

SIUE East St. Louis Center offers new Kindergarten Readiness Program

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EDWARDSVILLE - Little heads line up and stand still in a long line. And when one person makes a sound, a four-year-old boy turns and gives a stern “shhh!” His teacher smiles, because the student is learning one of the many lessons to be grasped at **Southern Illinois University Edwardsville East St. Louis Center’s “Kamp Kindergarten,”** a new Kindergarten Readiness Summer Camp.

“All of the data is now stressing the importance of developing children’s non-cognitive skills to ensure that they succeed from cradle to career,” said Johanna Wharton, Kamp Kindergarten program administrator. “We know that math and reading is important, but

demonstrating initiative, resilience, self-control, the ability to form relationships and communicate thoughts and feels with others, those are the skills that ensure that children succeed from K-to-12 and into college.”

“We want to make sure that children are socially and emotionally ready ‘to do’ kindergarten,” said Heidi Eichenseer, director of Kamp Kindergarten.

The five-week pilot camp is designed to help address the needs of children and their parents as they prepare to make this significant transition, emphasized Wharton.

The pilot camp is a partnership with East St. Louis School District 189. The camp is running from 8 a.m.-1 p.m. weekdays through July 15 at Miles Davis Kindergarten Center, 725 N. 15th St. in East St. Louis. The program began Monday, June 20. The program is targeting 40 incoming kindergarteners who are at risk of falling behind their kindergarten classmates.

“At risk is defined as little or no prior pre-kindergarten experience and/or low assessment scores within their outgoing pre-kindergarten program,” said Jesse Dixon, ESLC executive director.

During the camp children will learn such skill sets as how to take turns, how to transition from one activity to another and how to take things from school to home, according to Eichenseer.

Parents of the children will also be given teaching ideas during weekly Camp Fire Chats, to be held from noon-1 p.m. on Fridays, Eichenseer said.

“We will discuss educational topics, and parents will be given the opportunity to make items to support their child’s education at home,” she continued. “For instance, I will show them how to make puzzles out of cereal boxes. There are many things around the home that can assist in children’s learning.”

Providing curriculum support for the program is Martha Latorre, PhD, associate professor in SIUE’s Department of Teaching and Learning and director of the Early Childhood Education program, and Adrienne Kaesberg, school readiness coach with SIUE Head Start/Early Head Start.

“Research shows that children with strong social skills are more successful in school,” Latorre said. “One important social skill is: ‘How do I get along in a group?’ If a child is well behaved in the classroom, the teacher will focus positively on that child.

“If a child is disruptive, the teacher will either focus negatively on the child or ignore the child. When children are well behaved, the teacher can better focus on teaching rather than crowd control.”

Wharton listed some other objectives of the Kindergarten Readiness Camp:

- Close the kindergarten readiness skills gap by focusing on social, math, pre-literacy and basic skills
- To help students and parents learn some of the basic routines and school norms that enable them to be ready to learn at school
- Get students excited about learning and school with such activities that include science, technology, sports, literacy, writing, art, math and performing arts
- Help parents become involved in their child’s educational success

The camp will include the following partnerships:

- East St. Louis School District 189
- SIUE Head Start/Early Head Start
- SIUE East St. Louis Center for the Performing Arts
- SIUE School of Education
- Greater East St. Louis Early Learning Partnership & Innovation Zone
- Lume Institute
- Youth Coordinating Council members

We want children to be ready for kindergarten from day one,” said Wharton. “The East St. Louis Center’s Kindergarten Readiness Camp will expose these children to skills that will benefit them from K and beyond.”