

Empowering Success

In & Beyond the Classroom

2026 ANNUAL REPORT

Special Education Foundation

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Dear Friends,

The past year has been a remarkable year for the Special Education Foundation in assisting and empowering students with disabilities in St. Louis County, working closely with the Special School District.

In total, **SEF positively impacted more than 8,000 students through our many programs, each designed to support and inspire learners of all abilities throughout St. Louis County.**

While this overall number is impressive, it's really the individual impact of our work that tells the true story of the vital role SEF plays in supporting students, their families, and the educators in the SSD community. The stories that follow are only possible because of the unwavering support of our donors. Each example directly reflects how your generosity helps students thrive, providing resources and opportunities that would not exist without your investment. Here are a few highlights that demonstrate how donor support translates into meaningful, positive change for the students we assist.

Meet Eric McMath. Eric was a junior last year at Riverview Gardens High School and a member of the 2025-26 class of the Fred Saigh Leadership Academy. Eric decided it was important to help his fellow students at Riverview Gardens better understand autism, so he worked with his SSD teacher, Heather Berry, to organize an Autism Awareness Summit at the school.



Todd Streff
Chair, Board of Directors



Tim Eby
Executive Director

Another story comes from a young woman who attended summer camp through our Kid-to-Camp program. Her parent shared with us that she especially loved being active and having fun in a supportive and welcoming environment, adding that support from SEF was a great help to their family because it allowed their daughter to attend summer camp and enjoy activities they might not have been able to afford otherwise. It provided her with a safe, supportive environment where she could have fun, try new experiences, and build confidence. It also gave the parent peace of mind knowing that she was included and able to participate in camp like other children.

Our new Autism Independence Project also helped several students this year, including Aaliyah, who looked forward to the iSocial sessions with her cohort each week. Her mother shared with us that the experience has helped her want to engage more with her peers in conversation, better articulate her likes and dislikes, and take in others' opinions and feelings.

These are just a few examples of the dozens of stories that demonstrate how vital SEF is in empowering the students we are able to assist through our programs. This report showcases many others, made possible only by the generous support of individuals, businesses, and foundations that support SEF.

We are deeply grateful to our dedicated Board of Directors for their leadership and to our incredible staff, whose passion and commitment make our work possible.

We also extend heartfelt thanks to our partners at the Special School District of St. Louis County for their unwavering dedication to helping students aged 3 to 21 thrive.

Looking ahead, SEF is finalizing a new Strategic Plan to guide our efforts over the next few years. Stay tuned , as we'll be sharing details with you in the coming months. Thank you for believing in our mission and for supporting the students we serve.

Together, we are making a lasting difference.



WHO WE ARE

Founded in 1984 as Missouri's first public school foundation, the Special Education Foundation (SEF) has been dedicated to expanding opportunities for students with disabilities served by the Special School District of St. Louis County (SSD). As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, SEF's mission is to assist students with disabilities in St. Louis County in achieving success in ways not supported by tax dollars.

Through the generosity of our donors, partners, and community, SEF provides critical resources, innovative programs, scholarships, adaptive equipment, and emergency assistance that help remove barriers to learning and independence. With your support, we can ensure every student has the opportunity to reach their full potential and continue making a meaningful difference in the lives of thousands of students and their families.

Special Education Foundation

SSD SPECIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
SPECIALIZED FOR SUCCESS

WHO WE SERVE

The Special School District of St. Louis County (SSD) is Missouri's largest provider of specialized education, serving nearly 22,000 students with disabilities across 22 partner school districts. Dedicated to helping every student reach their fullest potential, SSD provides individualized services and supports for children and young adults ages 3 to 21 in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Through a continuum of educational services, SSD supports students in the environments where they can thrive. Today, 97% of SSD students receive specialized instruction and related services in their home district schools, while others are served in SSD schools, career and technical education programs, or approved private agency placements based on their individual needs.

Beyond K–12 education, SSD provides career and technical education to more than 1,400 students, serves more than 900 students in private and parochial schools, and supports over 100 adult learners pursuing practical nurse licensure. Through these comprehensive programs and partnerships, SSD is committed to preparing students for lifelong learning, meaningful employment, and greater independence.



By the Numbers

YOUR IMPACT FISCAL YEAR 2026

$5,000
Raised Through the Winter Coat Drive

24
Students Received Adaptive Equipment

11
Students Selected for the Fred Saigh Leadership Academy

65
Classroom Innovation Grants Awarded
$50,546 invested
5,490 students impacted

300+
Students & Families Supported Through Critical Needs
$18,184 provided for emergency assistance

57
Students Received Hearing, Vision & Assistive Supports
(Hearing aids, earmolds, eyeglasses, and other adaptive technology)

19
Students Participated in the Autism Independence Project
$30,540 in scholarships awarded

7
Principal Grants Awarded
$12,182 invested in Special School District schools, including the Juvenile Detention Center and Bridges Program
700+ students impacted

30
Kids-to-Camp Scholarships Awarded
$15,893 invested to support students during academic breaks

1,386
Students Experienced Arts in the Classroom

8,051
Students Helped



Adaptive & Assistive Equipment

TOOLS THAT TRANSFORM LIVES

Adaptive equipment and assistive technology play a vital role in helping students with disabilities fully participate in school and everyday life. Through the generosity of the Tilles Foundation and other caring donors, the Special Education Foundation (SEF) provides funding for specialized equipment that supports students served by the Special School District through age 21.

SEF is committed to removing financial barriers by providing communication devices, adaptive equipment, hearing aids, eyeglasses, and other essential technologies that enhance learning, increase independence, and improve quality of life.

During the 2025–2026 school year, SEF helped **84 students** gain access to life-changing equipment and services, including **57 students who received audiology support**, **24 students who received adaptive or assistive equipment**, and **three students who received vision assistance**. These critical resources empower students to communicate, learn, and navigate the world with greater confidence, opening doors to success both in and out of the classroom.

The Special Education Foundation was proud to receive a generous **$12,157** donation from Olympia Gymnastics and its non-profit sister organization, Team Central Gymnastics Academy, during a check presentation held on December 10, 2025 at the Olympia Gymnastics & Ninja City location in Manchester.

The funds, raised through Olympia's popular *Kids Night Out* events are designated to support audiology services for students served by the Special School District of St . Louis County. This gift marks a second-year partnership with Olympia Gymnastics, rooted in community involvement and a shared commitment to supporting local children.



"We're grateful for Olympia Gymnastics' dedication to supporting children with disabilities," said SEF Executive Director Tim Eby. "This donation will make a meaningful impact on the lives of many students by enhancing their access to vital audiology resources."

"While he was still in school, my son brought his communication device back and forth between home and school. Since he is nonverbal, he needed to have it at both places to express his wants and needs. Since I had to retire when he graduated in May, our income has decreased. We didn't know when we would be able to replace his device. Thank God for the Special Education Foundation! Providing him with an iPad along with the software is one less worry for us. It was a seamless transition for him since we received it during the school year. Our family can't thank you enough for this program."

–Grateful Parent

"My child's support was extremely helpful. He received new hearing aids. This has sent him into the next chapter of his life with confidence and the latest technology, and has lifted a financial burden that would have added stress to his college years. Also, the new technology picks up new, softer sounds that he could not hear before. Our experience was wonderful. Everyone was very friendly, and the process was easy. Thank you for all that you do!"

–Thankful Mom

SEF Presents! Arts in the Classroom

ENRICHING EDUCATION THROUGH THE POWER OF PERFORMANCE

The arts have the power to inspire, educate, and connect. For students with disabilities, experiences in theater and music can build confidence, strengthen communication and social skills, encourage self-expression, and foster a lifelong appreciation for the arts.

The Special Education Foundation (SEF) believes every student deserves access to these enriching experiences. Through **SEF Presents! Arts in the Classroom**, professional theater companies, musicians, and cultural organizations bring live performances directly into Special School District schools, creating meaningful learning opportunities that complement classroom instruction.

During the **2025–2026 school year**, **1,386 students** experienced the joy of live theater and music through **12 performances** presented at SSD schools. SEF partnered with outstanding arts organizations, including **The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Metro Theater Company, The Black Rep, Opera on the Go!, Afriky Lolo**, and the **St. Louis Symphony Orchestra** to expose students to a wide variety of artistic and cultural experiences.

SEF's Arts in the Classroom program is made possible through the generosity of our community - a $**10,000 grant from the Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis** and a **$2,500 gift from the Pat and Ken Schutte Family** to continue bringing high-quality performing arts experiences to Special School District students.

The performances created lasting impressions on students, educators, and school leaders alike.

"The production was theatrical and engaging. Students were engaged in the storyline throughout the show. We choose performances and activities that expose our students to a variety of cultural experiences. The Metro Theater Company is unique, which is why we partnered with the Special Education Foundation to bring them to Summit Academy."

–Ann Hawkey, Summit Academy Principal

"The Black Rep always provides engaging performances for our students. The performance encouraged crowd participation and opportunities for student volunteers. With support from the Special Education Foundation, our students are able to experience valuable Black history through a live performance."

–Bridget Duke, Neuwoehner Assistant Principal





Autism Independence Project

IMPROVING INDEPENDENCE & INCREASING SOCIAL SKILLS

The Special Education Foundation (SEF) is proud to partner with **iSocial** to support the Autism Independence Project, an innovative program designed to help students with autism strengthen social skills, build meaningful relationships, and develop greater independence.

Aligned with SEF's mission to empower students with disabilities served by the Special School District, the Autism Independence Project provides students with opportunities to expand their social networks, increase confidence, and develop skills that support success in school, the community, and beyond.

Now in its second year, the Autism Independence Project continues to grow and create meaningful impact. During the **2026–2027 school year, SEF provided $30,540 in funding to support 19 students** participating in iSocial's evidence-based programming.

What is iSocial?

iSocial is an innovative remote group therapy program developed by **Dr. Janine Stichter and her team at the Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment at the University of Missouri**. The program uses a structured, interactive approach to help individuals with autism develop social competence, strengthen communication skills, form meaningful connections, and build skills for greater independence.

Through virtual group sessions, students practice real-world social interactions in a supportive environment while gaining confidence in navigating friendships, relationships, and everyday experiences.



Thanks to the generosity of SEF donors and community partners, more students with autism have access to the tools and support they need to grow, connect, and achieve their personal goals. The Autism Independence Project is helping students take meaningful steps toward more independent and fulfilling futures.

"My grandson's family, friends, classmates, teammates, teachers, and counselors all are so happy to see him engaging in conversations. They see how much happier he is now. His special education aides and his mom and I are able to help him calm himself when he starts to melt down. Sometimes he struggles at first, but by assuring him by getting calm, we will listen, and we will try to help him, he can now calm himself."

–Mike C., Grandfather

"The support was very helpful, and it gave my daughter something to look forward to weekly. My daughter wants to engage more with her peers in conversation and be able to articulate her likes, dislikes, and take in others' opinions and feelings. This was a great opportunity for her, and we greatly appreciate the funding that allowed her to participate. Without the Foundation, I couldn't have afforded it."

–Appreciative Mom

Classroom Innovation Grants:

BRINGING INNOVATIVE LEARNING TO LIFE

Great teachers inspire students to see what's possible. For educators serving students with disabilities, that often means creating innovative, hands-on learning experiences tailored to each student's unique strengths and needs. Through the Special Education Foundation's Classroom Innovation Grants, those creative ideas become a reality.

Since 2002, SEF has invested in educators who are transforming classrooms with engaging projects that enhance learning, encourage exploration, and remove barriers to success. From adaptive technology and sensory learning spaces to life skills activities, STEM projects, communication tools, and creative arts experiences, these grants provide resources that enrich education and help students thrive.

During the **2025–2026 school year**, SEF awarded **65 Classroom Innovation Grants totaling $50,546**, funding projects that directly impacted **5,490 students** across the Special School District.

Each grant represents more than classroom materials—it represents an educator's vision, creativity, and commitment to helping every student reach their full potential. By investing in innovative teaching strategies and hands-on learning opportunities, SEF empowers teachers to create meaningful educational experiences that inspire curiosity, build confidence, and foster lifelong learning.





"As an Occupational Therapist, it's not every child who needs calming strategies to help regulate; some need movement. The trampolines are just one available item that can be used. They allow the kids to take a break when they need it. I've put them in a large motor space to do a fun trampoline "class" with several kids at a time, working on skills such as following directions, motor planning, body awareness, and self-regulation/body control strategies.

–Julie Lackey,
Webster Groves School District

"For many students, particularly those on the autism spectrum, trying new foods can be challenging. The grant was used to purchase a different fruit each month for preschoolers ages three to five, including both neurodivergent and neurotypical learners with a variety of disabilities. Many of our neurodivergent students struggle with trying new things and are often very selective eaters, which can make it difficult for them to get the nourishment their growing bodies need. Each month, a new fruit is selected, and I create video modeling instructional clips that demonstrate how to explore it. Students then practice these strategies daily, gradually learning to touch the fruit with their fingers, lips, teeth, and tongue, to eventually taste it. This approach not only supports healthier eating but also helps children build confidence in trying new experiences."

–Tracy Kroenlein,
Lindbergh Early Childhood Center

Fred Saigh Leadership Academy

GROWING LEADERS THROUGH EXPERIENCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Since 2004, the **Fred Saigh Leadership Academy** has empowered students with disabilities to discover their strengths, develop leadership skills, and build the confidence to make a positive impact in their schools and communities. Established through the generosity of the **Saigh Foundation**, the Academy is one of the Special Education Foundation's signature programs, preparing students to become tomorrow's leaders.





> "The Fred Saigh Leadership Academy had a profound impact on Eric's growth—not only as a student, but as a leader. Through the Academy, he gained confidence, strengthened his relationships, and embraced opportunities to advocate for inclusion within our school. His leadership was instrumental in organizing Riverview Gardens High School's first Autism Awareness Summit, where he brought together students and staff to promote understanding and acceptance. Watching Eric discover his voice and inspire others has been remarkable, and we are deeply grateful to the Special Education Foundation for providing a program that truly changes lives."
>
> *–Heather Berry, Educator, Riverview Gardens School District*

During the **2025–2026 school year, 11 students** from across St. Louis County participated in this unique, year-long leadership experience. Through monthly workshops, team-building activities, and community engagement, students developed skills in communication, collaboration, problem-solving, self-advocacy, and public speaking while forming lasting friendships with peers from across the Special School District.

Learning extends far beyond the classroom. Students participated in hands-on service projects, including organizing a community **car wash fundraiser** that allowed them to give back by supporting charitable organizations chosen by the class– the **Little Bit Foundation**, **St. Louis Children's Hospital**, and **CARE STL, Center for Animal Rescue and Endangerment**. They also explored leadership in action through their visit to the Missouri State Capitol in Jefferson City, gaining valuable insight into government, history, justice, and community service.

Throughout the program, students were encouraged to step outside their comfort zones, embrace new challenges, and recognize their own leadership potential. Many Academy graduates have gone on to serve as peer mentors, student leaders, advocates, volunteers, and active members of their communities.

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)



Junior Leaders Academy

BUILDING CONFIDENCE. DEVELOPING FUTURE LEADERS.

Leadership opportunities should begin early, giving students the chance to discover their strengths, build confidence, and develop the skills needed to advocate for themselves and others. Building on the success of the **Fred Saigh Leadership Academy**, the Special Education Foundation is expanding leadership development opportunities through the **Junior Leaders Academy Pilot Program**.

Made possible through a generous **$20,000 grant from the PwC Foundation**, the pilot program will support **seven middle school students** from across the Special School District during the **2026–2027 school year**. Through three monthly sessions of interactive workshops, hands-on activities, mentorship, and real-world leadership experiences, students will develop skills in communication, teamwork, self-advocacy, problem-solving, and community engagement.

The Junior Leaders Academy is designed to help students recognize their own potential and understand that their voices, ideas, and experiences matter. By creating a supportive environment where students can practice emerging leadership skills and build connections with peers, the program helps lay the foundation for greater independence and confidence.

Through this innovative pilot, SEF is expanding opportunities for students with disabilities to lead, inspire, and make a positive impact in their schools and communities—starting at an early age and continuing throughout their educational journey.

Fred Saigh Leadership Academy *(CONTINUED)*



The Academy culminates each spring with a graduation ceremony celebrating each student's achievements, leadership growth, and personal development. As part of this special event, classmates select one peer to receive the **C.J. Aubuchon Leadership Award**, recognizing a student who exemplifies kindness, integrity, inclusion, and the true spirit of servant leadership. This year's recipient was **Mario Holmes** of **Valley Park High School and South Technical High School**, honored for the positive impact he has made on his classmates and community.



This year also marked a meaningful new tradition for the Academy with the introduction of the **Debbie Smith Leadership Award**. Named in honor of Debbie Smith, who dedicated **two decades** to leading and mentoring Fred Saigh Leadership Academy, the award recognizes a graduating senior who exemplifies exceptional leadership, compassion, perseverance, and a commitment to serving others. This year's recipient was **Xavier Kadlec** of **Parkway South High School**, recognized for his exceptional leadership and the positive example he sets for others.

Scholarships

INVESTING IN STUDENTS. INSPIRING FUTURE SUCCESS.

The Special Education Foundation is proud to provide scholarship opportunities that celebrate student achievement while honoring the legacies of individuals who dedicated their lives to education, leadership, and supporting students with disabilities.



Established in **2016**, the **John Cary Scholarship** honors the legacy of John Cary, former Superintendent of the Special School District of St. Louis County (SSD) and a passionate advocate for students with disabilities. Each year, **five $5,000 scholarships** are awarded to college-bound students who demonstrate resilience, determination, and excellence in areas including academics, leadership, arts, athletics, and community service.



The **Jane Vickrey Scholarship**, established in **2025**, honors Jane Vickrey's extraordinary commitment to SEF and the students we serve. As a former SEF Board Secretary and liaison to the Fred Saigh Leadership Academy, Jane invested countless hours mentoring students and encouraging their leadership growth. This **$5,000 scholarship** is awarded to a Fred Saigh Leadership Academy graduate who embodies Jane's values of service, leadership, and empowering others.

The **Christopher Davis Scholarship**, established in **2005** and funded by the Ronald Davis family, provides a **$2,500 scholarship** to a deserving student from the **Ritenour School District**. Created in memory of Christopher Davis, a proud Ritenour alumnus whose life was tragically cut short in 1993, this scholarship continues his legacy by supporting students as they pursue higher education and future opportunities.

During the **2025–2026 school year**, SEF awarded **seven scholarships totaling $32,500**, helping students with disabilities pursue their educational goals and take the next step toward their future.

Through these scholarship programs, SEF continues to invest in student potential, celebrate achievement, and create pathways for success beyond high school.

John Cary Scholarship Recipients



WILL CLEER *Parkway South High School*

Will has demonstrated remarkable perseverance and academic growth throughout high school. Despite challenges with stress and workload demands, he remained focused and dedicated, earning a 32 on the ACT through hard work and determination. With a passion for advocacy and justice, Will plans to attend the University of Missouri–Columbia to pursue his dream of becoming a lawyer.



NICOLE DOZIER *Normandy & North Technical High Schools*

Nicole is a dedicated and compassionate student who has balanced academics, work, and family responsibilities with maturity and determination. Through her perseverance and self-advocacy, she has developed confidence, strong communication skills, and the ability to overcome challenges while preparing for her future. She plans to attend Houston Community College in the fall of 2027.



CAIDYN HARRIS *Lafayette High School*

Caidyn is a resilient and creative student who has used art as a powerful form of expression and confidence. Known for his kindness, maturity, and determination, he has pursued opportunities in graphic design, multimedia, and the arts while developing the skills needed to achieve his goals. He plans to attend Webster University to pursue an art degree.



LILLIAN HODEL *Webster Groves & South Technical High Schools*

Lillian is a determined and driven student whose passion for horseback riding inspired a commitment to animal care and veterinary medicine. Through hands-on experiences, leadership opportunities, and academic dedication, she has demonstrated perseverance, teamwork, and a strong desire to make a difference. She plans to pursue a future in veterinary medicine, attending the University of Missouri—Columbia.



NATHAN HUDSON *Clayton & South Technical High Schools*

Nathan's passion for cooking sparked an interest in chemistry and leads him toward a future in pharmacy, and he will be attending Southeast Missouri State University. Through rigorous coursework, pharmacy technician experience, and specialized training, Nathan has demonstrated exceptional dedication, academic achievement, and a commitment to reaching his goals.

Christopher Davis Scholarship Recipient



EDWIN PLAN CARTE-REYES *Ritenour High School*

Edwin is a dependable and goal-oriented student who has developed strong leadership and work skills through helping his family's business, participating in church activities, and mentoring younger students. With a strong work ethic and positive attitude, Edwin plans to attend St. Louis Community College to pursue his goal of becoming an electrical engineer.

Jane Vickrey Leadership Scholarship Recipient



DESHON (DJ) BURKS *Clayton High School*

Deshon is a resilient and compassionate student who has overcome challenges while developing strong leadership, responsibility, and community skills. A Fred Saigh Leadership Academy graduate and recipient of the C.J. Aubuchon Award, Deshon is recognized for his integrity, empathy, and positive impact on those around him. He plans to attend St. Louis Community College to pursue an Associate Degree in Business Administration before continuing his education in Sports Management.

Kid-to-Camp

HELPING STUDENTS STAY ACTIVE, ENGAGED, AND GROWING

For many students with disabilities, school breaks can mean more than time away from the classroom—they can also mean fewer opportunities to practice social skills, build independence, and engage with peers. The **Kid-to-Camp** program helps bridge that gap by providing financial assistance for camps that offer safe, inclusive, and enriching experiences.

Whether attending day camps or overnight programs, students gain valuable life skills through recreation, teamwork, and new experiences. These opportunities foster confidence, encourage independence, and help students maintain the progress they have worked so hard to achieve during the school year.

During the 2025–2026 school year, the Special Education Foundation awarded **30 Kid-to-Camp "camperships"**, ensuring more students had access to meaningful camp experiences regardless of their family's financial circumstances.

By removing financial barriers, SEF helps students stay engaged, continue developing important social and life skills, and return to school ready to learn, grow, and succeed.

"The Kid-to-Camp scholarship made it possible for my son to attend SLU's Autism STEM Camp, an experience he looks forward to every summer. He loved being surrounded by peers with similar challenges, making new friends, and participating in hands-on activities like adapting toys for individuals with physical disabilities. Seeing him come home excited to share everything he learned and watching his confidence, understanding, and social skills continue to grow has been invaluable to our family."

–Sandra G., Mom

"The Kid-to-Camp scholarship gave my son the opportunity to enjoy a fun and enriching summer filled with new experiences, friendships, field trips, arts and crafts, and exciting activities. He would not have been able to attend camp without SEF's support, and we are grateful for the opportunity it provided. My son has had a wonderful summer creating memories, exploring new places, and building confidence through these experiences."

–Ericka S., Mother



Women Leaders

CONNECTING PASSION WITH PURPOSE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Since 2009, the **Special Education Foundation's Women Leaders** have been a powerful force for creating opportunities and removing barriers for students with disabilities throughout St. Louis County. What began as a small friend-raiser has grown into a dedicated group of advocates committed to making a meaningful difference for students served by the Special School District (SSD).

The Women Leaders are more than fundraisers—they are champions for inclusion, innovation, and student success. Through signature events, including the annual **Starfish Awards**, this group brings the community together while raising critical funds to support programs and initiatives that enrich the lives of students with disabilities.

Their impact extends beyond fundraising. Each year, Women Leaders meet with SSD school principals, including leaders from specialized programs such as the Summit Academy and Bridges Program, to learn about unique student needs and identify opportunities to support innovative projects. Through the **Principal Grants Program**, principals share proposals designed to enhance learning, promote independence, strengthen social-emotional development, and provide students with meaningful educational experiences.

In 2026, the Women Leaders funded **$12,182 in Principal Grants supporting seven student-centered projects** across the SSD schools. These grants provided resources for creative learning tools, adaptive equipment, technology, and enrichment opportunities that may not otherwise be available through traditional funding sources.

Through their generosity, leadership, and commitment to students, the Women Leaders continue to open doors, inspire possibilities, and help ensure that every student has the opportunity to thrive.



"On behalf of the students and staff at Southview School, I am writing to express our gratitude for the SEF grant that made our recent mobile planetarium visit possible. For our special education students, traditional field trips can often be overwhelming due to logistical and sensory challenges. This grant allowed us to bring a world-class, immersive experience directly to their familiar environment. Your support provided more than just a lesson in astronomy; it provided a shared community experience that all of our students were able to access and enjoy. We are so grateful for the ongoing support of the Special Education Foundation in bringing these unique opportunities to Southview!

–Niki Tedoni, Southview School



S.A.F.E. - Student Aid Fund For Emergencies

PROVIDING ESSENTIAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

For many students with disabilities, challenges outside the classroom can create significant barriers to learning and independence. When students lack access to necessities such as food, clothing, personal care items, or essential equipment, it can impact their confidence, well-being, and ability to fully participate in school and community activities.

Through **S.A.F.E. (Student Aid Fund for Emergencies)**, the Special Education Foundation provides timely assistance to help meet urgent needs and ensure students have the resources they need to succeed. In partnership with the Special School District, SEF works year-round to support students and families facing unexpected challenges—because every student deserves to feel prepared, valued, and included.

During the **2025–2026 school year**, SEF provided critical support to students and families through emergency assistance, including:

- **187 winter food boxes were** provided to families during school breaks, totaling **$4,365** in support
- **139 students** received food kits to help address food insecurity during Spring Break
- **Essential needs requests** such as clothing, uniforms, hygiene supplies, prescriptions, diapers, undergarments, shoes, and adaptive equipment, including a foldable wheelchair, were fulfilled

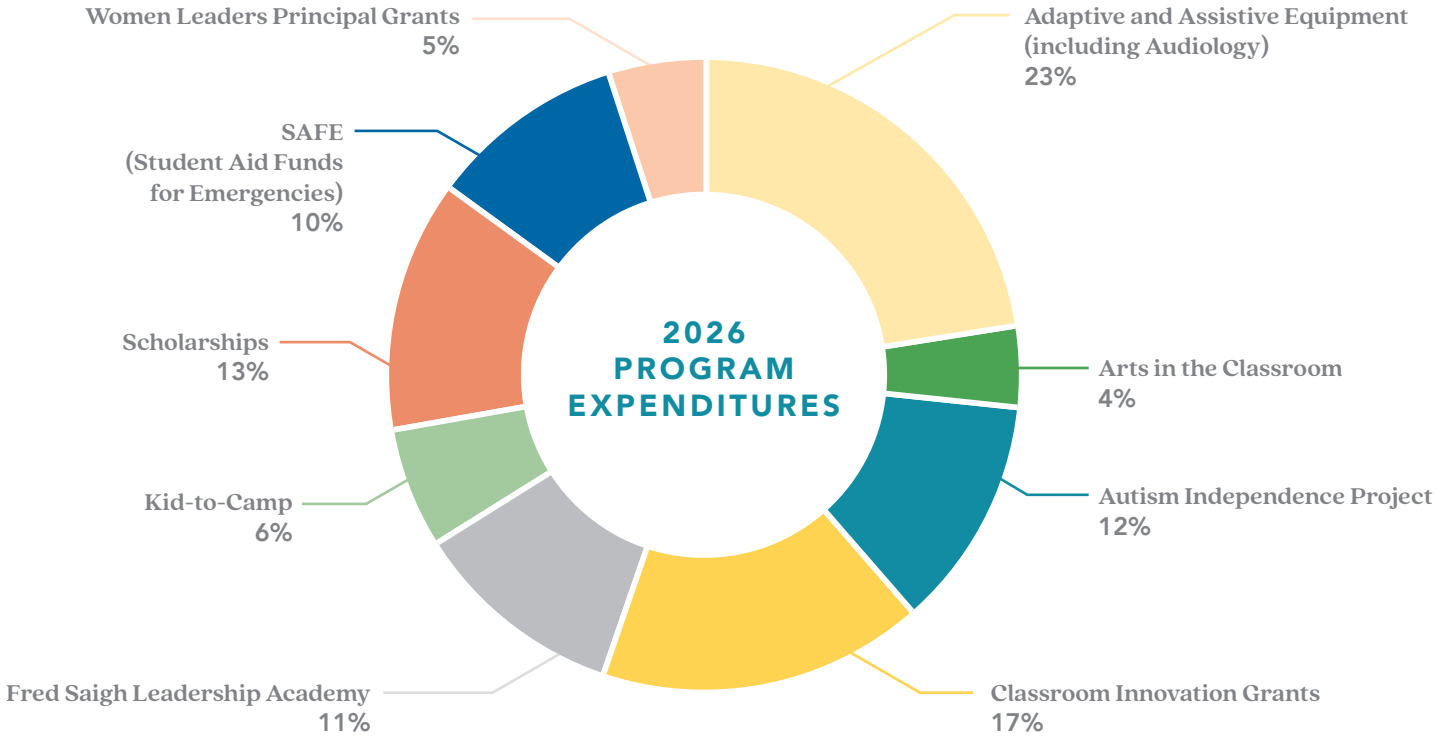
SEF also continued its annual **Winter Coat Drive**, providing students with warm coats and accessories so they could face the colder months with comfort and dignity. Additional support helped students access items needed for important milestones, including job training uniforms, graduation attire, and other everyday essentials.

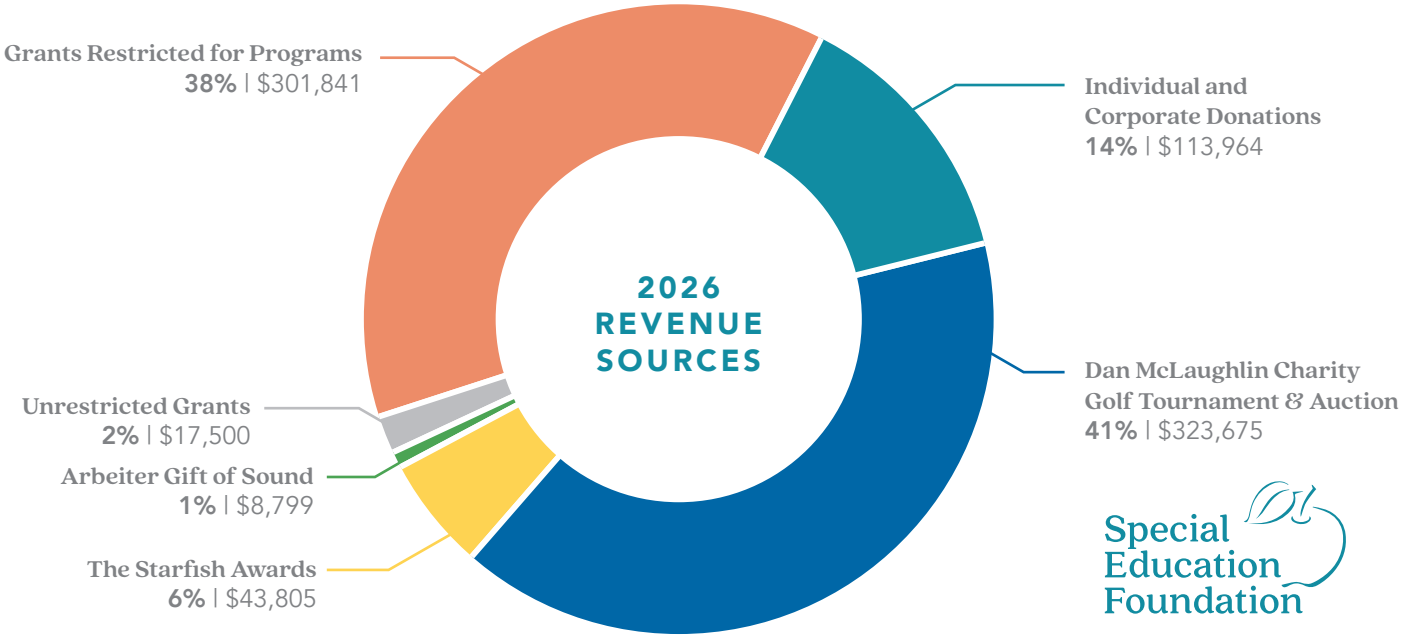
This year, SEF expanded the impact of **S.A.F.E. through a peer-to-peer giving initiative supporting students at Riverview Gardens High School.** In partnership with **SSD Family and Community Engagement (FACE), the River-view Gardens Alumni Association, SSD families, and generous community members**, SEF helped **30 Riverview Gardens seniors** participate in important milestone experiences by providing financial assistance for senior dues and activities, including prom, the senior luncheon, and cap-and-gown purchases.

> "Senior year is a significant milestone, and events such as prom and graduation ceremonies are once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. I wanted to ensure that all seniors had the chance to participate and create lasting memories."
>
> *–Quintana Harris,*
> *Educator, Riverview Gardens School District*

Every request fulfilled through S.A.F.E. represents more than a donated item—it represents a student who knows they are supported. By addressing immediate needs, SEF helps remove barriers so students can focus on learning, growing, and reaching their full potential.







Special
Education
Foundation

"Each year it gets better and better. What an amazing night!"
–Julia Burke, Ph.D., SEF Board Chair

3rd Annual Starfish Awards

CELEBRATING EVERYDAY HEROES MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, POWERED BY SEF'S WOMEN LEADERS



The Special Education Foundation proudly celebrated the **3rd Annual Starfish Awards** in June 2026, honoring the extraordinary individuals whose everyday acts of compassion, dedication, and support create meaningful change for students with disabilities throughout St. Louis County.

Created by the SEF Women Leaders, the Starfish Awards recognize the "everyday heroes" within the Special School District (SSD) and its partner districts—individuals who may not seek recognition but whose commitment leaves a lasting impact on students, families, and colleagues.

Each year's honorees demonstrate what it means to lead with heart. They provide encouragement during challenging moments, advocate for students' success, and create inclusive environments where students feel valued, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential. Like the ripple effect of a starfish's impact, their kindness and dedication inspire positive change throughout the community.

The **2026 Starfish Award recipients** were recognized for their exceptional commitment to students and their unwavering dedication to making a difference:



The following were recipients of the 2026 Starfish Awards:

Karlon Bishop
SOCIAL WORKER IN THE PARKWAY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Jennifer Corcoran
SPEECH & LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST IN THE LADUE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Jessica Klimpel
TEACHER IN THE WEBSTER GROVES SCHOOL DISTRICT

Jennifer Paris
INSTRUCTIONAL COACH IN THE ROCKWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT

Amanda Schroer
TEACHER IN THE HANCOCK PLACE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Donald Stanley
PARAPROFESSIONAL IN THE JENNINGS SCHOOL DISTRICT

Lisa Thomas
SPECIAL EDUCATION COORDINATOR IN THE FERGUSON-FLORISSANT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Debbie Young
PARAPROFESSIONAL AT ACKERMAN IN THE SPECIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Dr. Daniel Cuneo
MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF EDUCATION, COMMUNITY STARFISH AWARD

Adrienne Eaglin
DIRECTOR OF FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE SPECIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT, LEADERSHIP STARFISH AWARD

Laurie Williams
DIRECTOR EMERITA OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION FOUNDATION, SPIRIT OF SEF STARFISH AWARD

23rd Annual Dan McLaughlin Golf Tournament

MORE THAN A DAY ON THE COURSE—A LIFETIME OF IMPACT

For more than four decades, the Special Education Foundation (SEF) has been dedicated to removing barriers and creating opportunities for students with disabilities. One of the Foundation's signature fundraising events—the 23rd Annual Dan McLaughlin Charity Golf Tournament & Auction—continues to make that mission possible.

For 23 years, this event has brought together generous sponsors, golfers, volunteers, donors, and community partners who believe every student deserves the opportunity to succeed. Thanks to their unwavering support, the tournament has now raised more than **$5.3 million** over its history, providing critical funding for SEF programs that enrich the lives of students served by the Special School District (SSD) of St. Louis County.

This year's event was another remarkable success, raising **$317,709** through sponsorships, golf participation, the Happy Hour reception, and silent and live auctions. These funds will directly support SEF's programs, including adaptive and assistive equipment, Classroom Innovation Grants, scholarships, leadership development, emergency assistance, arts enrichment, and other initiatives that help students reach their full potential.



A Powerful Drive for Students with Disabilities

One of the evening's highlights was the **Fund-A-Need** appeal. A special thank-you to the Toombs family for their extraordinary generosity in increasing their matching gift from $20,000 last year to **$25,000** this year. Their leadership inspired attendees to give generously, amplifying the impact of every donation and helping ensure SEF can continue responding to the growing needs of students with disabilities throughout St. Louis County.



The continued success of the Dan McLaughlin Charity Golf Tournament is a testament to what can be accomplished when a community comes together with a shared purpose. Every sponsorship, auction bid, foursome, and donation helps create opportunities for students to learn, grow, communicate, and thrive.

We are deeply grateful to our sponsors, volunteers, committee members, donors, and every participant who made this year's event possible.

As the need for assistance continues to grow, SEF remains deeply committed to expanding its reach and impact. We are building brighter futures—one student, one classroom, and one act of kindness at a time.





Special Education Foundation

- 2 Cityplace Drive, Suite 200
  St. Louis, MO 63141
- 314.394.7030
- **www.sef-stl.org**

Support the Special Education Foundation

- **Donate online by scanning the QR Code**