



Sixtimes

The Official Newsletter of Special School District No. 6



WINTER 2019

New career pathway courses spark passion in students

This fall, through the TriDistrict collective efforts of the school districts of South St. Paul (SSPPS), Inver Grove Heights, and West St. Paul – Mendota Heights – Eagan, as well as business partners, Twin Cities Orthopedics and North American Trailer, two new high school courses were offered in the fields of healthcare and transportation. These year-long courses are redefining the high school experience for the TriDistrict students that are a part of these unique and immersive learning experiences.

SSPPS recently talked with Tonya Reineke, mother of SSP senior Christopher, who participates in the transportation program. She noted that the experience has sparked a passion in her son that has helped him identify a career path for after high school. The following is taken from a letter Ms. Reineke shared with Superintendent Dave Webb and has granted permission for us to share here.

READ MORE about the TriDistrict Career and College Readiness programs at careercollegeready.org.



My son Christopher Reineke, SSP grade 12, is a part of the Careers in Transportation Business and Technologies program. Christopher has always had good grades, took honors courses, and has been involved in many school sports and activities at South St. Paul High School. He is a part of the National Honors Society and between the various sports and activities he has been involved in, he has lettered 10 times. Christopher is a well-rounded student who is proud of his school and the opportunities he has been given.

Last year Christopher came home from school excited after learning about the new TriDistrict program and has been happy with his decision to become a part of it. He has enjoyed his time at North American Trailer and is inspired to continue within this field. The teachers along with the hands-on training have been invaluable and we are looking forward to Christopher starting his North American Trailer Internship as a part of his educational experience.

On Nov. 15, 2018, Christopher received his acceptance letter from Dakota County Technical College (DCTC) into the Heavy Construction Equipment Technology AAS program. This is a program that fills quickly and has been known to have a waiting list. He is fortunate to have been accepted into this program. Christopher also has plans to work towards a B.A. with focus on Transportation Management after he receives his AAS degree. Metropolitan State University offers this degree on the DCTC campus.

The opportunities available within this field are vast and Christopher is excited about what the future holds. As parents, we are happy to see him succeed and seeing his confidence in himself growing.

Thank you for the opportunities you are offering our students.

Sincerely,
Mike and Tonya Reineke

Partnering with parents to support student success

Parents in Action classes are part of a national initiative known as PIQE which stands for Parent Institute for Quality Education. These classes help create an alliance between parents, students and schools to improve academic achievement. More than 250 Packer parents have participated and graduated from the course.

This winter, 23 Packer parents graduated from the South St. Paul Parents in Action course. Thank you, parents, for your time and dedication to Parents in Action, and for working as a team with school staff, students, parents and other active members of our community to be involved in SSP schools.

South St. Paul adds eight International Baccalaureate Diploma Graduates to global roster of IB-DP alumni



In 2018, the International Baccalaureate (IB) program celebrated 50 years of delivering education for a better world, 165,752 students received their IB Diploma, joining a community of more than 1.7 million lifelong learners. Among those recognized by the IB, eight were 2018 graduates of South St. Paul (SSP) Secondary.

LEARN MORE about the South St. Paul Secondary IB Diploma Program (IB-DP) at sspps.org/ib-diploma.

VIEW THE 2017-18 ANNUAL REPORT INSIDE!

TOGETHER

we can do so much more



We have much to be proud of here in South St. Paul. I am honored to be a part of this amazing SSP School Community Team, with our great students, outstanding staff, and supportive community. In working together we demonstrate that the collective power of many is greater than the individual achievements of one.

Our theme this year in South St. Paul Public Schools (SSPPS) is to develop high performing teams throughout our school system. We believe strongly that by working together and performing at high levels, incredible things can happen.

One such example of this can be seen in how we are using the resources from the 2018 community-supported operating levy. The funds allowed SSPPS to start the 2018-19 school year with increased support for our students, including lowered elementary class sizes and increased counseling and behavior intervention staff.

Another example, as noted on page one, is our transportation and healthcare career pathways program offered through our TriDistrict partnership. These innovative programs provide SSP students with hands-on, real-life, personalized learning experiences that are helping prepare them for life after graduation.

As we look to build on the successes we’ve already seen this school year, I ask for your continued involvement and partnership in helping to keep our district performing at high levels. In order for us to make good decisions that support the needs of all students, we need a high-performing School Community Team. Here are some ways you can join us:

- **Stay Informed** - Continue reading our print and digital newsletters, visit our website, and engage with us on our #SSPpride social media platforms.
- **Share Your Voice** - If you have an idea to improve academic success or positively impact student experiences, let’s talk about it. We want to hear from you.
- **Get Involved** - Research shows that family and community involvement has a significant impact on student achievement and engagement. Show off your “Packer Pride” — visit our schools, volunteer in our classrooms, be engaged.

By being informed, engaged and involved with SSPPS, you can help us reach our goals and achieve our vision of *igniting a passion in every learner to inquire, continuously improve and engage in positively changing our world.*

Dr. Dave Webb

Dr. Dave Webb
Superintendent of Schools



Research, training and relationships central to improving school climate

“All children come to school to learn,” said Connie Garling-Squire, director of early learning and equity. “But sometimes what they need to learn is not found in a textbook. The adults in the room need to be adept at understanding how students access learning and how they can help them with both content and behavior.”

Garling-Squire, who has worked in SSPPS for over 30 years in various positions, notes that today’s world is chaotic and it is “our job as adults and educators to help build structures for students to help them be successful.” For the past two years, SSPPS has conducted staff trainings and launched initiatives focused on increasing the capacity of teachers and staff to better respond to individual student needs, which in turn helps reduce incidences of negative student behavior and disciplinary actions.

But the district’s efforts are not solely focused on responding to negative situations. For Garling-Squire and other district leaders, even the district’s recent plan to reduce suspensions, exclusions and expulsions, as required by the Minnesota Department of Human Rights (MDHR), has resulted in positive outcomes for the district. Whether at the early learning level with Conscious Discipline, the K-12 level with PBIS [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports], or the monthly suspension review meetings with principals as a result of the MDHR requirement, district leaders have shifted the conversation away from solely looking at the negative actions of the students to more understanding of what education a student may need.

“More often than not, student behavior issues are the result of skills gaps in kids. They don’t have the skills to react or respond appropriately to a situation, so they act out in a negative way,” said Garling-Squire. “By helping to teach students conflict management skills and to better understand their social-emotional needs, we can help them to make better choices.”

Garling-Squire admits that disciplinary actions are still necessary at times, but giving teachers the training and tools to respond differently to kids’ behavior has resulted in better outcomes for everyone. She also noted that the addition of more counselors and behavior specialists this year have helped address some concerns.

“We still have work to do,” she said, “but we are making great progress in teaching our students and staff how to appropriately respond and react to situations before they get out of control. In the end, it is about finding ways to achieve positive outcomes for all students.”

“By helping to teach students conflict management skills and to better understand their social-emotional needs, we can help them to make better choices.”

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#SSPPRIDE TRENDING



Four SSP teachers nominated for 2019 MN Teacher of the Year

Two new faces join SSP School Board

On Nov. 6, 2018, voters elected two new members to the South St. Paul School Board. Bill Arend and Linda Diaz were each elected to a four-year term, along with incumbents Wendy Felton and Chris Walker.

The newly and re-elected members were sworn in at the Board’s organizational meeting on Jan. 14, 2019, joining current members Patricia Bjorklund, Nikki Laliberte and Jeff McClellan. Following the swearing in, the Board elected its officers for 2019 — Walker, chair, McClellan, vice chair, Bjorklund, treasurer, and Felton, clerk.

LEARN MORE about the Board at sspps.org/schoolboard.



Mindfulness helps students manage their behavior so they can focus on learning



It seems to be everywhere. Magazine covers, news stories, health clubs - everyone seems to be touting the benefits of mindfulness. So when a group of South St. Paul Public Schools (SSPPS) teachers came together last summer to learn about ways to incorporate mindfulness and yoga into their classroom, some were skeptical, worried that it was just another fad.

But, like the volumes of research that support mindfulness for everything from better health to increased productivity at work, many SSPPS teachers are finding success with the strategies and applications they learned at the “Mindfulness, Movement and Socio-Emotional Learning” workshop in August.

“I absolutely think the strategies are helpful — not just to my students, but to all of the adults in our room too,” said Jessica Green, Lincoln Center special education teacher. “Taking quiet moments to breathe together helps everyone get on the same page and ready to move forward. Many of the strategies are so portable and simple that I’ve already seen both the staff and students using them outside of the times where it’s part of the lesson.”

The training, conducted by Kathy Flaminio, whose experience as a regular and special education teacher helped to create instant credibility with the SSPPS faculty, aims to build emotional, physical and mental strength in both students and teachers. The link between these three areas resonated with the educators in the room.

“Without these practices and meeting the students at their social-emotional state, they are unable to learn to their fullest potential,” said Lincoln Center special education teacher

“ If kids can learn to be self-aware, quiet their minds and bodies, and educate themselves about their emotional, physical and mental health, they will become more competent in many areas. ”

Allie Dawson. “It should be our goal as educators to meet all students’ needs, both academically and socially-emotionally.”

“The Move Mindfully training provides you with many tools to demonstrate kind, compassionate and patient teaching,” added Sydney Jacobson, Kaposia and Lincoln Center occupational therapist. “It’s easy to respond to unwelcomed behaviors in a negative tone or with a bigger reaction than necessary. When you work with students and complete the techniques with the students, you are regulating your body, which in turn leads to something we call co-regulation. Co-regulation occurs when two individuals in an interaction are able to lend and borrow each other’s calm. Both parties feel safe and trust is built.”

According to Jacobson, this year they have seen more success with the students they work with than in past years. “We believe the move mindfully ‘calm/active/calm’ structure makes movements in the motor room more purposeful and provides structure for and consistency between staff.” Her team is in the process of collecting data on specific student outcomes related to readiness to learn in the classroom. “We are looking forward to seeing those results,” she said.

For fellow occupational therapist Denise Frederick, who works at Lincoln Center and SSP Secondary, those results are already apparent. “I have seen that if kids can learn to be self-aware, quiet their minds and bodies, and educate themselves about their emotional, physical and mental health, they will become more competent in many areas,” she said. “After I facilitated a group activity with some middle school students about releasing breaths and active yoga poses, a teacher mentioned that one of her students completed an entire math worksheet, which he had not been able to do all year. This was very exciting to hear!”

District continues to advocate for referendum equalization to “level playing field” of school funding

After receiving a clean audit in November and approving an overall decrease in the final tax levy for 2018 payable 2019, the district continues its fiscal stewardship of limited resources. South St. Paul Public Schools’ (SSPPS) property tax levy represents a decrease of 1.07 percent, compared to estimates statewide which show that the average school district levy actually increased by 6.4 percent this year.

“As we have shared with residents for many years, the way the state calculates property tax levies and state aid for schools is complex and unfair,” said Aaron Bushberger, SSPPS director of finance. “Several of our levies actually increased this year, but because of the increase in property values in South St. Paul, the portion of state aid decreases, resulting in the same amount of revenue for the district, but a shift to more burden on property owners. This is why we continue to fight for referendum equalization at the Legislature.”

Independent auditors issued an “unmodified opinion” on the district’s financial statements for the 2017-18 school year, which means no corrections were needed. The district’s fund balance did show a decrease by \$285,529, the result of intentional spending to enhance staffing at all schools, including decreasing class size at the elementary level and increasing counseling and support staff at the secondary level.

READ MORE about district finances, at sspps.org/finance.

District continues to study options for school start times and daily schedules, hopes for implementation in 2020-21

Following a September presentation by members of the Teen Sleep and School Start Time Study Committee, comprised of district parents, staff, and community members, the South St. Paul School Board identified options and next steps in moving forward with recommendations to have secondary students start their day later. Currently, South St. Paul (SSP) Secondary students start school at 7:50 a.m. The Board directed the administration to further assess costs and timelines for later secondary start options as identified by the team, with the goal of implementing new start times in the 2020-21 school year.

In addition, the Board also discussed a desire to explore alternative daily schedule options. Administration has broadened the scope to look at ways to restructure the school day PreK-12, noting that redesigning the school day could lead to additional teacher collaboration time and improved student outcomes.

“In addition to having zero hour, which runs contrary to the medical research about sleep and the adolescent brain, we also know that the current daily schedule limits our ability to think creatively about how learning can happen during the day,” said Superintendent Dave Webb. “It makes sense for us to look at all options to see what is viable and most importantly, best for all South St. Paul students.”

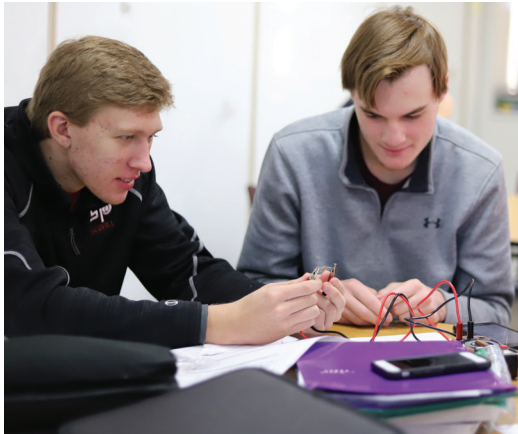
READ MORE about the studies at sspps.org/StartTimeReview.



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UPCOMING
EVENTS

FEBRUARY

- Feb. 18 - No School (holiday)
- Feb. 20 - Free Food Distribution (Secondary)
- Feb. 21 - Academic Choir Concert (Gr. 6-8)
- Feb. 25 - School Board Meeting
- Feb. 26 - Academic Choir Concert (Gr. 9-12)
- Feb. 28 - Free Food Distribution (Lincoln Center)
- Feb. 28 - Band Concert (Gr. 6-12)

MARCH

- March 6 - Last Day of Trimester 2
- March 6-7 - Elementary Conferences
- March 7-15 - No School (Spring Break)
- March 11 - School Board Meeting
- March 21 - Free Food Distribution (Kaposia)
- March 25 - School Board Meeting
- March 27 - Free Food Distribution (Secondary)

APRIL

- April 8 - School Board Meeting
- April 12-14 - Secondary Theatre Production
- April 18-19 - Secondary/CLC Conferences
- April 19 - No School (Professional Day)
- April 22 - School Board Meeting

FIND MORE events at sspps.org/calendar.



First graders at Lincoln Center explored the IB PYP Unit of Inquiry: Where We Are in Place and Time, with the central idea that exploring the past allows us to understand the changes in daily life. Special guests were invited to share their stories about the past and present with students on “Wisdom Wednesday.”



SSPPS is proud to be the first k-12 **International Baccalaureate (IB)** world schools district in Minnesota. Through the IB curriculum, students are invited to discover for themselves that learning can be an exciting, challenging and rewarding process of exploring the world around us.

LEARN MORE about our IB programs at sspps.org/ib.



Kaposia second graders learned in their IB PYP unit about how maps help people understand where they are and where they are going. Students in Mrs. Spafford's classroom designed and replicated their classroom into a mini 3D classroom map.



New preschool classes for kids age 2½ to 3 help them learn and practice social skills through play, stories, crafts and creative movement.

LEARN MORE about Early Learning programs at sspps.org/earlylearning.



Eighth graders in the IB MYP conducted research and prepared presentations focused on a social justice issue of their choosing. They shared a summary of their research topic, what the social justice issue was, and a potential solution for the issue.



Tenth graders recently presented their projects at the MYP Personal Project Fair. The Personal Project can be something the student organizes, or almost anything else that demonstrates their skills. Each student worked with a mentor who was available to answer questions and help with time management.

TriDistrict Community Education provides high quality, respectful, equitable, learning experiences for every person in the community - early learning programs, school-age care programs, youth enrichment programs, adult enrichment programs and senior programs.

LEARN MORE about the South St. Paul Community Education programs at tridistrictce.org.





Students in the Kids' Choice School-age Care program packaged books for children in need.



South Suburban Adult Basic Education (SSABE) provides adults in Northern Dakota County with educational opportunities to acquire and improve skills, including to become self-sufficient, proud employees, family members, and citizens. GED courses are also available.

LEARN MORE about ABE at tridistrictce.org.