

Carolyn Jason Selected To Lead A Revisioning Of The SIUE Head Start /Early Head Start Program

by Patricia Merritt

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EDWARDSVILLE - After decades of ensuring program compliance, working with children, families, staff and more, longtime Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS) staff member and interim program director Carolyn Jason was named HS/EHS Program Director.

“I am pleased and excited to continue to help the program that I love and that has advanced so many lives over the years,” said Jason. “SIUE Head Start/Early Head Start has a commitment to provide services that not only prepare children for school readiness and success; but is also key to improving the lives of families.”

“Early childhood services in a Head Start community, of course include education services, but also integrate those comprehensive services of health, dental, hearing and vision, and family goal setting,” she continued. “Since the inception of Head Start, these are services that help remove barriers to a child’s education.”

“SIUE is fortunate to have such an experienced administrator who is a recognized leader in the world of Federal Head Start Programs,” said SIUE East St. Louis Center Executive Director Timothy Staples, EdD. “Mrs. Jason provided crucial leadership during a once in a hundred year’s pandemic. Additionally, during her time as interim, Mrs. Jason guided the department through a re-competition which yielded a 5-year grant status. Mrs. Jason’s years of experience as an administrator and a former federal reviewer of Head Start/Early Head Start programs across the country, will assist her in ensuring success for the program.”

Jason began working at Head Start in December 2000 as the center coordinator at the SIUE Cahokia Head Start Center. She was promoted in 2007 to serve as program operations coordinator, where she was responsible for monitoring the program data collection system and ensuring program compliance for federal and state regulations. From 2015-2020, Jason served in a dual role as program operations coordinator and assistant program director. Her most recent position was that of interim program director from 2020-23.

“The greatest reward, having served in various roles at SIUE Head Start, is how each position has allowed me to be involved in different levels of service to children and families,” said Jason, an SIUE alumna. She earned a master’s in public administration in 2004. “It gives me a sense of pride and joy when former students return to share successes in reading, math or attendance; or when a former parent visits to share how

the Head Start program gave them confidence to serve on their child's school PTO or PTA. And lastly, I continue to enjoy the relationships formed with parents, staff and the Head Start community.”

Jason's immediate plans for the program includes a continued commitment to provide quality services to help prepare children and families for school readiness and life-long success. “I am prepared to work with families and staff in every way to honor this commitment,” she noted.

“I believe SIUE Head Start/Early Head Start is in a position to reimagine program services, relationships with families and staff, and develop enhanced community awareness efforts,” shared Jason. “I am looking forward to the opportunity to stay involved in the ‘work.’”

The [SIUE Head Start/Early Head Start Program](#) serves more than 860 families and children birth through age five, including children with special needs, throughout St. Clair County. The program also provides services to expectant mothers. The program is housed in 12 early childhood centers, seven managed directly by SIUE staff and five collaborations. The program includes a rigorous school readiness program and provides comprehensive services, such as health/ dental screenings and family engagement and support activities.