



Sixtimes

The Official Newsletter of Special School District No. 6



Hands-on,
real-world
experiences
give SSPPS
students
an edge

Hands-on learning, building relationships with community business partners, thinking from a design perspective, and participating in internships and non-traditional classrooms are just a few of the innovative and real-world experiences South St. Paul students are gaining through their courses this year.

International Baccalaureate® (IB) and Center for Advanced Professional Studies (CAPS) courses help students explore possible career fields, but more importantly, teach life skills students can utilize in their future, no matter what that may be – technical school, college, entrepreneurship, military or career.

“If you step out of your comfort zone, you will be amazed at what you learn,” said Brynn Sexauer, a senior Business and Entrepreneurship student. “My internship has prepared me for what the business world is like and it will be super beneficial for me in the long run.”

“

I've learned to be a risk-taker and think outside of the box to come up with creative solutions to problems.

”

MACEY ELLIS
10TH GRADE IB DESIGN
TECHNOLOGY STUDENT



PROBLEM SOLVING AND DESIGN THINKING

Using computer-aided design (CAD) and 3D printing, IB Design Technology students dove deep into the world of design, discovering ergonomics, raw and refined materials, and becoming experts in identifying and solving problems using the design thinking process.

“I really learned how to present myself to others, have my voice be heard, and effectively communicate my ideas to a group,” Ellis said.

“The course has impacted the way I think about everyday objects that I come in contact with, like learning how and why the products around us are designed the way they are,” said senior Antonio Delfino.

In one project, Ellis and her peers identified a hallway that bottlenecks between first and second period when Second Chance Breakfast is served. Through the customer discovery process, they learned about the hallway being difficult to navigate, causing students to be late to class. The group prototyped possible solutions and worked with Nutrition Services and administration to see which options were realistic and cost-effective.

“I learned about all the different things that go into solving problems,” Delfino said. “A lot of people need to be made happy with a solution, which is a lot harder than what I had initially thought.”

The group eventually pitched moving Second Chance Breakfast to a less congested hallway, which also necessitated moving WiFi routers and adding an electrical outlet.

“While solving these problems, students are building ‘21st-century skills,’ which have identified as essential to success in the workspace,” said Mike Gehlsen, IB Design teacher. “The greatest improvement I saw was around critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, digital literacy, self-direction and flexibility.”



EXPLORING & HANDS-ON LEARNING IN THE TRADES

Exploring trades careers and getting hands-on building experience are two of the 10th graders' main focuses in the Introduction to the Trades course. This year, students are building two sections of a wall, including framing, sheetrock, mudding and taping, finishing, painting and electric work.

“This course helps prepare students who are going into the trades to get a better idea of what it takes to be successful,” said Andrew Doran, Introduction to Trades teacher. “It’s a powerful course for all students, as they learn life skills of working in teams, problem solving and being able to complete basic home maintenance.”



INTERNSHIPS AND REAL-WORLD LEARNING WITH LOCAL BUSINESS PARTNERS

Students are experiencing life in local businesses first-hand through the Business and Entrepreneurship program, the newest addition to the TriDistrict’s CAPS program. It is available for 11th- and 12th-graders at South St. Paul, Henry Sibley and Simley high schools, and combines classroom instruction, group projects, mentorships and internships.

“First semester we prepared for being a part of the business world, learning everything from how to dress like a business professional, to a proper handshake and looking people in the eye, to resume writing,” said Sexauer.

Throughout the year, students learn about different types of businesses, hear from guest speakers and work on projects for local businesses. In one project with Hardline Concrete and Masonry, students were challenged to help the company find and retain student-aged employees. After researching options, students like SSP junior Josh Leon presented the idea of setting up an Instagram account.

“Instagram is where most Gen Z and young adults are. It has a nice balance of businesses and friends,” he said. “And it doesn’t seem like an invasive space for a company to recruit on.”

Hardline took the students’ advice and implemented Instagram into their recruitment strategy, which has already helped hire several new young employees. Leon is currently interning with Evolve Workplace, helping them with social media, branding and targeting marketing.

Sexauer accepted a marketing internship with Rihm Kenworth, a local trucking company, after interviewing for and being offered three internships. Her internship provides her with opportunities to learn about each department, participate in executive meetings, and more.

“The knowledge I’ve gained is invaluable and my experiences look awesome on college applications, my resume and my LinkedIn profile,” Sexauer said. “Plus I’ve learned to network with professionals in the industry.”



STAY CONNECTED!

f /sspps6

🐦 @sspps6

📷 @sspps6

📺 SouthStPaulSchools

✉ sspdirect@sspps.org



Increased learning opportunities outside of the regular school day focus on building academic and social skills

Learning for students can happen at any time, not only during the school day. In South Saint Paul Public Schools (SSPPS), students are finding new opportunities to access personalized learning before school, after school and in the summer through the district's Targeted Services program.

"We are really excited about the new offerings and opportunities in Targeted Services this spring and summer," said Robin O'Reilly, Community Learning Center assistant principal who leads Targeted Services district-wide. "This program really allows us to help meet the needs of students outside of the school day in a fun and different way."

Targeted Services is a state funded program that offers additional learning opportunities for students kindergarten through eighth grade who may be struggling in the regular school program and need additional time to develop skills and abilities.

According to O'Reilly, the key to Targeted Services is that the learning experience should look different than it does during the school day. Through hands-on activities and projects, students explore new ways to learn content and build their academic and social skills. SSPPS Targeted Services also helps fifth graders transition to middle school through a special program in July that focuses on helping them learn how to work a combination locker, navigate passing time, and build relationships with the sixth-grade staff.

TARGETED SERVICES PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



Concepts taught in the classroom are reinforced and taught in new and energizing ways.



Students build relationships with their peers and teachers, making learning more fun and interesting.



Academics, social-emotional skills and other developmental skills are emphasized for each student.



Learning opportunities are interesting, culturally relevant and adapted to the interests of each student.

Whether it is through cooking, art, yoga or field trips, students find themselves engaged in learning that helps build skills and confidence, which in turn helps them to be more successful in the future.

Creating a vision for our future

Six years ago, I remember sitting together with SSP community members, parents, staff and students as we built our 2020 Vision for South St. Paul Public Schools. It seems like only yesterday, and yet it is already the year 2020. As we reflect back at our successes, we are stronger as a school district because of Vision 2020. Over the past five years, many of the improvements that we now see district-wide are the result of many people pulling together in the same direction with the same vision to better serve our students.



Now it is already time to create our SSP Schools Vision 2025. Over the past two months, we have been busy meeting with groups of students, staff, parents and community members to develop our next five-year vision for SSP Schools.

To date, we have received feedback from over 200 participants about the hopes and dreams for an improved SSP experience. As we work to combine each of these key themes into our Vision 2025 framework, it helps us, just as it has for the past five years, to create better yearly goals, targets and vision. It will better serve us to achieve success, together. Our goal, and the reason we take the time to listen to each of you is to build a shared vision, and create a shared plan and roadmap for us as we do our day-to-day and year-to-year work. We want to continue to create the best possible service and support for our students, staff and each one of you.

Now as we head toward, and plan for, the year 2025, we again want to pull together, as a community, to provide the best possible educational experience for our children. That is our goal. That is why we exist as a school district. And we appreciate all of your support and partnership to help us achieve this goal. Go Packers!

Dr. Dave Webb
Superintendent of Schools



District addresses \$4.1 million budget shortfall for 2020-21 school year

In March, the South St. Paul School Board received the administration's recommendations for addressing a projected \$4.1 million budget shortfall. According to district officials, the gap is the result of declining enrollment, increasing costs and inequitable state funding. The School Board approved the recommendations in April.

"This is the largest reduction we have had to make in our district in the last decade, so the impact to our organization is significant," said Superintendent Dave Webb. "We don't bring these recommendations to you easily, but I am proud of our leadership team's work to get a set of recommendations that is balanced across the district."

RECOMMENDED BUDGET ADJUSTMENTS

- Reduce Fund Balance By 2% = \$800,000**
District policy currently requires a 12% fund balance. By reducing the fund balance to 10%, the district can access one-time funds to help address the budget shortfall, while remaining financially secure.
- Access Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) Fund Reserves = \$775,000**
The OPEB trust fund provides retirement benefits, other than pensions, for district employees. The fund currently has excess reserves. Accessing the fund balance will not impact benefits for retirees, but it will provide one-time resources to help address the budget shortfall.
- Realign Staffing to 2019-20 Class Size Norms = \$1.26 Million**
Current staffing levels are below class size norms approved by the SSP School Board. As enrollment drives revenue, staffing must be realigned to enrollment, which has decreased in the last two years. This realignment to current norms, with no change in norms recommended for next year, will result in the reduction of 18 teaching positions. According to a recent study, the district's current class sizes are among some of the lowest in the metro, and will likely remain so given no recommended change to staffing norms.
- Additional Program and Staff Adjustments = \$1.26 Million**
Additional budget redesigns, reductions and revenue generations were identified including restructuring and/or cutting some positions and adjusting current program and services.

Webb noted that while there will be significant staffing adjustments, the plan does include a new comprehensive student support model that will be consistent at each level of the organization -- elementary, middle school and high school. "We've heard from our staff and families about the need to better address behavior concerns," Webb said. "By creating a consistent, comprehensive student support model at each site, we will be better able to provide the needed support and services that students, families and staff desire."

"Nonetheless, this remains a really sad time for our school system that we have to make such cuts," added Webb. "I am most upset about the state and how the funding formula is hurting our kids. That is what I am most angry about. But I also believe that we have to stay focused on the goal of being the best IB district, and I believe we can still be the best."



Systematic approach to literacy instruction helps build skills and passion for reading

Reading is foundational for all learning. Yet according to many educational experts, it is one of the most difficult skills for a human to learn.

“Learning to read isn’t a natural process for humans. So teaching children how to read is a difficult endeavor,” said Ryan Higbea, IB PYP and curriculum coordinator at Kaposia Education Center. “Reading involves many interrelated skills. If a child isn’t able to read successfully, it is our job to figure out what’s missing.”

According to Theresa Starkman, assistant director of learning and special services, South St. Paul Public Schools (SSPPS) uses a systematic approach in how students’ reading abilities are assessed and how interventions are provided to students who need them. “This systematic approach helps us to provide the necessary resources and supports to ensure students are not only growing their literacy skills, but also helping to them to grow a passion and love for reading that will stay with them throughout their lives.”

In addition to, and perhaps even more important than a student’s score on a state test, SSPPS teachers are using a variety of assessments to help measure a student’s reading ability and progress, which in turn helps them provide personalized instruction and support to help students reach their targets. In SSPPS, students are screened at least three times per year to assess what literacy skills they are proficient in and in which areas they need additional support.

If the screening assessment shows a student is not proficient or lacks a skill, school staff provide additional diagnostic assessments to help determine what skills are missing. Once staff members know what skills are missing, appropriate remediation interventions, using research-based materials and curricula, are applied to help students learn each skill. Similarly, students who are meeting reading targets are challenged to continue growing their literacy skills and abilities.

Once a student’s needs are identified, teachers turn to a balanced literacy approach that focuses on understanding words, reading and writing.

“Building a foundation for success in reading and writing really depends on a solid understanding of words and sounds,” said Kaposia kindergarten teacher Katie Linscheid. “By balancing word work, writing and reading, students have the opportunity to apply their learning in each area.”



“**When a child knows how to read, millions of concepts are open to them. They can solve math problems, build on complicated concepts, analyze and synthesize information, and conceptualize an ever-changing world.**”
- Ryan Higbea

Understanding words means that students have strong phonemic awareness, or that they can hear different sounds within the English language. Students then build on these phonics skills by matching sounds with specific printed letters.

To increase students’ skills around reading, SSPPS teachers use engaging, relevant, cognitively complex grade-level materials. Students read a variety of texts to grow their exposure to literature, informational texts and foundational skills.

To grow students’ writing capabilities, teachers encourage students to write on topics that are interesting to them while balancing writing by hand and typing on the computer. Students learn how to develop arguments in opinion pieces, provide summary information, and convey their thoughts or feelings through creative writing.

“One of the most important measures of success around reading is building that love for reading, and this balanced approach helps to do that” said Starkman. “When a student picks up a book or discovers their favorite author, it means our work in the classroom is moving us closer to ensuring all students are strong readers.”



Literacy program helps students with limited verbal skills better communicate

Thanks to a targeted teaching approach called Core Vocab, teachers with Lincoln Center’s Students with Unique Needs (S.U.N.) program are making more strides than what was previously possible with students who have limited verbal skills.

Research shows that 85 percent of all communication is comprised of about 300 words. If other words are used in a sentence, those words can largely be switched out for one of the 300 basic vocabulary words. The Lincoln Center teachers identified 48 of the 300 words to focus on with the Core Vocab program. These 48 words are displayed on a communication board or paper with photos and text within the classroom. Student then point to the words to indicate what they mean when communicating with adults and other students. By using Core Vocab, students are learning the most important words they will need to communicate every day in all aspects of their lives.

“We have worked with students who had maybe two to six verbal words, who are now able to verbally express 42 out of the 48 words,” said Deanna Roering, Lincoln Center special education teacher. “They are also able to use their new vocabulary in different settings such as in general education and English Language Learning classes, with specialists, and at home.”

According to Roering, Core Vocab allows students to answer comprehension questions on things they’ve read in class and ask new questions about the text, giving them new opportunities to engage with what they are reading. “It has opened up many opportunities for the students and teachers to understand each other and communicate in new ways.”



South St. Paul Public Schools

104 5th Avenue South
South St. Paul, MN 55075
sspps.org

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT #134
SOUTH ST. PAUL,
MN

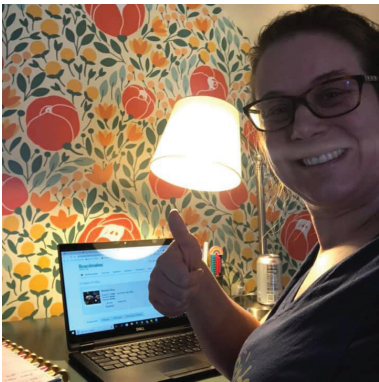
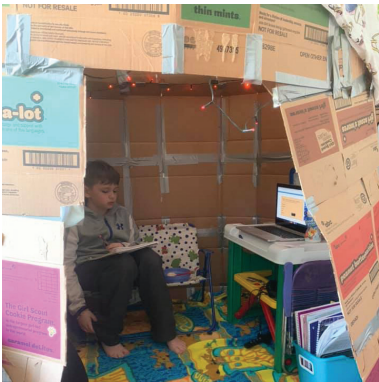


Follow our journey
on social media with
these hashtags:

#SSPpride

#SSPcares

#SSPlearns



On Monday, March 30, SSPPS
embarked on a new experience
with the launch of the district's
Distance Learning Plan.

The district also continues
to provide breakfast and
lunches to local students
seven days a week.



Natalie Fredricks is a full-time mom
with two children attending SSPPS. Both
children attended the early childhood family
and are currently attending preschool and
kindergarten at Lincoln Center Elementary.
As the president of the Early Learning
Advisory Council (ELAC), Natalie continues
to actively support and advocate for our
youngest students and families.

Parents share benefits of experience with SSP Early Learning Program

What do you appreciate about the South St. Paul Early Learning classes?

FREDRICKS: I love the teachers. They feel more like family and they love my kids unconditionally.

COLATO: My child can learn by playing. I also get to explore all the resources offered by the district.

What is the best thing you learned or gained from participating in Early Learning classes?

FREDRICKS: The best thing I gained was my best friend whom I met during the baby classes. I also love seeing how much my kids have grown up over the years and how well behaved they are after taking ECFE classes.

COLATO: I have learned how to put patience into practice, and a better understanding of the different developmental stages of children.

How will your experience in Early Learning help you and your child when they move on to kindergarten?

FREDRICKS: My children now have the basic social skills of being around their peers, respecting adults, and learning how to behave in classroom settings. They know how to listen well, sit in a circle, and stick up for themselves and one another. They are very well prepared for kindergarten.

COLATO: I know that my daughter will be better prepared. She has learned how to play well with other children and how to behave in a classroom.



Claudia Colato is a working mom with two children attending SSPPS. Her oldest son, Jeancarlos, is currently attending first grade at Lincoln Center Elementary. She attends parent education and early childhood family education classes with her youngest daughter, Sofia.

What would you say to other families in South St. Paul who are thinking about enrolling in Early Learning classes?

FREDRICKS: It is healthy as a parent and child to be interacting with other kids. It's a very non-judgmental environment where you can learn from other parents who may or may not be going through similar experiences. It's a great place to get resources for new and young parents. The Early Learning and Family Education classes truly make you feel like you're not alone in parenting.

COLATO: Do not hesitate to register and experience how wonderful it is for both children and parents.

Why did you choose to enroll in Early Learning classes?

FREDRICKS: I get to meet people in the community with children my kids' ages and knowing that my daughter would be in classes with these peers until graduation.

COLATO: It is a great place to learn new things for both myself and my children. During ECFE class, my child learns to be independent and play with other kids. I get to meet with a teacher and other parents to learn about parenting and child development skills.

Visit sspps.org/earlylearning to learn more about the South St. Paul Early Learning programs.