garden, his dream has been realized," said Benner. ■

The Power of Presence

Written by Melanie Fitzgerald, Ed.S.
SSD Effective Practice Specialist,
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The 21st century has advanced beyond our wildest dreams. With these advances, our lives are more comfortable in many ways, and yet these advances add to the never-ending distractions that can pull us away from the importance of human connection.

Parents, particularly those of children with disabilities, juggle a variety of responsibilities and may experience stress that impacts their home life and ability to enjoy everyday moments with their families.

Children need a good pilot to navigate the present and future. A calm, relaxed parent can guide the child to be as independent as possible. Parents and other family members can cultivate these qualities by using self-care strategies such as a secular mindfulness practice.

Although secular mindfulness is the current buzzword, it has been around for 29 years in some of the best medical facilities to assist patients with stress reduction.

Mindfulness: What is It?

Mindfulness is the intentional use of attention. The father of modern mindfulness, Jon Kabat-Zinn, defines mindfulness as “Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally. Bringing one’s complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis.” To parent nonjudgmentally and give ourselves a break as we learn and grow with our children could be a stress reducer in and of itself.

Why Use It?

Research supports mindful activities to reduce stress in adults and children. The daily practice can reduce stress and increase presence and connection between the parent and child.

Most people have 50,000 thoughts in one day. That includes mostly repetitive thoughts that interfere with people’s ability to focus. This increases stress as we continually think of the past or the future, rarely being present. Mindfulness can offer a time in our day to give our overworked, overstressed brains a break.



The Basics of Mindfulness

Mindfulness helps us put some space between ourselves and our reactions, breaking down our conditioned responses.

Here are some tips on how to tune into mindfulness throughout the day.

1. Set aside some time. You don’t need a meditation cushion or bench, or any sort of special equipment to access your mindfulness skills — but you do need to set aside some time and space.
2. Observe the present moment as it is. The aim of mindfulness is not quieting the mind or attempting to achieve a state of eternal calm. The goal is simple: we’re aiming to pay attention to the present moment, without judgment. Easier said than done, we know.
3. Let your judgments roll by. When we notice judgments arise during our practice, we can make a mental note of them, and let them pass.
4. Return to observing the present moment as it is. Our minds often get carried away in thought. That’s why mindfulness is the practice of returning, again and again, to the present moment.
5. Be kind to your wandering mind. Don’t judge yourself for whatever thoughts crop up. Just practice recognizing when your mind has wandered off, and gently bring it back.

Get more mindfulness tips and resources for families:
http://bit.ly/mindful_families

Read about mindfulness-based activities for children:
http://bit.ly/mindful_students

Special Education Foundation

Success Beyond the Classroom

The Hug Project

Ann DiFranco and Mary Ann Raghebi are lean, mean sewing machines. They have sewed and assembled 220 weighted blankets for students with disabilities who receive services from SSD to use in the classroom. Ann is the mother of former SEF board member Nan Murch, and Mary Ann is her neighbor. They have also recruited other friends to help.



Ann DiFranco (seated) and Mary Ann Raghebi

Some children find that these blankets provide security. They may be positioned on the body in the way that is most comforting to the child. The project is headed by Patty Benner, an SSD audiology assistant. Two generous companies donate the expensive plastic pellets that fill the blankets.

Financial donations to support this project can be sent to Special Education Foundation, 13545 Barrett Parkway Drive, Suite 300, Ballwin, MO 63021. Write "Project Hug" in the memo line of the check.

New Application Deadlines

John Cary Scholarship applications and Fred Saigh Leadership Program applications are due Jan. 11, 2019. Online applications are available at sef-stl.org/programs

Thank a Teacher

With the holidays upon us, consider honoring a teacher or paraprofessional with a donation to Special Education Foundation. Visit sef-stl.org/donate, select the memory/tribute link and enter the person's information. You and the recipient will be sent acknowledgment of the gift, and you'll be helping the Foundation support the wonderful students served by SSD

Another Great Year for Golf

Thank you to everyone who made 16th annual Dan McLaughlin Golf Tournament a success. For the second year in a row, the Foundation raised more than \$300,000 thanks to the generosity of countless sponsors, golfers (most ever at 296), bidders, diners and volunteers.

The event committee includes many SSD employees and retirees and 87 staff members volunteered on the day of the tournament, including Clare Kujath and Chris Dasal, who played bagpipes to usher the golfers onto the course.

Staff from two SSD departments — Deaf/Hard of Hearing/Audiology and Early Childhood — raised enough contributions that each department was able to sponsor a golf hole for \$1,000.

There is a competition among SSD schools to sell the most raffle tickets. Northview High School reclaimed the RED Apple Trophy (Remarkable Effort of Distinction) this year. The 2018 Fred Saigh Leadership Class also encouraged SSD teams to raise \$10,000 in the Kid to Camp challenge. Check out these young leaders at vimeo.com/273754217.

Save the date for next year's tournament, which is scheduled for Oct. 14, 2019. ■

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 tinyurl.com/SSDPAC, email pac@ssdmo.org or call 314.989.8448 ext. 6650. ■

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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 each student's success

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

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NEWS FROM SSD



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Student Scholarship Opportunities

The SSD Board of Education, as well as other organizations, 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 scholarship is unique, and has its own history and specific requirements. Visit www.ssdmo.org/student_scholarships.htm for applications.

Application deadlines for each scholarship are listed below.

- James E. Westbury Memorial Board of Education Scholarships – Jan. 11, 2019
- Bonhomme Lions Scholarships – Jan. 11, 2019
- Allison M. Haake Memorial Scholarship – Jan. 11, 2019
- Special Education Foundation John Cary Scholarships – Jan. 11, 2019