



Heidi Klosterman, center, worked with Jasmine Demsko-Khan, left, and Lilian Milbourn at St. Cecilia Academy in South St. Louis. The NativityMiguel model school includes extended school days and extended academic years, effective student guidance, tuition assistance, mandatory parental and community involvement, and four years of structured post-graduate support.

‘Motivated’ is key to success

BY STEVE HOUSTON

Heidi Klosterman’s title at St. Cecilia Academy in South St. Louis is graduate support counselor, but it may as well be the good shepherd.

Klosterman’s flock is composed of disadvantaged students from the city’s urban core enrolled in the ACCESS Academies middle-school program at St. Cecilia. A motivator, a mentor and even a surrogate mother for many, she is one reason why ACCESS has placed 92 percent of its 244 graduates in college prep high schools. It’s been so successful that ACCESS is hosting a June 8 fundraiser to generate high school financial aid vital to closing the gap of opportunity for impoverished students.

The students Klosterman shepherds are challenging long-held beliefs about educating children from our poorest urban neighborhoods. Eighty percent of ACCESS students qualify for federal poverty programs and 42 percent are from single parent homes. But with support from ACCESS and others, including the Archdiocese of St. Louis, they are attending such schools as Cardinal Ritter College Prep, CBC High School, Incarnate Word Acade-

my, Nerinx Hall, St. Mary’s High School and other college prep high schools.

That lofty goal also challenges ACCESS to ensure its graduates keep pace with demanding academics while bridging the cultural and other divides found in largely suburban schools. That’s where Klosterman, 29, comes in. “Our program wouldn’t succeed without the dedication of graduate support counselors like Heidi,” said Tom Nolan, executive director of ACCESS.

Other ACCESS schools are at Central Catholic Academy, 1106 N. Jefferson Ave., and Most Holy Trinity Academy, 1435 Mallinckrodt St.

Klosterman cultivates trusting relationships in middle school to prepare students for college prep schools. From tutoring support, to helping with school transportation, to assisting with financial aid, Klosterman guides them through many challenges, including:

- Adjusting to high school environments where differences of color, class, ethnicity and other factors can complicate the transition to high school life.
- Struggling with the demanding

rigors of the college prep environment. Klosterman’s personal knowledge of students guides high schools in developing strategies to help them keep pace academically.

- Working with students’ families to ensure that the resources and encouragement needed for academic success are provided. For example, Klosterman ensures that the safe haven of St. Cecilia is available for after-school tutoring.

Klosterman, a member of St. Margaret of Scotland who lives in the Shaw neighborhood with her husband, Kyle, and their 2-year-old foster child, stays in touch beyond high school. She helps students apply for financial aid to succeed at becoming, in most cases, the first member of their family ever to attend college.

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