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Periodic Newsletter for Sesser-Valier Community Unit School District No. 196
Volume 2, Issue 1, August, 2013



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WHAT'S NEW THIS YEAR?

- ◆ Five new staff members
- ◆ New CollegeBoard Advanced Placement® course offerings at SVHS
- ◆ Increased implementation of national Common Core State Standards
- ◆ Minor facility improvements to enhance learning environment
- ◆ Additional mobile technology for student use

A WORD FROM SUZANNE JOHNSON...

"I'm happy to be back at SVHS. But, more important, I'm glad to be alive," Johnson said. "Our house fire was an unbelievable experience, but our community's quick response to help was extraordinary. Our family is indescribably grateful to our friends, students, colleagues, churches, and communities. Simply, thank you!"

SV goes back-to-school, welcomes new staff.

On August 16, 2013, SV students and staff members came together again as the 2013-2014 school year started. District teachers returned to school a day earlier to make final preparations for students' return. Classroom instruction began on Day 1 as staff members implemented a legally-required calendar change that was adopted by the Illinois General Assembly in 2012.

The District welcomed the following five new staff members to its ranks for 2013-2014:

- Elementary/Junior High School Office Manager: Sherry DeAngelo
- High School Mathematics Teacher: Meredith Emling
- JHS/HS English/Language Arts Teacher: Kayla Priebe
- High School Spanish Teacher: Megan Purcell
- Elementary Library Clerk: Paige Ruffino

Mrs. Priebe & Ms. Purcell are familiar faces to SVHS students, having previously substituted in the district during the 2012-2013 school year.

Suzanne Johnson, longtime SVHS English Teacher, re-joined the faculty to teach during the 2013-2014 school year following a severe accident in May, 2012. Johnson's return marks a significant milestone in her recovery and for the District's high school English program. Welcome back, Mrs. Johnson!

A great school year begins with strong partnerships. We value the trust that you place in the District every day. Thank you for your support of SV196 schools!

Advanced Placement® comes to SVHS.

Course offerings broaden opportunities for students

Every school year, SV196 staff members work to enhance curriculum options for students, but the 2013-2014 school year is different—in a good way. Beginning this school year, Sesser-Valier High School is offering (for the first time) national CollegeBoard Advanced Placement® courses to its junior & senior students.

The move comes after the 2010 adoption of the Dual Credit Quality Act, a change in the law governing dual credit courses. The Act requires dual-credit course instructors to have Master's degrees or other extensive college study in the academic area in which they are providing instruction. Rend Lake College notified SVHS Principal Wes Choate of the law change, and SVHS staff members began studying other options to benefit students.

"Very few high school teachers possess Master's degrees in the area in which they teach," Choate wrote in a series of school newsletters published in Spring, 2013. "SV juniors and seniors will continue to be able to enroll in dual enrollment courses which are offered on weekday evenings and during the summer months."

Students who enroll in AP® courses will have the opportunity to gain college credits accepted by most colleges and universities across the nation, a benefit that Choate believes will appeal to students.

"Our students now have opportunities that are regularly available in larger high schools across the nation, but with the advantages of small-school instruction. The credit-transfer available with AP® courses opens new college choice options that may not have been feasible previously," Choate said.

The transition in instruction from dual-credit to AP® courses didn't come easy. SVHS teachers Craig Garner and John Shadowens spent the summer charting new territory in their instructional methodology, having to gain CollegeBoard approval for their course outlines. But, their work was all for their students' benefit.

"I'm teaching details of history topics that I've never taught before. It's taking teaching to another level," Garner said, "and it's energized me as a teacher."

Shadowens agreed that AP® brings "a substantial increase in rigor" for students and teachers. "I've had to work a lot harder" preparing for "uncharted territory," Shadowens said. "Students are receptive to the workload, more serious, and more focused in their work. They're definitely working harder."

The course change doesn't come without apprehension, though. Both Garner & Shadowens worry that success of the program will be judged by the percentage of students who pass the spring AP® exam. "The success of the program isn't just measured by one test. Kids are learning more rigorous material, and they are better prepared for college. They are better off after taking an AP® course, even if they don't pass the test," Garner said.

Choate praised his students and staff members for *Elevating Expectations*, this year's SVHS theme. "SVHS students and staff members were ready for a new challenge. And, they're confronting the challenge head-on. I can't wait to see their achievements."

Questions regarding dual credit and Advanced Placement® courses should be addressed to Mr. Choate at SVHS (Ext. 100).



What do SVHS students have to say about AP® courses?

- ◆ "I'm getting prepared for the next level."
- ◆ "The classes require more writing, even some timed writing. They're tougher."
- ◆ "The material is more in-depth than what we've had."
- ◆ "The expectation is for us to analyze & interpret what we've read, not just write what went on in the reading passages."
- ◆ "We're rewarded for a more expansive vocabulary."
- ◆ "It's the hardest class I've ever had. I'm getting prepared for college."
- ◆ "They're not holding our hands; they're preparing us for college."
- ◆ "Taking tougher classes at SV is an advantage because I can get more one-on-one help."
- ◆ "We're being taught to write more formally, not just write how we talk."
- ◆ "I'm OK with harder grading and the possibility of not getting an A because I'm learning a lot more."
- ◆ "I'm more focused as a student, and the study habits I'm learning in AP are rubbing off on my other classes."
- ◆ "I think it's a good idea that we really needed. It pushes us."



FOCUS

District Mission

The Sesser-Valier Community School District's mission is to provide a superior educational environment so that every child is educated and graduates with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to achieve significant career, educational, civic and personal goals which will generate confident, productive, and responsible citizens.

FUTURE TOPIC

State Funding for Schools

In the next issue of *red.devil.details*, a Question/Answer section will address the most Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) regarding state funding for schools. These FAQs are sometimes the most common revenue questions that we encounter. The next edition of the district newsletter will address this issue in detail.

District Procedure 101.

Payment of student fees and other expenses occurs throughout the school year, not just at enrollment. Here are some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) regarding payment of student fees:

Q: What student fees does SV196 charge?

A: The most common student fees/expenses that parents incur are book rent (\$35/student; \$60 family maximum), lunch costs (K-5: \$1.95; 6-12: \$2.20), parking permit fees (\$20) and driver's education lab fees (\$25).

Q: How can student fee payments be made?

A: SV196 accepts cash, personal checks, money orders and Illinois Funds E-Pay online payments (see below).

Q: How can I pay student fees online?

A: SV196 accepts Illinois Funds E-Pay online payments. Illinois E-Pay is available by web link on the district's website at www.sv196.org (see "E-Pay" under Quick Links on district home page). Illinois Funds E-Pay payments can be made by MasterCard, American Express, and/or Discover.

Q: Is there a process for waiver of school fees?

A: Yes, in certain circumstances. SV196 participates in the federal free/reduced lunch program. To qualify for free/reduced lunches, parents/students must meet certain federally-established household income requirements. Household income statements

may be subject to verification pursuant to federal lunch program rules.

Students who qualify for free lunches may also qualify for a waiver of book rent and driver's education lab fees (separate district application form required). Questions regarding free/reduced lunch applications and student fee waiver applications should be directed to the applicable building principal's office (Elem/JHS @ Ext. 118; HS @ Ext. 100).

Q: Does SV196 charge fees for participation in extracurricular activities/athletics?

A: No. While students who participate in extracurricular activities may incur some supply/equipment/clothing/travel expenses, the district does not charge a participation fee.

How Can I Know?

Q: How can I keep track of how my child is doing in school?

Parents can find out about their child's school progress by:

1. Contacting the student's classroom teacher(s) directly by phone at (618) 625-5105 and leaving a voicemail message for a return phone call;
2. Scheduling a conference appointment with the student's classroom teacher(s) for a face-to-face discussion; or
3. Contact the applicable school office to set-up online grade record access. Online student record access for parents simply requires an e-mail address and Internet accessibility.



Photo by Lynn Keller, Author

Help Us Help You!

We want your feedback! If you like reading about school district activities, education topics, or special features of students' activities, please let us know. Your suggestions and constructive feedback are necessary to help us keep you informed about the issues that matter the most. Please call (618) 625-5105, Ext. 105 (Superintendent's Office) or e-mail jdhenry@sv196.org with your feedback.

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Upcoming Events

Labor Day Holiday

District schools will be closed on Monday, September 2, 2013, to observe Labor Day. Student attendance will resume on Tuesday, September 3, 2013.

Columbus Day Holiday

District schools will be closed on Monday, October 14, 2013, to observe Columbus Day. Student attendance will resume on Tuesday, October 15, 2013.

School Improvement Day/Teacher Workshop Day

Students will be dismissed at 11:50 AM on Thursday, October 24, 2013, for a teacher workshop activity. Student attendance will resume on Monday, October 28, 2013.

Thanksgiving Holiday

District schools will be closed on Thursday, November 28th & Friday, November 29th, to observe Thanksgiving. Student attendance will resume on Monday, December 2, 2013.

Sesser-Valier Community Unit School District No. 196

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