

SIUE Early Childhood Center ensures student parents and their children flourish

by Megan Wieser

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EDWARDSVILLE - With a smile so big you can barely see his eyes, three-year-old Princeton captures the heart and attention of anyone who has the pleasure of meeting him. If you're lucky, you may hear a story or two from the imaginative preschooler who loves fire-breathing dragons, counting, kiwis, oranges and more.

Princeton's personality and educational development are flourishing thanks to the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville [Early Childhood Center](#) (ECC), and of course, his mom Melody Peterson, a junior studying sociology and pre-law at SIUE.

"It's definitely stressful juggling being a student and a parent," Peterson said. "He is my top priority. I am incredibly grateful to have found SIUE, where both my and Princeton's education is high-quality."

When considering where to pursue her bachelor's, Peterson's initial favorite was Purdue. But that changed when she stepped foot on SIUE's campus. Her decision was solidified when she visited the ECC.

"I toured the campus and instantly fell in love," she recalled. "SIUE was beautiful and inviting. It was a big school, with a small feel. When I came to the ECC, I knew immediately that Princeton would be in good hands."

According to ECC Director Rebecca Dabbs MacLean, the ECC provides a high-quality preschool experience for all children, and is strongly committed to ensuring that caliber of schooling is accessible and affordable for all, especially student parents.

"When a student parent crosses the commencement stage, it changes their life and their kids' lives," Dabbs MacLean emphasized. "We want SIUE student parents, like Melody, to be able to access this kind of education for their children."

Recent state budget cuts led to increased tuition costs at the ECC, making it more difficult for low-income families to utilize the campus resource. Therefore, in fall 2018, Dabbs MacLean and her team worked tirelessly to secure two major grants that will aid in their support of a targeted group of families.

The grants include a five-year \$705,000 award from the Illinois State Board of Education's Preschool for All program. It focuses on preparing at-risk children for kindergarten. A four-year \$675,836 award from the U.S. Department of Education's CCAMPIS: Childcare Access Means Parents in School program emphasizes student parent retention and graduation.

“We wrote these grants with our student parent population top of mind, and are thrilled to have received funding that enhances our educational mission,” Dabbs MacLean said. “The Preschool for All grant is designed to help 40 children gain preschool services.”

“The CCAMPIS program will make the SIUE ECC’s gold circle of quality services more accessible to a larger number of low-income students,” she added “It is designed for students who receive financial aid and covers a large chunk of their costs at the ECC. The grant also expects us to support those students by checking in on their academic progress and building strong relationships with them to make sure all of their needs are met here at SIUE. We are offering a monthly student parent support group beginning spring 2019.”

For Peterson, whose sights are set on law school next, both of these grants help ensure her and Princeton’s continued success.

“The teachers and administrators at the ECC have been instrumental in our lives,” Peterson said. “They are invested in the success of not only the student parent, but also the student’s child. While I’m in class, I can focus on being a student, and know that my son is safe and getting an excellent education. That peace of mind means the world to me.”

The ECC strives to maintain a balanced enrollment of children ages 2-5 whose parents are students, SIUE faculty and staff, and surrounding community members. With this grant support, the ECC hopes to attract more student parents to offer their high-quality services to those children and families who may benefit most.

While a small portion of the grant funding supports teacher professional development, most of it is earmarked for a specific population. Therefore, Dabbs MacLean continues to emphasize the ECC’s need and appreciation for community giving.

“Positive early childhood experiences foster the growth and development of tomorrow’s leaders,” she explained. “We see a lot of families, outside of student parents, that would benefit from additional support to make this high-quality care affordable. We are grateful for the support we receive from individuals and businesses, and remain committed to doing our part to secure funding that changes lives.”

For more information on the SIUE Early Childhood Center and how to give, visit siue.edu/early-childhood-center. For additional details on giving to the ECC, please contact Dabbs MacLean at 618-650-2256.

The [SIUE Early Childhood Center](http://siue.edu/early-childhood-center) recognizes the potential of each child and the vital contributions parents make to the ECC community. Our program is licensed by the

[Illinois Department of Children and Family Services \(DCFS\)](#), has a 4-star rating from the [Illinois Quality Rating System \(QRS\)](#), a Gold Circle of Quality through [IL ExceleRate](#) and is accredited through the [National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)](#). We are also proud that our playground is a certified Nature Explore Classroom through the [Arbor Day Foundation](#).

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#) provides students with a high quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of more than 13,000.