

SIUE East St. Louis Charter High School Awards its First National Honor Society Inductees

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EAST ST. LOUIS - Wearing embossed, white-collar sashes and holding white candles, the inductees of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville East St. Louis Charter High School (CHS) Chapter of the National Honor Society looked out on a roomful of family, friends and staff. Thunderous applause and shouts were offered in celebration of the inaugural class.

“You are making history today as being the SIUE East St. Louis Charter High School’s very first National Honor Society (NHS) members,” beamed CHS Director Gina Jeffries, EdD, “and we couldn’t be prouder of you.”

The NHS is based on the four pillars of scholarship, service, leadership and character. Nationally, students must range in grades from sophomore to senior and have a minimum grade point average of 3.0. CHS's minimum is a 3.1. CHS applicants also had to write a 250-word essay expressing their interest, submit three letters of support and have an exemplary discipline record.

"Those selected to serve in this society are viewed as role models for their peers and are outstanding representatives of CHS," said Liza Cummings, PhD, CHS assistant director. "They will be ambassadors for the school."

The 16 students were selected by the CHS National Honor Society Faculty Council: Advisor Tomisha Montgomery, counselor; Mildred Fort, science instructor; Colin Neumeyer, English instructor; Stephanie Newton, reading and math interventionist; and Carolyn Stewart, social studies instructor.

The NHS motto comes from the French phrase, "Noblesse Oblige" meaning "Nobility Obligates," according to Montgomery. "Scholarship, service, leadership and character are more than mere badges of honor for NHS members," Montgomery told the audience. "These principles are transformative keys that unlock potential, enhancing every student's educational journey and ultimately empowering them to make profound, enduring contributions to our world."

"You all had to overcome obstacles to receive this honor today, whether it was through academic, physical, mental or emotional difficulties," said Newton, speaker for the ceremony. "School has changed in the last four years because of the pandemic. Both you and your parents should be proud to be in this special ceremony and receive this special award."

"Still, I want to challenge you that although you have received this honor today," added Newton, "continue to work on achieving the pillars of the National Honor Society in your future endeavors."

Four inductees were selected to speak about each of the NHS pillars.

"Scholarship is more than a report card," said Laylah Leech. "It represents a dedicated commitment to lifelong learning. It's about optimizing the educational opportunities offered and pursuing knowledge within and beyond academic confines. Scholarship necessitates a consistent effort, with an aspiration to contribute positively to the world through one's own knowledge, skills and experiences."

"Service represents the choice of stepping outside oneself to meet the needs of others, fueled by an unwavering passion for a cause, heartfelt empathy for others, or driven by

personal circumstances,” said Aaliyah Coleman. “It’s about performing selfless acts that transcend the ordinary, engendering transformative changes that resonate through our schools, ripple across our communities, and reverberate on a global scale. In the noble act of service, we sculpt a better world with our hands, our hearts and our humanity.”

“Leadership is more than a position or title,” said Julez Hill. “It means embodying the spirit of initiative, innovation, and influence. It’s about inspiring peers through actions, nurturing a collaborative environment, and championing positive change. Student leaders embrace the responsibility of shaping their academic community, all while fostering personal growth and development. It’s an interplay of intellect, empathy, and resilience, guiding others while continually learning and evolving.”

“Character is the essence of who we are,” said Dannica Davis. “It is about valuing diversity, building relationships grounded in empathy, and exhibiting qualities like perseverance, respect, integrity, and honesty. Character lies not in public acts of virtue or visible mistakes, but in the consistent commitment to ethical and compassionate decision-making that positively affects both oneself and others.”

“Don’t take this accomplishment lightly,” said CHS Board President Willis Young. “Go out and change your community and change the world. I know you have it in you.”

Destiny Jones’s guardian knew she had greatness in her. “She is a bubbly, energetic, determined young lady,” said Kelly Brooks of the sophomore. “She is a mediator, great communicator and advocate for other students.”

However, Keithen Chism’s mother was amazed to learn about her son’s award. “I was surprised, excited and overwhelmed,” said Sheree Chism of the sophomore. “Keithen hasn’t really participated in a lot of things, but I am so glad he has gotten more involved, and especially with the National Honor Society.”

“I’m so proud of him,” said Ashley McGee of her son, Julez Hill. “When he first came to Charter High School, we were in the pandemic for two years. But he put in a lot of work. He was having difficulty with math, but he pushed past it.”

“I had some mental challenges in the beginning,” said Hill, a senior. “I had to work hard and stay consistent.”

Hill is taking the SIUE class, Introduction to Literature (ENG 111), taught by Distinguished Research Professor Howard Rambsy, PhD, in the College of Arts and Sciences’ Department of English Language and Literature. Hill also completed English 101 and is currently taking 102, offered by Southwestern Illinois College. He plans to attend SIUE and major in graphic design.

The inaugural class of the CHS Chapter of NHS include:

Keya Anderson
Anthony Ayers
T’Niyah Black
Cartier Burton
Keithen Chism
Aaliyah Coleman
Donna Cosby
Dannica Davis
Julez Hill
Shaniya Johnson
Destiny Jones
Jayla Jones
Laylah Leech
Angeleah McGee
Kielynn Palmer
Jamie Spiller

The [SIUE East St. Louis 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 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.

The [SIUE School of Education, Health and Human Behavior](#) prepares students in a wide range of fields including 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.