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Periodic Newsletter for Sesser-Valier Community Unit School District No. 196
Volume 2, Issue 2, March, 2014



SVJHS science teacher goes around the world.

Don't tell SVJHS Science Teacher Holly Dunderdale that a missed opportunity is always lost. After thinking she might never get there, Dunderdale saw the pieces fall into place for her to travel around the world to South Africa in November, 2013. The Robert Noyes Master Science Teacher Fellow "wouldn't have ever gone" without fellowship program funding and an almost half-price airfare.

"This was one of my bucket list items," Dunderdale said in a recent interview. "I had a friend who had previously served in the Peace Corps, but I didn't make the trip back then. My friend and her family went back to South Africa for a month, and I was able to go visit her." What she learned, both personally & educationally, impacts her teaching.

"The world seems like a smaller place that is attainable. Not only can I share my experiences with kids, but I can encourage them to try new things and reach farther," Dunderdale reminisced. "What once seemed out-of-grasp for me was great, both personally and professionally." Dunderdale observed conservation practices and geological features that have made their way into her class curriculum. She also stayed in both an African village and a "luxury tent." "The more I learn, the more I have to share," Dunderdale said. "Kids are kids, no matter where they are."

Dunderdale has taught science at SVJHS for 12 years and is originally from Effingham, Illinois.

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AND A MARATHON TOO?

Challenges are no problem for Dunderdale...even in the 20th mile. Before her trip to South Africa, Dunderdale completed the Chicago Marathon in October, 2013, helping the running community to say, "We're back" following recent tragic events at major marathons. Her run also helped raise \$1,500, double her goal, for the Komen Foundation.

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR OUR COMMUNITY: WE NEED YOU!

State funding for schools.

By now, it's no secret that public schools in Illinois are faced with major programming decisions because the State of Illinois is not fulfilling its statutory obligation to fund General State Aid (GSA) to schools. Widely available media reports continue to show budget cuts, program cut-backs, and other unprecedented major changes to school programs due to funding shortfalls.

State funding shortfalls for SV196 are no different. Since Fiscal Year 2012, the State of Illinois has prorated, or reduced, the GSA paid to schools each year. Now in the third year of state shortfalls, public school districts, including SV196, are beginning to feel the pinch.

During Fiscal Year 2014, SV196 will not receive \$400,632 of GSA that it should because of the state's reduction (the biggest reduction yet). In total, SV196 has lost \$975,662 in GSA during the last three years (FY12, FY13, & FY14) due to the state's failure to pay GSA at the statutory rate. In other words, the State of Illinois has "shorted" SV196 almost \$1 million over the last three years, and the end of the shortfalls is not in sight.

"State education leaders are now advising schools that next year, the 2014-2015 school year, may be worse," District Superintendent Jason Henry reported at a March 10th board meeting. "ISBE representatives have esti-

mated the 2014-2015 GSA proration at 80-85%," Henry said.

General State Aid is the largest portion of state funding for schools and is based on student attendance rates. In SV196, GSA accounts for about 54% of the district's revenue. When all state funding is considered, SV196 receives over 64% of its revenue from state sources (*Source: 2013 District Report Card*). For comparison, local property taxes in SV196 account for 21.1% of the district's revenue.

Public school districts in Illinois like SV196 are dependent on GSA being paid in-full, on-time. When that doesn't happen, schools must 1) dip into cash reserves for short-term relief or 2) make programmatic cut-back decisions. To date, SV196 has been able to avoid programmatic cut-backs by utilizing cash reserves that have been built over time. But, unless the State of Illinois fixes its school funding problems, the district's cash reserves cannot sustain the same educational programs indefinitely.

"To borrow the words of a school official in another Southern Illinois school district, 'We are underfunded, we are not overspending,'" Henry said. "District staff members are very good caretakers of public funds, and don't take that responsibility lightly."

So, how can you help? As state leaders formulate the state budget for next year, we need our community members to be engaged in the process. State leaders need to know what's important to you! We believe that education is a key factor in lifelong success, and we trust that you agree.

Questions regarding school funding or the district's programs should be addressed to Mr. Henry at SV196 (Ext. 105).



Operation Teen Safe Driving: An SVHS specialty...

SVHS Student Council members and ALPHA program leaders joined together recently to lead *Operation Teen Safe Driving*, an Illinois Department of Transportation program designed to decrease occurrences of distracted driving. The program, co-sponsored by The Allstate Foundation, Ford Motor Company Fund, and IDOT is in its fourth year at SVHS.

SVHS student leaders conducted random seatbelt checks, led a community "Black Out" at a boys basketball game, managed a distracted driving obstacle course using golf carts, raised a special OTSD flag at the school campus, and worked alongside Illinois State Police troopers to facilitate student participation in *The Convincer*, a seat-belt awareness activity. SVHS students designed a school-wide safe driving campaign, incorporating the OTSD program themes.

SVHS Student Council Sponsor Dana Laur & ALPHA Peer Leader Sponsor Kerri Henry facilitate the OTSD program at SVHS. This is the fourth year that SVHS students have participated in the OTSD program.





District Procedure 101: Help us help you!

In order to assure collaborative relationships between students' families and the District, and to enable parent(s)/guardian(s) to become an active partner in their children's education, the District strives to keep parents informed about their child's school and education. We also encourage parents to be involved in their child's school and education by informing them on how they can assist in their children's learning. (*Board Policy 8:95*)

When questions or concerns arise, the best place to begin is with the person(s) directly involved. Normally, that would be the teacher where a student-related problem is involved, for example, or the principal where a school regulation or practice is what concerns you.

When a situation cannot be resolved at the lowest possible level, then it should be taken to the next level in a kind of "chain of command." Once you have talked to the teacher and principal, you may still have to bring to the attention of the superintendent those matters that involve state laws or district-wide policies. When the superintendent cannot resolve your question or problem, you should ask to address the board at the next regular board meeting. The SV196 Board of Education sets aside time at each meeting for public input. (*Board Policy 3:30*) The Board is interested in receiving suggestions and concerns from members of the school community. (*Board Policy 8:110*)

If the question or concern is important enough to be brought before a public meeting of the full board, you'll find that this approach gets a much better response because individual board members have no authority other than voting on official actions at board meetings. (*Board Policy 2:10*)

Your views are strengthened when they can be read as well as heard. Except in very unusual circumstances, if you take your question or concern to the person(s) directly involved first, you will likely get your question or concern resolved quickly.

If you are uncertain who you should contact regarding a question or concern, please contact the district superintendent's office. District Secretary Vera Malinee or Superintendent Jason Henry will gladly help guide you.

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

Extracurricular Activities

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

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.



Image courtesy of Ambro/FreeDigitalPhotos.net

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

Spring Break

Students will be dismissed at 2:19 PM on Friday, April 11, 2014, for spring break. Student attendance will resume on Tuesday, April 22, 2014.

Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE)

SVHS Juniors will take the annual PSAE on Wednesday, April 23, and Thursday, April 24, 2014.

School Improvement Day

Students will be dismissed at 11:50 AM on Friday, April 25, 2014, for a teacher workshop activity. Student attendance will resume on Monday, April 28, 2014.

SVHS Academic Awards Banquet

The annual SVHS Academic Awards Banquet will be held on Tuesday, April 29, 2014, at 6:00 PM in the high school gym.

Sesser-Valier Community Unit School District No. 196

4626 State Highway 154
Sesser, IL 62884

618.625.5105 ph
618.625.6696 fax

www.sv196.org