

SIUE Celebrates Teacher Appreciation Week

by Megan Weiser
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EDWARDSVILLE - It's not a 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday through Friday job. It pulls at the heart-strings, bringing abundant highs and difficult lows. Teaching is a worthy professional calling for those who want to do good, be a support system and develop learners into leaders

The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville School of Education, Health and Human Behavior (SEHKB) is celebrating Teacher Appreciation Week, May 5-11. It's a time to honor the incredible difference educators make in their daily work.

“Can you tell me what comes next?” Amanda Luce asked a student working on a math problem.

“Yes, 9,” she replied enthusiastically upon receiving the student’s correct answer.

Luce is a self-contained special education teacher at Eastwood Elementary in East Alton. She earned both a bachelor’s and master’s in special education from SIUE in 1995 and 2007, respectively. She’s currently pursuing graduate level courses through the SEHHB Department of Teaching and Learning.

“I chose special education, because I have always had a passion for helping what I consider to be an underdog,” Luce explained. “Society views children, or people in general with disabilities, as the underdog in certain situations. I wanted to work with children that might be perceived that way, because I don’t believe that has to be the case. You can teach to their abilities, and strengthen them and their education.”

Luce’s teaching journey has come full circle. Once an aspiring educator, completing her undergraduate student teaching, she now acts as a cooperating teacher for current students eagerly preparing for their own classroom. Student teacher Daija Nellums, of Marion, has found the perfect mentor match in Luce.

“She has been such a positive role model for me,” said Nellums, a special education major slated to graduate from the SEHHB on May 11. “She’s been uplifting and inspiring. She has no problem allowing me to take ownership in the classroom and assume the teacher responsibilities.”

“Daija is phenomenal,” Luce emphasized. “She was born to be a special education teacher, like myself. Each school year brings different challenges, but this seemed like the perfect year to take on the cooperating teacher duties. I ended up with the perfect candidate in Daija.”

All SIUE education majors complete three student teaching practicums in order to find their best classroom fit. Nellums notes her special education placements in a high school, pre-kindergarten setting and elementary classroom helped her decide her greatest connection is with elementary students.

“I was worried I’d feel as if I was being thrown into a classroom upon graduation, but that’s not the case at all thanks to my practicum experiences,” Nellums explained. “My academic teachers and cooperating teachers have prepared me well for my next steps.”

“I love Mrs. Luce so much,” she exclaimed, “but, I am incredibly ready to have my own classroom. I can’t believe my time has finally come!”

Despite the unbounding passion of current and future educators, their important work is too often underappreciated. During Teacher Appreciation Week, Luce and Nellums most want the public to remember that a teacher’s job never ends.

“Once I leave here, I don’t stop thinking about these kids,” Nellums said. “It’s a heartfelt job.”

“I feel appreciated in many different ways, sometimes by an administrator or parent,” added Luce, whose daughter Andrea will graduate from SIUE on May 11 with a bachelor’s in elementary education. “But mostly, I feel appreciated by the students. When they want to be here and are excited about learning, that’s all I need. I love what I do. I’ll never do anything else.”

The SIUE School of Education, Health and Human Behavior prepares students in a wide range of fields including community and 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.

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Photo: (L-R) SIUE alumna and cooperating teacher from Eastwood Elementary Amanda Luce and SIUE senior student teacher Daija Nellums.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02etFQWMO8Y>