

SIUE East St. Louis CHS Encourages Qualitative Living Among Black Male Students

by Megan Wieser

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EAST ST. LOUIS - One set of adjectives included such words as “respectful, intelligent and trustworthy,” while another set of descriptors contained phrasing like “pay bills, raise their kids and works hard.”

It was an exercise to draw a picture and list the attributes of both a gentleman and a man, which was done by male students at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville East St. Louis Charter High School (CHS) on Wednesday, Dec. 1. The students are part of Black Gentleman Entering Manhood (GEMs), a program designed to mentor Black males, presented collaboratively by the CHS and the SIUE School of Education, Health and Human Behavior (SEHHB).

“It is our hope to build accountable, responsible, and intentional gentlemen for tomorrow,” said Nate Williams, PhD, associate professor in the SEHHB’s Department of Teaching and Learning and CHS liaison. “Black GEMs hold weekly enrichment programming focused on positive attitudinal development and career readiness. Freshmen and sophomores meet in one group and juniors and seniors meet in another group.”



“Under the word, ‘gentleman,’ I wrote, ‘respecting of elders’ and ‘understanding of women,’” said CHS junior Quanzelle Anesca. “Under the word, ‘man,’ I put, ‘he has a job’ and ‘he takes care of business.’ I see myself as both a man and a gentleman. I’m respectful. I work and pay my bills.”

“What’s the difference between a gentleman and a man?” Williams asked the group of CHS juniors and seniors at the conclusion of the exercise.

“If you are a real man, then you should carry yourself with respect and be kind and generous,” said one student.

“Your parents can’t make you a gentleman. They don’t know about the situations you get in. It’s up to you,” replied another student.

In the freshman and sophomore class, Orlando Evans Jr. offered his explanations. “I think of myself as a gentleman, because I was raised to treat people with respect. A man will take responsibility and take care of his family, his house, and his garden. Excellent examples of the gentlemen in my life are my dad, Orlando Evans Sr., and my grandfather, Donnie Smith.”



CHS's Black GEMs resulted as a charge from CHS Director Gina Jeffries, EdD, and is taught by Williams and CHS team member Greg Laktzian. The mentoring program was the collective creation of CHS male scholars and CHS Black faculty members, including Laktzian, Ronald Irving, Shawn Roundtree, and Johnathan Tate. Initial meetings began in fall 2020.

“We want members of Black GEMs to be examples of what healthy, intentional Black men should be,” added Williams. “We hope that our students take what they learn and put it into everyday action.”

Other topics that the mentoring program will address include consent, healthy sexual practices, a career in education, self-motivation, and the introduction of various professions.

“We plan to add an afterschool component of Black GEMs at the Charter High School in the spring semester,” said Williams. “We also envision growing and expanding to start chapters in other schools in the area.”

[The SIUE Charter High School](#) is a school-of-choice for families in the East St. Louis School District 189. The mission of the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville East St. Louis Charter High School is to prepare students who are career- and college-ready upon graduation. To achieve this mission, the school and its staff will positively impact the educational and economic lives of East St. Louis, Illinois youth through individualized instruction in core academic subjects, exploration of career interests and aptitudes, assistance in realizing students' talents, high academic goals, and expectations that graduates will become competitive employees for the 21st century.

