



For Immediate Release

Chris Thorburn and “Blues for Kids” Score Big for Flynn Park Teacher

University City, MO (April 11 2018) - On Thursday, April 12, 2018, at 2 p.m., St. Louis Blues Hockey forward Chris Thorburn (#22) and his wife, Sara, will visit Sierra Weber’s classroom at Flynn Park Elementary School in The School District of University City to present an oversized check for \$20,000! The funds were raised at the April 4, “Support Special Education,” night at the Blues game along with a silent auction and raffle. The inspiration for the event was the bond between seven-year-old Bennett Thorburn and his teacher, Sierra Weber, which the family noted has led to noticeable breakthroughs in Bennett’s development.

The Thorburn’s young son was diagnosed with autism at age four and, since then, his education and development have been the family’s focus. In a recent news feature, Chris Thorburn opened up about how amazingly well his son manages the challenges he faces every day. As his story unfolded, it became clear there was another hero in the picture.

The Thorburn’s moved to St. Louis when Chris started with the Blues last summer. The family credits Special School District (SSD) teacher Sierra Weber for helping Bennett adjust to his new home in St. Louis and at Flynn Park School. Chris noticed that sometimes, Weber purchased school supplies for her students using her own money.

“Ms. Weber, she’s an angel and she’s a saint,” Chris said. “I’ve gotten to know a lot of her students and they deserve nothing but the best. We want to help her achieve that...Bennet has progressed leaps and bounds and we owe her a lot for that. Seeing her is the highlight of his morning.”

Weber added, “Bennett is the sweetest boy! He tries really hard and has made so much progress even though he was nervous about stating at a new school, in a new home and a new country! Now, he just runs into the building every morning. He’s excited to learn and more engaged with his peers. He has made great progress academically and socially.”

Acknowledging those significant breakthroughs, Sara said, “We are so blessed, in that this is the ideal situation where we ended up having a teacher who cares and is willing to put in time and effort. She is amazing at what she does and loves what she does. That is a big part of what’s making Bennett excel right now.”

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Thorburns and Blues for Kids Support SSD Classroom Teacher – Add One

“When we first moved here,” Sara added. “I was scared to death to send him (Bennett) and she made it work way above our expectations. I felt like I owed her...she saved us. It is a very big deal for us to put it out there (family story) and she is the inspiration behind this whole movement. You meet someone like her and you understand what she can do if you get the right resources in her hands! “

In support of that, the Thorburn family and St. Louis Blues’ Blues for Kids organization launched a series of fundraisers including a very successful silent auction and a raffle for which Weber was on hand to sell tickets.

“When the Thorburn’s said they wanted to do something for our classroom, I didn’t know what that could mean,” Weber said. “I am overwhelmed by their offer and how the Blues just ran with it!”

Weber added, “I am so very grateful to the Thorburns, to the Blues, the volunteers and to all who supported this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Raising this much money is so incredible! I am really looking forward to class field trips, added technology and sensory tools for students and more for my students.

Clearly excited in her planning, Weber said, “There are now so many additional resources and tools we can purchase now and more things in the community we can take advantage of...We do a lot of hands-on learning. My students are not traditional learners who will sit for a lecture or use pencil paper...I am excited about shopping for food and expanding our cooking group to help develop social and functional skills. Cooking as a group is a particularly good exercise for those students who avoid certain foods and textures because of a sensory aversion.”

“Kids with special needs, need more and yet, special education seems to have less funding,” Sara said. “There is not as big of a highlight (on special education in general) as there is on extracurricular activities. There is a need for more money and more highly trained teachers in the classrooms working with the kids. It’s something no one seems to get. But, everything takes time and money...and, we just tackled one classroom!”

“(We thought) if there was more of a group effort with the community and school working together, then everyone is more aware, it could be a beautiful thing. Everyone would excel, everyone would learn and be better people from it,” Sara added.

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On February 21, 1911, with a City population of only 2,417, The School District of University City was officially established. Classes began in September 1912 with a total school population of 769. Today, you will find outstanding educational programs serving a student population of approximately 2,800 with a preschool, four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. In May 2017, University City High School held its 100th formal Commencement.



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Although they spent the hockey season in St. Louis, Michigan is home base for the Thorburn's, their son Bennett and 17-month-old daughter, Mary. Typically, they would return to Michigan for the summer but, "We are planning to stay through June," Sara said. "We want to take full advantage of the summer program being offered (Flynn Park)...this has changed our whole life! We are keeping him in school, so yes; we are staying with Ms. Weber!"

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For more about Chris Thorburn's story, visit: <https://www.nhl.com/blues/news/one-tough-customer/c-297413764>

For more about the April 3-4 Blues for Kids fundraiser, visit:
<https://www.nhl.com/blues/community/special-education-night>

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