

# Edwardsville CEO Program Builds "Entrepreneurial Mindset" in High Schoolers

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
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EDWARDSVILLE - The Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities (CEO) program cultivates an “entrepreneurial mindset” in high school seniors. But if you ask them, it’s also just a lot of fun.

The CEO program is based out of [Midland Institute for Entrepreneurship](#) in Effingham, IL, with regional chapters throughout the state. The Edwardsville CEO program brings together students from Edwardsville High School, Father McGivney Catholic High School and Metro-East Lutheran High School to foster job skills through hands-on learning.

“Our goal with the program is to help them develop an entrepreneurial mindset,” said Hannah Allison, the Edwardsville program’s facilitator. “They learn the skills and the tools necessary to help set them up for success, no matter what career path they plan on choosing.”

The program selects 26 applicants who are “hardworking, trustworthy and motivated.” Throughout senior year, the students meet every day from 7–8:30 a.m. to hear from guest speakers and establish their own business ventures. They often gather at local businesses to speak with the owners and managers about their work.

“The community is the classroom,” Allison added. “We’ve been super lucky with Edwardsville CEO in that the community has just been so gracious and so welcoming to us.”

The selection is based on students’ character and potential rather than GPA or extracurriculars. Allison noted that the program draws students with different goals, including many seniors who aren’t sure yet what they want to do after graduation. The experience encourages students to think like entrepreneurs, and this attitude is what they ultimately carry into their careers, no matter what field they pursue.

“What we try to help them experience firsthand is that it’s okay to not know exactly what you want to do,” Allison said. “What is most important is that you establish those really important skills of how to communicate, how to shake hands, how to do what you say you’re going to do, how to work hard. When you have all those skills, things work out.”

Additionally, the class meets guest speakers and business owners who share their own ups and downs, including many people who, by their own admission, struggled academically in high school or didn’t know what they wanted to do for a long time. Allison said “a lightbulb goes off” for a lot of students when they realize it’s possible to find success on a nonlinear path.

That being said, the CEO program does set up one possible track for graduates. At the end of the fall semester, students work together to organize a class business venture. The spring semester is then devoted to individual ventures, which some students develop further into side hustles or full-time jobs.



The Edwardsville CEO students are currently working on their class business venture, a [community Christmas event called “Jumpstart to Joy.”](#) Allison is excited to see this project come to fruition, but she is especially looking forward to the great work the students will do after graduation. She hopes the support they’ve received from the Edwardsville CEO program will boost their confidence and leadership skills so they can think and work like true entrepreneurs.

“Across the board, what I see from our alumni is that it’s not really about that actual business or the money that they make from it. It’s about all of the lessons they’re learning as a part of that process, and those they carry with them in numerous ways,” she explained. “I can’t even tell you the number of messages and emails and notifications we get from our alumni that are just tying small things or big things back to what they directly learned in the program and how it’s affected their lives...To watch these students grow and experience all of these lessons hands-on is very fulfilling. It’s a pleasure to be in this role and to get to do this.”

For more information about the Edwardsville CEO program, visit their [official website at EdwardsvilleCEO.com](#) or check out their [Facebook page](#) and other social media sites.

