

East St. Louis District 189 to debut Family and Community Engagement Center Wednesday

February 27 2018 11:18 AM



WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM

EAST ST. LOUIS - East St. Louis School District 189 leaders have pledged to “connect the dots for educational success” with the opening of a new Family and Community Engagement Center Feb. 28.



The facility is to be the centerpiece of the district's strategic plan to create an environment that will ensure that every student is prepared to succeed in life, careers, and postsecondary education. When families and schools and communities partner to promote learning and healthy development in all children, students thrive and student outcomes increase. Meaningful family engagement is based on the premise that parents, educators, and community members share responsibility for the academic, physical, social, emotional, and behavioral development of youth and equips and empowers families in a strengths-based, culturally-responsive manner, according to Dr. Tiffany Gholson, Director of Parent and Student Support Services.

The new center, according to Gholson, will support students, parents, and families as well as provide services, learning opportunities, support, and engagement in a centralized location.

“It will create a one-stop shop model for resources including transportation, homelessness, immunizations, after school programming, and more” said Gholson. “It will also aid in collaborating with schools for a seamless enrollment process for next year.”

The James E. Williams Family and Community Engagement Center and supports include:

1. **Parent University:** Parent University is a learning portal for families that will cover topics such as Effective Black Parenting courses, GED classes, Advocating without Attitudes, Harvest to Table garden classes, cooking classes, Understanding your child's IEP, and Understanding your child's mental illness, Skyward Training for Parents, East Side Works Curriculum (Soft Skills), Dads are Parents Too, and Family Bonding Activities.
2. **Ms. Dottie's Garden:** The garden will host up to 20 families each year as they learn to plant and nurture a garden, harvest the vegetables and herbs grown, understand nutrition and practice recipes, and how to pickle, can and sell their harvest.
3. **Resource Center:** Our resource center is ever-growing and filled with information on resources serving our community.
4. **Transcripts and Records:** Families can access their educational or historical documents to assist individuals in continuing their careers and postsecondary education.
5. **Parent Support Center Hotline:** To maintain open lines of communication, the Center will assist with concerns that may not be satisfactorily addressed at the school campus level.
6. **Family Access Center:** Parents can come to the Center to view the following important information regarding your child's educational experience in District 189:

grades (grades 7-12 only), district and school calendars, upcoming assignments, messages from your child's school and teachers, class schedules, attendance records, a place to manage emergency phone/email contact information.

The Center and its services are one component of a master plan to support students and families. “The District’s new strategic plan includes a goal to foster a positive culture and climate that supports the health and social-emotional well-being of every student,” Gholson explained. “We have set objectives to obtain success toward our goal.”

Zorina “Ann” Brown serves as a key staff member of the new Center. As the Family and Community Engagement Coordinator, Ann is working daily to support parents and assist them in supporting their children on their educational journey. “We are thrilled to be building on the work of Lead Parents in the school campuses, expanding parent rooms in each school and providing supportive training through Parent University,” noted Brown.

Other improvements District 189 has made toward ensuring a safe and healthy environment for students include:

- Placed a school social worker at each school to address the social emotional needs of general education students.
- Implemented Restorative Practices district-wide resulting in a 12% decline in the overall suspension rate. Secondary schools experienced a 43% decrease in suspension rates.
- Applied the use of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support to guide social-emotional supports and interventions.
- Implemented an evidence-based social-emotional curriculum at two district pilot schools this year, with hopes to expand district-wide, preschool-grade 12.
- Advanced the professional development staff receive to ensure they are trauma-informed. This includes Youth Mental Health First Aid Training, Family Trauma Training and PrePare Crisis Training.
- Established a Crisis Team at each campus as well as the district’s central office.
- Hired a part-time nurse at Vivian Adams Early Childhood to be able to support the needs of preschool students and in the process of hiring nurses for each school building.
- Focused on partnering with external experts to provide school-based mental health services that offer individual and family counseling in the schools to assist with depression, anxiety, trauma and other challenges.
- Updated the Student Code of Conduct to include positive student behavior as well as instructive, corrective, and restorative interventions.
- Reduced the number of buses arriving and departing late, allowing students enough time to eat breakfast before attending class.

- Ensured students are provided access to healthy nutrition by implementing Breakfast After the Bell, supporting USDA Smart Snack regulations and participating in the National School Lunch Program, Summer Food Program and Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program.
- Proactively conducted independent testing of all district consumable water sources to ensure all drinking water was safe and met EPA standards.
- Improved the safety of students, staff and property by purchasing, upgrading and installing new camera systems, weapon detectors and an additional security guard for elementary schools.
- Digitized student records to reduce the handling of the hard copies of the documents, providing more efficient service to community members.

And the work does not end there.

“All schools will encourage a clean, healthy, positive and supportive lifestyle, culture, and climate for all children,” Gholson said. “We are actively looking to hire more school nurses. In the meantime, we are working closely with our outside partners to provide better dental and vision services to students as well as more mental health services. We are committed to providing culturally-responsive, trauma-aware, and supportive services to students that include measurable outcomes for health and wellness and growth.”

The formal dedication of the Family and Community Engagement Center will happen with an open house between 10 a.m and 6 p.m. at the James E. Williams Center located at 401 Katherine Dunham Rd in East St. Louis. This open house will provide an opportunity for community members to meet the staff and learn more about the programming.