

Segue: Jason Henderson's vision for District 7

Amanda Cooper, For the Intelligencer

Friday, January 17, 2020



EDWARDSVILLE — On this week's episode of Segue, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's weekly radio program exploring the lives and work of the people on campus and beyond, Chancellor Randy Pembroke interviews Jason Henderson, EdD, Edwardsville District 7 superintendent.

Henderson assumed his superintendent role on July 1, 2019. His career in education began in the Triad School District in 1994, where he has worked as a math teacher, coach, elementary school principal, curriculum director and assistant superintendent. Last May, he obtained a doctorate in education from SIUE.

This episode of Segue airs at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Jan. 19. Listeners can tune in to WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound or siue.edu/wsie.

"I'm always curious when I'm talking with fellow teachers," begins Pembroke. "What was the impetus to get you into education?"

"I come from a teaching family," answers Henderson. "My grandma was a third grade teacher, and my mother has worked in a few different capacities throughout District 7. I've grown up respecting the teaching profession. While I didn't know that I wanted to end up being a teacher, once I hit college, I gravitated towards education. So many teachers affected me throughout my life, and I wanted to be able to do that, as well."

"Have there been any challenges associated with the transition to your new position as superintendent in Edwardsville?" inquires Pembroke.

"The sheer size of the district is something that's a little different than what I've been used to," responds Henderson. "There are over 7,500 students and 900 employees in District 7. I'm coming from a place where I had been for over 25 years, and getting to know everyone has been an early challenge. You get the best out of people when you have a personal relationship with them, and that's been something that over these first six months I've been trying to do as much as I can."

"When administrators change and when you come into a new position, there is always a conversation about vision," says Pembroke. "Your vision has an emphasis on technology, which is something that continues to change and affect the classroom experience."

"In District 7, one area that we are a little bit behind in is the amount of technology that is available to students every day," says Henderson. "When you put technology into a teacher's hands, it can transform the way that they're able to instruct our students. Giving students the opportunity to have technology and allowing our teachers to utilize it in the classroom can take their teaching to the next level."

Henderson's previous district promotes a one-to-one policy; meaning that for each student, there is a computer available to enhance their learning needs. He would like District 7 to follow suit by taking a step forward to put devices such as laptops or tablets into students' hands.

"I've found that high school students are usually fine with taking that device home and taking ownership of that device over a few years," adds Henderson.

"Another thing I was intrigued about while looking at your background was the concept of teaching all children while realizing differences in their learning styles and interests," says Pembroke. "Can you tell us how you are trying to take advantage of the particular strengths of students and where that may take you with new programs and teaching styles?"

"We want every student to find their interests and passion in District 7," responds Henderson. "Our district has always done a great job of preparing students to go onto college for careers that require a college education. However, there's a gap for students that don't plan on going to a four-year college and want to choose a different career path. Knowing that, we've been trying to push for providing opportunities to help each student find their passion."

Such opportunities include a construction trades program created in conjunction with Madison County that allows students throughout the county to gain hands-on experience each day. Upon completing the program, students will be a year into an apprenticeship towards a career.

In addition to these initiatives, Henderson is leading the district in the beginning stages of strategic planning and the development of an equity task force to create a plan on how to move forward in the coming years.

Tune in at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Jan. 19, to WSIE 88.7 The Sound to hear the entire conversation.