

Area educators attend SIUE faculty-led workshop on instructing and supporting students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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EDWARDSVILLE - Special education teachers and school psychologists engaged in lifelong learning and collaboration to provide the best possible outcomes for their students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) during a workshop hosted by Southern Illinois University Edwardsville faculty Aug. 8-10 at Civic Memorial High School in Bethalto.

Leading the innovative interdisciplinary workshop were SIUE School of Education, Health and Human Behavior (SEHHB) faculty members Susanne James, PhD, associate

professor and graduate program director in the Department of Teaching and Learning, and Elizabeth McKenney, PhD, associate professor of school psychology in the Department of Psychology.

The two combined their expertise to provide 25 area educators and psychologists from schools across the region with effective strategies to help students with ASD gain social communication, academic and adaptive skills.

“Our special education program surveyed SIUE graduates and administrators and asked them for the areas they need more professional learning, and autism was one of the biggest areas of need,” said James. “Dr. McKenney and I have a common interest in working with students with ASD and believe that individuals with disabilities should be included in our community. It is important for their livelihood and independence to learn effective social, communication and behavioral skills.”

Educators play an integral role in offering students with ASD, and their parents, the resources they need to achieve such independence.

“There’s a misconception that the best ASD services can only be provided in private or university-based treatment settings,” McKenney explained. “But public schools are inherently multidisciplinary, outcomes-oriented, social places, which actually makes them perfect for providing strong services to students with ASD. To do that, educators need to be able to team up effectively around the goal of providing evidence-based services.”



“This fall I’ll be in a classroom with young children who have autism, so I’m eager to get the latest information about how to help them socially and academically achieve their goals,” said Angela Cartee, a special education teacher in the Perandoe Educational Program. “I am from a rural community, so gaining connections with SIUE, other educators and resources in this region is valuable for me, my colleagues and parents whose students we support.”

“We need to work together, we address the whole child, rather than one aspect,” added Vicky Mudd, a special education teacher at Zahnow Elementary in Waterloo, regarding the interdisciplinary workshop. “My hopes are that this conference will help me transition students with autism from a more self-contained focused environment, to an inclusive one where they can better access the general education curriculum.”

Multiple SIUE alumni and current students presented during the workshop on such topics as video modeling, social narratives and restorative practice.

“The evidence based practice of video modeling can assist students with autism in language, cognitive, communication, behavior and social skills,” added Sarah Crause, of Godfrey, who is pursuing a bachelor’s in special education at SIUE. “The research and applied learning opportunities I’ve had in SIUE’s program have provided me with real-world experience. I plan to teach either in a Preschool for All program or elementary special education, because I believe early intervention is essential for students with exceptionalities.”

Other student presenters were Kasey Kowalski, of Troy, and Kathryn Skaer, of Millstadt, both of whom are studying special education. Haley Pemberton, of Maryville, completed both a bachelor’s and master’s in psychology at SIUE in 2015 and ’16, respectively. Now an intern in the Alton School District while pursuing her school psychology specialist degree, Pemberton was glad to attend the conference and learn from other dedicated professionals.

“It’s incredibly important for all fields to have this connection with one another,” Pemberton said. “We all bring different expertise to the table. Expanding our knowledge base and working as a team will allow us to best support our students.”

Alumni presenters included Ashley Reu, MS ’16, from Belleville Area Special Services Cooperative, Racheal Leckrone, BS ’12, MS ’15, from Bethalto School District, and Patty Hernandez, BS, ’95, MSED ’13, from Hillsboro School District. The teacher experts played a key role in designing the workshop to bridge the research of James and McKenney with the daily applied practice of the attending teachers and school psychologists.

“It was critical for us to provide workshop participants with practice-based information when working with students with ASD by teachers that are exemplary in their work,” James said. “This workshop aligned with SIUE’s values, as we are in service to our community to help educators with areas they feel in need of more professional learning.”

For more information on programming within the Departments of Teaching and Learning or Psychology, [click here](#).

The [SIUE School of Education, Health and Human Behavior](#) prepares students in a wide range of fields including public health, exercise science, nutrition, instructional technology, psychology, speech-language pathology and audiology, educational administration, and teaching. Faculty members engage in leading-edge research, which enhances teaching and enriches the educational experience. The School supports the community through on-campus clinics, outreach to children and families, and a focused commitment to enhancing individual lives across the region.