

SIUE STEM Center hosts star spectacle during District 7's NASA Day

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EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's Center for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Research, Education and Outreach shared its Star Lab Inflatable Planetarium and astronomy expertise with 8th grade

students participating in the Edwardsville School District 7's NASA Day on Friday, May 18.

NASA Day began with the special opportunity to host a NASA International Space Station Inflight Education Downlink at the ECUSD's Liberty Middle School. Eighth grade students from Liberty and Lincoln Middle Schools were able to interact with astronauts aboard the International Space Station.

Following the astronomical interaction, students spent the day enjoying space-related presentations by community partners, including the SIUE STEM Centers, Riverbend Astronomy Club, Boeing, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency and the Edwardsville High School Science Club.

"We are always glad to share our STEM-related resources and expertise with the community," said Colin Wilson, resource manager of the SIUE STEM Center. "Today, the students crawled into our inflatable planetarium where we star gazed and talked about various constellations, including their placement and names from the geographical perspectives of the North Pole and Edwardsville."

"Most eighth graders don't get to do this. We're the lucky ones," said Connor, a participating student. "It's always more interesting to learn through hands-on activities like this, compared to reading a textbook. I enjoyed seeing the astronauts via video chat and entering the inflatable planetarium."

"I anticipated that this would be cool and interesting, because constellations are giant and everything about space is a lot of fun," added classmate Meredith after the STEM Center's planetarium presentation. "It was interesting to learn what shapes and names have been given to big balls of gas in the sky."

According to an email message from District 7 Superintendent Lynda Andre, the opportunity to interact with astronauts "supports the 8th grade science curriculum, enhances daily STEM education and increases student knowledge about the International Space Station."

"Today has presented our students with an awesome experience and shown them what they can possibly do in the future," said SIUE alumna and special education teacher Jenna Rickert. "Seeing the astronauts in space is one of the most amazing things I've been a part of. The district and many community partners came together to make this an exciting day."

The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville [Center for STEM Research, Education and Outreach](#) comprises an independent group of researchers and educators, innovating

ways to engage students and the public in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Within the SIUE Graduate School, the Center brings together research faculty, graduate students and practitioners to conduct education research. The Center contributes educational expertise to SIUE undergraduate classes and provides professional development for K-12 teachers. The Center boasts a significant library of equipment and resources, which are available for loan at no cost to campus and regional instructors. For more information, visit <https://www.siue.edu/stem/about.shtml> or contact STEM Center Director Sharon Locke at (618) 650-3065 or stemcenter@siue.edu.