

ESL charter school provides foundation for success

Segue • SIUE

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SIUE photo, Gina Jeffries.

There are many reasons why Gina Jeffries, director of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's East St. Louis Charter High School (CHS), will be beaming with pride at the school's graduation ceremony on May 19 in the Meridian Ballroom.

On this week's episode of Segue, SIUE's premier radio show on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound, Chancellor Randy Pembroke, PhD, sits down with Jeffries to discuss how her students defy the odds each day at CHS.

Jeffries graduated with a bachelor's in secondary education from Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Mo. She earned a master's in educational administration from the University of Missouri St. Louis, and graduates in May from SIUE with an education specialist degree and superintendent endorsement.

In her 22 years of educational experience, Jeffries is proud to enhance the lives of her students, and work toward ensuring they are college and career-ready after graduation.

"To achieve our mission, our faculty positively impacts the education and economic lives of East St. Louis youth through individualized instruction of core academic subjects, exploration of career interests, college preparation courses and much more," she says. "Our goal is to prepare our students for the next steps of their lives as they cross the stage at graduation."

Students wishing to attend CHS are required to fill out an enrollment application. Those applicants are put into a lottery and are chosen at random. To qualify for admission, students must be East St. Louis residents. CHS is sponsored by SIUE, and East St. Louis School District 189 is the charter authorizer.

"With state support declining for K-12 education, there is a consistent need for additional budget resources to cover the shortfall somehow," she says.

"We are delighted and blessed to have SIUE support us," she says. "Our SIUE partnership enables us to offer our students a top-notch education. I love coming to the East St. Louis Center every day, because I know we are making a difference in the lives of young people."

CHS offers students an academic experience that is different in terms of college and career prep classes, and differentiated education, with an emphasis on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The school also offers unique opportunities for extracurricular educational activities through before and after-school programs, and Saturday school events.

"Every day, we see these students' lives changed through our programs," she says. "Even though our resources may have been decreased, we still observe significant improvements in our students."

Jeffries has the opportunity to brag about her students' accomplishments for good reason: In the Class of 2016, each of those students was slated on a career path or went on to college. The school has also seen substantial improvement on its PARCC (The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers)

standardized test scores. On the English and language arts section of the test, the school ranked proficient and advanced at a level of 48 percent, beating the state average.

Facilitating relationships between students on the SIUE campus and at CHS has been a goal of both Chancellor Pembroke and Jeffries. Partnerships between the University and CHS exist within the School of Health, Education and Human Behavior, College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Nursing, administrative internships, and much more.

“We love to see these kinds of relationships,” she says. “Our student population is 100-percent low income and these programs, in addition to the academics, work to educate the whole child. These opportunities, as well as dual credit classes in English and psychology, help our students stand above the rest.”

CHS’s involvement with the SIUE East St. Louis Center’s Upward Bound Program provides its students the ability to take after school tutoring sessions, visit colleges, mentorship and counseling sessions, ACT preparation and much more. CHS students also are able to take advantage of the recently reopened East St. Louis Learning and Resource Center that is also available to all program participants at the Center and the East St. Louis community.

“The Learning Resource Center serves as a useful opportunity for our students,” she says. “I love to see the community partnerships that are coming into the Resource Center. It is bringing revitalization and is making our campus livelier.”

On May 19 in SIUE’s Meridian Ballroom, the class of 2017 will graduate and be recognized for their efforts during the last four years.

“It is awesome to see our graduates and families come to the SIUE campus for the ceremony,” she says. “Most importantly, the students are participating in a ritual that is so incredibly life-changing.

“Some of these students may be the first high school graduates in their family. Others may be the first person in their family to go to college. We are making history that night.”

Jeffries and her students work to continue to make history by increasing student achievement and encouraging the next generation to pursue careers in STEM-related fields.

Catch this episode of Segue in its entirety at 9 a.m. this Sunday on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound.

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