

# Kindergarten Readiness Camp: Analysis of Pilot Program

## Introduction

### Table of Contents:

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Need for Program</i>	2
<i>Program Implementation</i>	3
<i>Community Partners</i>	6
<i>Implementation Lessons Learned</i>	6
<i>Program Impact Data</i>	8
<i>Ongoing Program Evaluation</i>	10
<i>Future Action Steps</i>	10

### Key Points:

- Positive increases in student social behaviors after attending camp
- Project-based curriculum aligned with Illinois Learning Standards
- Statistically significant improvement in School Readiness Assessment after camp

The initial idea to develop a kindergarten readiness summer camp was generated by a focus group of SIUE Head Start parents in East St. Louis who expressed concerns that Head Start was putting their students at a disadvantage in kindergarten. Several parents indicated that their Head Start graduate would enter kindergarten classrooms that were so focused on getting the other students "caught up" that their Head Start students were bored and began developing behavior problems. This compelled SIUE East St. Louis Center staff to begin considering the possibility of leveraging the SIUE Head Start teachers that were off during the summer to implement a Kindergarten Readiness Camp for non-Head Start students as a way to level the playing field and "protect the investment" made in our Head Start children.

Leaders from East St. Louis School District 189 were eager to become partners in the Kindergarten Readiness Camp citing the chal-

lenges of the first few months as a major barrier to student academic achievement in the early elementary years. They cited that only 2 in 5 incoming kindergarteners pass the kindergarten readiness exam and that a Camp could make a big difference in giving those students a "running start." They also expressed concern about a very wide gap between those students who have attended high-quality early childhood programs and those who have not: based on NWEA data, students who have attended at least one year of high-quality early childhood score approximately one standard deviation above the national norm in math and reading in the Fall NWEA assessment, while students who have not attended high-quality early childhood program score in the bottom decile. This presents an enormous challenge for kindergarten teachers to meet the needs of all learners.

SIUE East St. Louis Center staff then conducted a focus group with kindergar-



ten teachers from East St. Louis School District 189 to learn more about what types of skills should be the focus of a Kindergarten Readiness Camp. The top priority of the teachers was the importance of teaching "socialization" and "listening skills." They expressed that significant time is spent in the first two months of school on helping students learn about "taking turns" and "sharing." They also expressed the importance of teaching "how to treat classroom objects" such as books and manipulatives.



These priorities were echoed during a program design meeting with representatives from the East St. Louis Early Learning Partnership. Participants from YMCA, Children's Home and Aid Society of Illinois, Illinois State Board of Education, private day cares in East St. Louis, and Head Start all agreed that "social emotional learning" had to be the top priority. They emphasized the importance of social skills and parent involvement.

Finally, we convened two focus groups with parents - one from Head Start parents and another through the East St. Louis chapter of Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI). These parents' feedback were consistent about the emphasis on learning how to "do school" but also clear about the importance of helping parents learn how to be an effective parent of a kindergarten student.

Funding for the program was made possible by the Dana Brown Charitable Trusts and SIUE. This synthesized analysis of student performance data, community feedback, and school district priorities created the foundation for the goals and objectives of a pilot of the SIUE East St. Louis Center Kindergarten Readiness Camp.

## *Need for the Program*

The SIUE East St. Louis Kindergarten Readiness Camp was designed to address one central need: preparing East St. Louis students for kindergarten who have not been able to participate in a high-quality early childhood program. The average East St. Louis student enters kindergarten behind in math and reading (approximately one standard deviation below grade-level according to the na-

tionally-normed Northwest Education Assessment). 40% of students enter kindergarten at or above grade-level in reading and math (NWEA); Based on an analysis of the data and feedback from a wide range of stakeholders, it is evident that high-quality early childhood education works to prepare students for kindergarten. Our goal was to expand access to those effective

learning interventions to more East St. Louis students and ensure that a majority of East St. Louis students enter kindergarten at or above grade-level. While the central need that this project seeks to address is to prepare more East St. Louis students for kindergarten, we have identified three underlying needs that this program addressed:

**"70% of children birth-to-five do not attend a licensed childcare center."**

- Only 2 in 5 East St. Louis students passed the kindergarten readiness assessment for reading and math (as measured by the East St. Louis School District 189 Kindergarten Readiness Assessment);
- Only 2 in 5 East St. Louis students enter kindergarten with the necessary social, emotional, and classroom skills to be successful in kindergarten in the first month of school (as measured by parent and teacher survey data); and
- There exists no formal alignment between pre-school curriculum and expectations and kindergarten curriculum and expectations.

## *Broad Context for Early Childhood Education in East St. Louis*

There are several high-quality pre-school options in East St. Louis, but the majority of students do not have access. Based on a community needs assessment conducted by SIUE Head Start, approximately 70% of children birth-to-five do not attend a licensed childcare center. These youth are starting school significantly behind. There are 4,115 children birth to 5 years of age in East St. Louis. 52% of the birth to five child population lives in deep poverty. During the

summer of 2015 the Greater East St. Louis Innovation zone conducted a screening day for youth 0-5 years of age to connect youth to early interventions. Of the more than 300 youth receiving a developmental screening, 37% had no prior preschool experience, 31% had a teen parent, 21% of children had witnessed significant trauma, and 18% were homeless.

When a majority of students enter kindergarten unprepared and behind

grade-level, it has a negative effect on the learning environment of those students who are entering the classroom fully prepared for kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers consistently state that the first few months of kindergarten are spent catching up those students who haven't learned how to "do school" with less focus being paid to those students who are ready to learn.

**“a majority of students enter kindergarten unprepared and behind grade-level”**

## *Program Implementation*

The four week Kamp Kindergarten was offered from June 19 through July 22 2016. The program was offered at Miles Davis Kindergarten Center. SIUE East St. Louis Center offered the first kindergarten readiness summer camp in East St. Louis.

Kindergarten Readiness Camp ran from 8:00am to 1:00pm and aligned with School District 189's summer school program that was offered at the Miles Davis Kindergarten Center (which closed at the end of the summer programming). Curriculum for the program was evidence-based and incorporated the Illinois Learning Standards in social emotional development and approaches to learn-

ing. Although the focus of the curriculum was on non-cognitive skills development, language arts, mathematics, physical development, science, and visual and performing arts were also incorporated throughout the day's activities. The curriculum directly addressed the skills and priorities identified by school district administrators, teachers and parents during the focus groups. The curriculum was organized around four learning units: All About Me; I Am Becoming an Explorer; Kindergarten Here I Come; and The Olympics. Appendix 1 provides an example of detailed and aligned lesson plans supported by curriculum maps.

Each day, youth had the opportunity to learn, explore and practice skills that they will be expected to master in Kindergarten. Youth participated in small group instruction (circle time), project based learning/centers, gross motor development and enrichment. See Appendix 2 for a Sample Daily Schedule.

Youth rotated through five centers that included a writing center, math center, language center, creation station and a science center. Youth spent 20 minutes in each center working on a pro-





ject. The projects were designed to progressively build on social emotional development skills and content-specific knowledge. All program



content was developmentally appropriate and reasonable for the youth to explore and learn during the four week

camp.

During circle time, youth learned to practice self-regulation by sitting still for approximately 15 minutes while listening to information about the day ahead, and activities and goals for the day. Youth also had the opportunity to share information about themselves with their new friends.

Youth participated in gross motor activities twice each day. The morning gross motor time was more recreational in nature and included outdoor time (weather permitting). SIUE Child Psychology Professor, Dr. Stephen Hupp provided one of his students to facilitate games and skill-building activities that culminated in Field Day on the last day of camp.

Youth engaged in enrichment activities twice a day and rotated through activities that included performing arts, creative arts, li-

brary time, and computer skills.

Social and Emotional Development and positive behavior was reinforced in the program through the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) program. PBIS uses rewards and visual reminders to teach children social skills and positive behavior proactively instead of punitively.

Youth spent the final week of camp integrating with Kindergarten students in Kindergarten classrooms. Youth participated in math and reading classes.

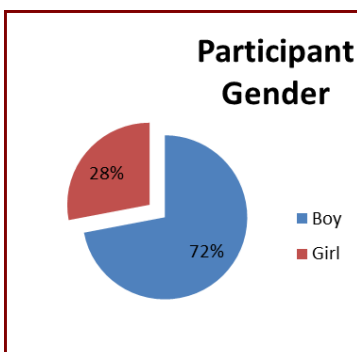
One of the highlights of the program was a field trip to the Science Center Discovery Room. Youth engaged in hands on learning activities. Parent participation was high at this event.

Kamp Kindergarten was designed to prepare parents and families to have a direct relationship with their students' educational success. The program offered opportunities to engage families in their child's learning by sending home weekly newsletters and notes about what the youth learned, hosting weekly campfire chats, and recruiting parent volunteers. Parent engagement was a

key component of the program. Parents were invited to attend weekly Campfire Chats at the school with pro-

gram staff. These thirty-minute weekly seminars addressed topics such as employment resources, social and emotional development, resources available at the local library, etc. After the seminars, parents participated in making a learning tool with their child to take home and practice skills that the child was learning in the summer program. As an incentive for parents, there were ten weekly drawings at the end of each Campfire Chat for \$25.00 gift cards. At the end of the summer program, the child received a toolkit of supplies and manipulatives, books, games, and learning tools that were used during the summer program.

Kamp Kindergarten was designed for children that will struggle the most in school. We found these families to be disconnected from community resources and more likely to be responsive to engagement and outreach from a familiar person. The program employed diverse recruitment strategies that incorporated one-on-one engagement and traditional marketing methods (see Appendix 3 for a sample flyer).



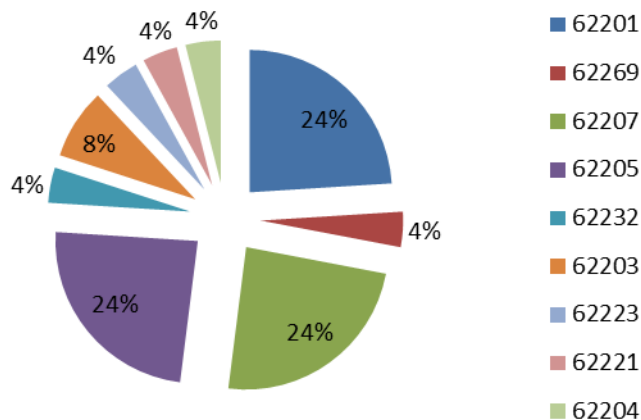
### *Recruitment Strategies Included the Following:*

- SIUE partnered with Parents United for Change and COFI (two East St. Louis parent organizing groups) to hold focus groups with potential parents and recruit parents to go door to door and recruit other parents;
- SIUE East St. Louis Center staff partnered with Children's Home and Aid to send mailings and flyers to over 500 households in Greater East St. Louis that receive a State Subsidy for a family member to provide childcare within their home or child's home and to small home-based providers;
- SIUE sent a mailing to parents in SIUE's Home Base Head Start Program;
- Families were recruited through family-friendly community events and health fairs;
- SIUE partnered with the East St. Louis Library to share information with parents attending library events and activities;
- East St. Louis School District 189 sent flyers and mailings home to parents with children that enrolled in the More at Four program but attended for less than one year;
- SIUE East St. Louis worked with the East St. Louis Housing Authority and local faith communities to spread awareness of the program; and
- Flyers were placed in strategic locations throughout East St. Louis such as the unemployment office and the Department of Human Services.

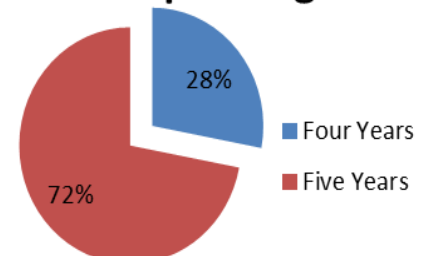


Attendance incentives were incorporated into the program to retain youth once they were enrolled to help encourage attendance as well as on-time pick-up and drop-off.

#### Zip Codes of participants



#### Participant Age



## *Staffing*

The program was jointly staffed by our most effective educators from SIUE Head Start and from School District 189. The following staffing structure was used to implement the program:



- Director of Special Projects- responsible for program administration, budget management, staff recruitment, hiring, participant recruitment, community partnership development, curriculum development, evaluation and reporting;
- Program Director/Parent Engagement Specialist – responsible for program implementation; coordinate recruiting, and family engagement activities.;
- Four Instructors--two per classroom, with a total of two classrooms;
- Two Instructional Coordinators- part-time coordinators were responsible for curriculum development, teacher coaching and evaluation; and
- Four Volunteers – assisted with classroom supervision, field trips, and outdoor activities.

## *Community Partners*

Kamp Kindergarten would not have been piloted in 2016 without the committed efforts of community partners:

- **Greater East St. Louis Early Learning Partnership:** Assisted with program design, curriculum development, and recruitment.
- **East St. Louis School District 189:** Provided space within the Miles Davis Kindergarten Center, data sharing, Summer Food program, professional development, coordination on parent engagement, and field day;
- **SIUE East St. Louis Center for the Performing Arts:** provided dance instruction;
- **LUME Institute:** Facilitated professional development to camp staff on strengthening social and emotional development in the classroom

## *Implementation Lessons Learned*

### *Recruitment*

Forty parents responded, communicated with staff and expressed an interest in enrolling their child in the Kindergarten Readiness Camp. Only 26 followed through on all of the pro-

gram enrollment documentation. Recruiting participants at the highest risk of not being prepared for kindergarten proved to be more of a challenge than anticipated. Parents that

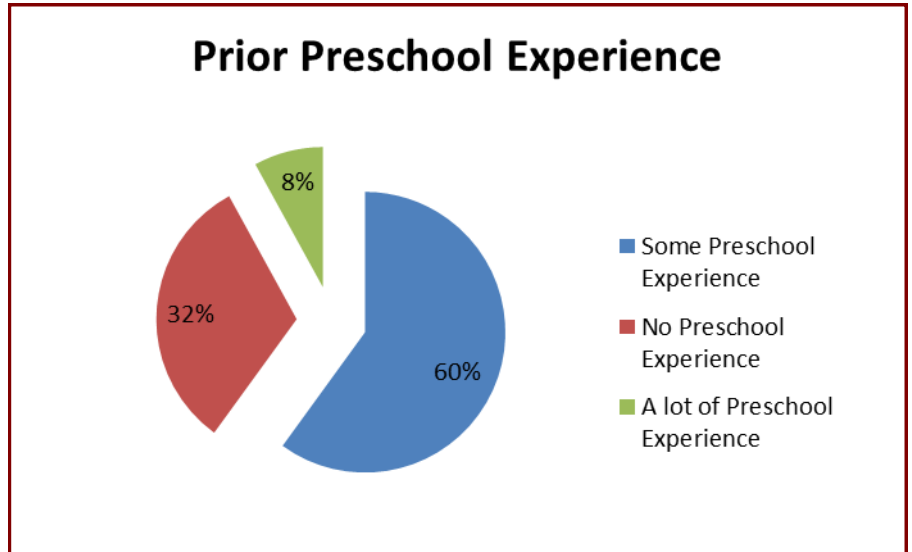
never enrolled their child in Kindergarten were not responsive to recruitment efforts for this program either. Parents that indicated that their child had two or more years of preschool,

or met or exceeded developmental milestones and was on target academically were discouraged from enrolling their children in Kamp Kindergarten. Although most of the children in the program had some daycare, or pre-school, it was less than three years and inconsistent, and in most cases parents had one or more concerns about their child's readiness for kindergarten. It was suggested that if transportation were provided we would have recruited more parents.

Another barrier to recruitment was the time frame available for recruitment.

The ESLC received notification of the funding award from the Dana Brown Charitable Trusts during the first week of May and received approval for a match from SIUE funds shortly thereafter. With the program starting on

June 15, there was less than four weeks to hire staff, recruit, and prepare.



## Staffing

The original model design called for one Early Childhood Teacher paired with one Kindergarten Teacher. This pairing took place in one Kamp Kindergarten classroom and the other Kamp Kindergarten classroom had one Early Childhood Teacher and one

Early Childhood Teacher Assistant.

Having two experienced teachers in the same classroom proved difficult in terms of building teamwork, collaboration and cooperation. Each teacher was used to leading and

thus these teachers worked more independently and divided up tasks completely so that each had autonomy while the Early Childhood Teacher paired with the Teacher Assistant collaborated more and communicated more.

## Curriculum

There was a hypothesis that most of the camp day would be spent reinforcing school routines and norms and learning to share and there would be little time for direct instruction. Children learned the routines, accepted direction and

made friends much faster than anticipated. Transitions between different activities went smoothly and time spent going over rules was less frequent than expected. Staff had to quickly modify the curriculum and camp schedule to incorpo-

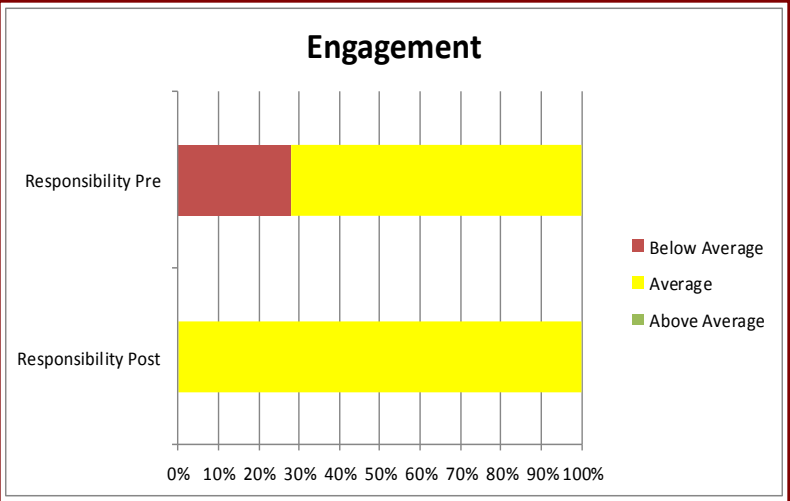
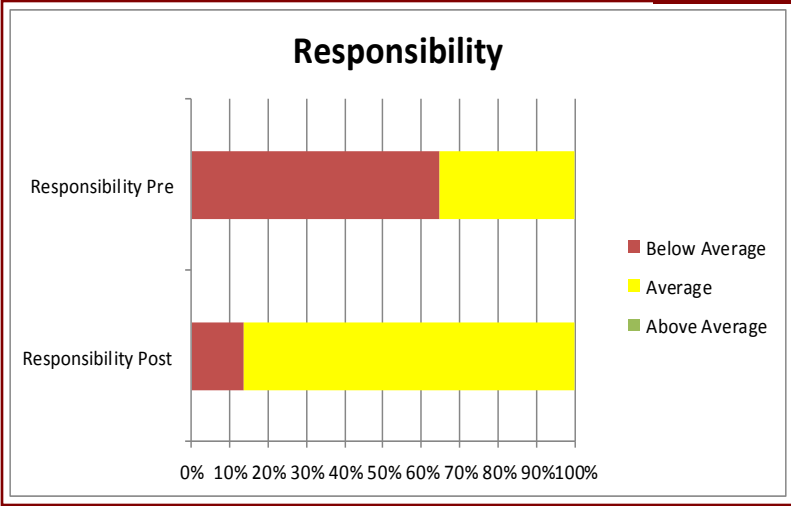
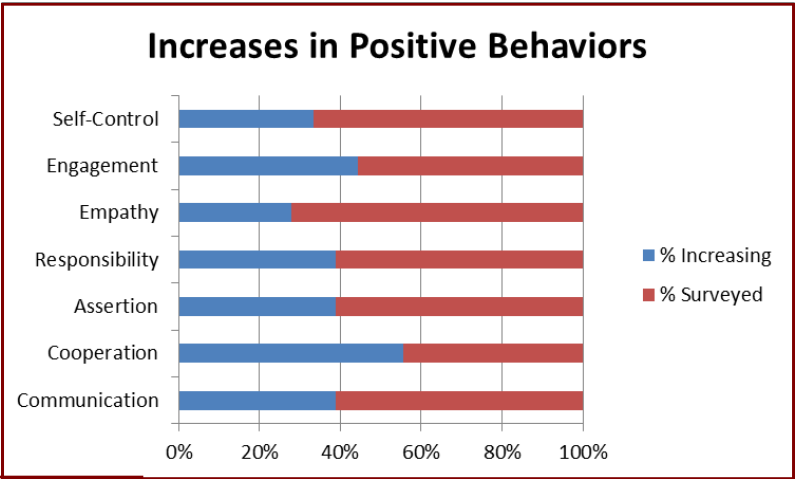
rate more academic intensity and more activities.

**“The program was very beneficial. My grandson loved it.”**

# Program Impact Data

## Social Skills Assessment

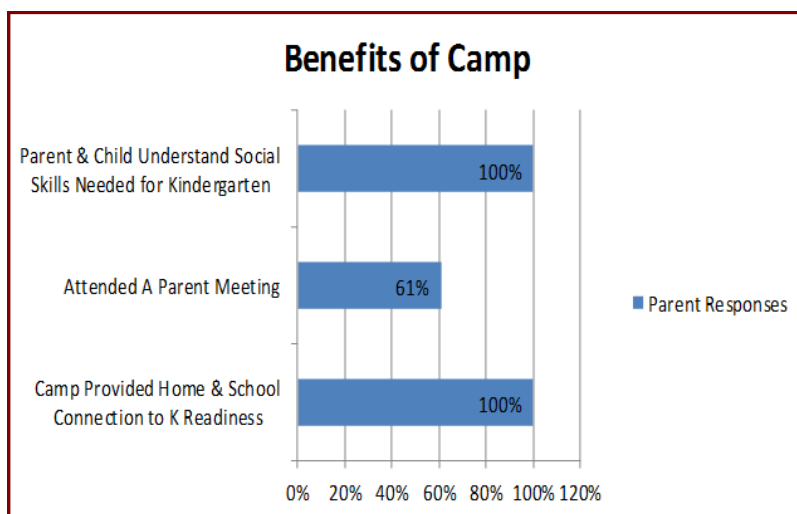
The chart below shows the impact that Kindergarten Readiness Camp had on positive social behaviors as measured by pre- and post-assessments using Pearson’s Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS) instrument .





## Parent Satisfaction Survey

Parents were overwhelmingly pleased with the support the camp provided around social skills development and around communicating information and resources to parents about what participants learned in the classroom and how to support that at home.



Child's Favorite Part of Camp	11 Parents Responded
Playing with other kids/making friends	7
Field trip	3
Painting	2
Everything	1
Social skills	1
Physical skills	1
Saying ABC's	1
Food	1
Learning and Playing	1
Computer lab	1
No naps	1
More independence	1
Homework	1
Parent Meetings	8 Parents Responded
I was able to get information for my children to learn at home	3
The social and emotional parent lecture was helpful	3
I learned to use what I had laying around the house for educational use	1
The things that were taught at school were reinforced through the homework	1
Meetings were entertaining and full of information	1
Other Comments	5 Parents Responded
The teachers were wonderful	4
If it was not for this camp my child would not be as far as she is now	1
The program was a very beneficial program. My grandson loved it.	1
My child showed me what he learned everyday	1
Suggestions for Next Year	12 Parents Responded
Make program longer	6
Everything was fine	5
My child enjoyed coming everyday	1
Continue to Strive for Progression	1
More outdoor activities	1

## *Ongoing Program Evaluation*

Participants in the Kindergarten Readiness pilot will be monitored through their first year of Kindergarten. Attendance and Grades will be collected quarterly and NWEA scores will be collected throughout the year. SIUE has a data sharing agreement with School District 189. Par-

ents will be asked to submit information voluntarily for those that enrolled in another school district.



## *Future Action Steps*

SIUE has been awarded a \$65,000 grant from the Boeing Company to expand the Kindergarten Readiness Summer Camp to eight classrooms with a total of 80 students in the summer of 2017.



## East St. Louis Center

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### We're on the Web!

<https://www.siue.edu/eslc/index.shtml>

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The East St. Louis Center is a place that inspires... prepares.... and connects youth and adults to opportunities that allow them to reach their full potential.



- ***Inspiring youth to believe in themselves and their community***
- ***Preparing Youth to succeed from cradle to career***
- ***Connecting Youth to post-secondary education and career options in high demand fields***

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## *SIUE East St. Louis Center*

The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) East St. Louis Center has supported youth, adults and families in the Metro East community for more than 70 years. The Center is part of a historic, rich and vibrant community—and we are committed to being a neighbor East St. Louis residents can count on.

We inspire individuals and families, and help them

lead successful and healthy lives. We provide care for young children. We help teens prepare for college. We help young adults build skills that lead to success in college and better jobs. We offer high-quality, affordable health care.

Located just 20 miles south of the SIUE campus, the SIUE East St. Louis Center connects the community with the research, faculty, students and credibility that

a nationally recognized university brings.

SIUE East St. Louis Center programs prepare more than 2,000 youth in grades Pre-K-12 each year for successful futures.

We believe that all youth can succeed given the right supports.