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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

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NEWS FROM SSD



**Special School District
of St. Louis County**
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BUILDING PROJECT UPDATES

proposition S

Investing in student success

Visit bit.ly/prop_s to see photos of construction progress on the new Northview High School, as well as building projects and renovations at several other SSD schools.

These improvements were made possible by voters' investment in SSD and its students through the passage of Proposition S in 2012. ■





SPECIAL EDITION



Issue 4, 2015

Student Crowned Missouri Miss Amazing Preteen

Natalie Taylor loves art, getting dressed up and traveling. Participating in the Missouri Miss Amazing Pageant allows her to do many of the things that she enjoys.

Natalie, a student who receives services from SSD at Truman Middle School in the Lindbergh School District, earned the Missouri Miss Amazing Preteen crown at the state pageant.

The Missouri pageant features contestants in a variety of age categories from throughout the state, and it celebrates girls with physical and other disabilities.

Natalie gained confidence and self-esteem by participating and winning the preteen title, said Julie Grassi, SSD physical therapist.

“The pageant helped Natalie realize the things that she can do,” said Grassi. “She is learning to advocate for herself and focus on her strengths rather than her limitations.”

In addition to having been diagnosed with autism, Natalie has Charcot Marie Tooth disease, which results in the progressive loss of muscle tissue. Grassi works with Natalie to try to regain flexibility and strength in her legs and core muscles.

“She is a beautiful girl, both inside and out,” said Grassi. “I am so proud that she has not allowed her physical limitations to hold her back from participating in activities.”

Laurie Taylor, Natalie’s mother, said the Missouri Miss Amazing Pageant is truly a wonderful experience. She said, “It celebrates the beauty of women and girls with special abilities. I am so proud of Natalie for having the confidence to be a part of it.”

As the winner of the Missouri competition, Natalie will be busy with official special appearances as well as representing her division in the national competition this summer at the Freud Playhouse at the University of California Los Angeles. It coincided with the World Special Olympics and the pageant contestants played a role in the event.

“When I won my title, I was so happy that I was in tears. I would like to see more girls participate,” said Natalie.

Natalie said she enjoyed getting dressed up. Contestants interviewed with the judges, walked on stage, introduced themselves and wore formal dresses.

Laurie Taylor said she would encourage others to participate in the Missouri Miss Amazing Pageant. “I love that they celebrate girls and women with different abilities. And I love watching the faces of all the participants enjoying their moment in the spotlight and hearing applause and cheers from their families.” ■



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– JULIE GRASSI, SSD PHYSICAL THERAPIST

For more information on the Miss Amazing Pageant, visit www.missamazingpageant.com.

Former Student Gives Back by Mentoring

Aristotle, considered the father of science, made contributions to the world that still have lasting effects to this day. Yet, without his mentor, Plato, it is impossible to know if he would have made the impact he did. The mentor-protégé relationship is nothing new; and passing down information from person to person is a fundamental aspect of learning. At St. Mary's Health Center, the mentor-protégé method is alive and well.

Two pharmacy technicians there, Mike Walker and Clarence Ray, have developed a great relationship where knowledge is passed from one to the other. Clarence is a student in SSD's Vocational Skills Program (VSP), and is learning the ropes in the St. Mary's pharmacy department.

A year ago, Mike was in the same position — a student learning the finer points of being a pharmacy technician. He quickly excelled at the position, learning the skills needed around the hospital, and gained other outside skills like improved communication, relationship building and personal transportation. St. Mary's hired him in October 2013. A year later, Clarence began at St. Mary's. And when he needed to be trained, it became apparent that Mike was in a unique position to guide Clarence, having been in his position just one year prior.

"It has been cool to see Mike go from part time to full time in less than a year and then be able to have that maturity and growth to teach someone whose shoes he was once in," said Alice Jensen, a VSP teacher with SSD at St. Mary's. "I think the rigor of the program helped Mike to grow at a time when he was ready."

The duties of a pharmacy technician are far and wide, and take them throughout the hospital working with nurses, filling medication dispensers, answering phone calls and filling stock orders at the central pharmacy.

"Working with nurses is the most challenging," Clarence said. "Also just experiencing more and being in a new place."

As a VSP student at St. Mary's, Clarence can learn the remaining skills he needs to earn his way to employment with St. Mary's or another pharmacy.

"The big difference here is they learn a full entry-level position," Jensen said. "The expectations are high — they wear the uniform, wear the badge and are seen and treated like employees and experience the culture of this work environment."

For observers, it is virtually impossible to tell the students from the employees. But students do have an added level of support built in from their teachers. For example, Jensen developed a map of the hospital's different floors so that Clarence could



Mike Walker (left) and Clarence Ray (right)

locate the prescription dispensing machines throughout the hospital when he was new to the position.

"My biggest goal is giving them the tools to be as independent as possible," Jensen said.

Now, Clarence makes his way through the hospital smoothly, often with Mike alongside.

"My favorite thing here is going on rounds because I get to walk around the hospital and have conversations with Mike and see other people here," Clarence said. "He has shown me a lot."

"The challenge is making sure he knows everything," Mike said. "Doing this (training) is a lot harder than I thought it would be."

Jensen stressed the importance of learning from a peer. "Clarence respects Mike a lot — that he's been through what he's going through," Jensen said. "And Mike's sense of humor really helped Clarence feel more comfortable."

Andy Yates, a specialist technician in pharmacy at St. Mary's, is the liaison between SSD and the pharmacy department and oversees the training process. He also trained Mike when he was a student.

"It's a great opportunity for the ex-student to take their experience and not just help someone else, but also say 'Hey, I came from the same thing,'" Yates said. "The two of them have a great rapport."

What does Clarence think about the prospect of training someone in the future?

"Mike trained me, so I'll pass it to someone else. And then they could pass it on to someone else," he said. ■

This issue of Special Edition features important dates, resources and opportunities for families, and we hope it will serve as a yearlong reference to help you plan for the upcoming school year and all it has to offer.

SAVE YOUR QUESTIONS FOR THE EXPERTS

SSD's Parent Education and Diversity Awareness Program offers families a variety of opportunities to learn more about special education and disabilities through educational workshops, District resources, referrals, resource fairs and other special events.

A variety of free workshops are offered on topics ranging from basic sign language and teaching kids social skills to college preparation and understanding the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. For more information about these events or to register, visit www.ssdmo.org/cool_tools/workshops.html



The Family & Community Resource Center (FCRC) provides a vast array of special education and disability-related tools and resources for SSD families and the community at large. The FCRC's collection includes thousands of books, journals, videos, resource packets and more. For details, visit www.ssdmo.org/cool_tools/fcrc.html. ■

SAVE THE DATE CALENDAR FOR SSD SCHOOLS*

AUG. 17, 2015	First Day of School
SEPT. 7, 2015	School closed in observance of Labor Day
OCT. 16, 2015	Teacher and staff workshops, no student attendance
NOV. 25–27, 2015	School closed in observance of Thanksgiving
DEC. 18, 2015	Teacher and staff workshops, no student attendance
DEC. 21, 2015– JAN. 1, 2016	School closed for Winter Break
JAN. 4, 2016	Teacher and staff workshops, no student attendance
JAN. 5, 2016	Students return from Winter Break
JAN. 18, 2016	School closed in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day
FEB. 15, 2016	School closed in observance of Presidents Day
MARCH 11, 2016	Teacher and staff workshops, no student attendance
MARCH 21–25, 2016	Spring Break
APRIL 22, 2016	Teacher and staff workshops, no student attendance
MAY 26, 2016	Last day of school for students
JUNE 13, 2016	Summer school begins

* Students that attend school in a partner district follow the school calendar of the partner district. Visit www.ssdmo.org/ssd_services/schools.html for links to partner district websites.

Community-based transition sites follow the SSD school calendar above.

SAVE MONEY

SSD, the Special Education Foundation, the Bonhomme Lions and a variety of other organizations offer scholarships to students who receive services from SSD. Applications can be found on the SSD website beginning in September at www.ssdmo.org. Application deadlines start in December. ■

Share Your Feedback



Do you have a suggestion, comment or concern regarding SSD? Visit the Comment Corner feature on our website to let us know, and we'll use your feedback to continuously improve the District. Visit bit.ly/ssd_comment_corner to share your feedback. ■