

NEW ST. LOUIS MAGNET SCHOOL WITH HEALTH SCIENCE FOCUS ATTRACTS NUMEROUS COUNTY STUDENTS

All its Bright, Motivated Students There to Gain Edge

by Peggy Magee



At the new St. Louis magnet high school, The Collegiate School of Medicine and Bioscience, students – many from St. Louis county – receive hands-on learning opportunities at local medical and research institutions, in addition to high level general education course work. Here, exploring equipment at the simulation center at Washington University Medical School, under the direction of one of its instructors, are Noah Hamoud of the Valley Park district and Cheyanne Willis of Lift for Life Academy. Photo provided by CSMB

What kind of learning opportunity, you may wonder, would uproot nearly 25 eighth-grade graduates from their St. Louis county school districts or private schools — ones with excellent reputations and impressive facilities — to a startup St. Louis public high school housed in an unassuming (formerly abandoned) school building in the Skinker-DeBaliviere neighborhood of St. Louis city?

In short, it is rigorous academics along with a hands-on experiential learning component designed to prepare students to enter the highly competitive fields of medicine and medical research. There are no tuition or transportation costs for this new magnet high school called The Collegiate School of Medicine and Bioscience (CSMB), which opened in August, 2013 with 63 freshmen of which 40 percent hail from St. Louis county. Another new class of freshman will be added each year for a total enrollment of about 300 students. CSMB plans to have a new home in the bioscience corridor of St. Louis come the 2015-2016 school year.

The school's main drawing card is to give its bright, highly motivated students an edge in gaining admission and competing well at the nation's best colleges and universities in order to realize their dreams of becoming physicians, nurses, pharmacists or medical researchers. The math and science emphasis is folded into a strong liberal arts curriculum that provides students with skill sets and values conducive to becoming self-reliant, well-balanced life long learners.

Principal Chip Clatto explains the rationale behind of this new magnet school: "In recent years, there's been an explosion of growth in the medical field and bioscience research yet a study by the NAACP shows low minority participation

in those areas. Our goal is to cultivate more minority and home grown talent for this growing industry."

According to Clatto, the CSMB experience "takes bits and pieces from highly-regarded high schools throughout the nation." This includes honors courses in every subject — all geared toward Advanced Placement assessments, the offering of Latin (highly used in medical terminology), an iPad for every student, ACT and SAT prep built into the curriculum, and an honor code (part of its emphasis on academic integrity).

The health science curriculum is modeled after some of the best performing private and public high schools in the country, most notably DeBackey High School for Health Professions in Houston, TX, recently ranked #26 in the country by U.S. News and World Report and #31 for math and science education. "Our track at CSMB requires five mathematics and six science course sequences," points out Clatto.

To provide students with a well-rounded education, the small school boasts an orchestra (one of two in the district), art education, a drama club, a debate team, a robotics team and an intramural sports program. Its community service program is designed to produce students with compassion who want to give back. A strong emphasis on character, integrity and work ethic permeates the school.

The hands-on medical component is provided through visits and learning opportunities at local medical and research institutions with whom the school maintains partnerships. A CSMB advisory board is comprised of professors, administrators and other professionals from medical and research institutions such as Washington University Medical School, St. Louis University School of Medicine, BJC, Goldfarb School of Nursing at Barnes-Jewish College, St. Louis College of Pharmacy and Cortex Innovation Community. All students are paired with a mentor from the medical field who meets with them regularly to provide insight and guidance. As seniors, students will do an internship aligned with their career interests.

The school's selective admissions policy is based on academics, attendance, an essay, letters of recommendation and a student/parent interview. All incoming freshmen participated in a one-week orientation featuring workshops on topics such as Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens and Maintaining a Healthy Lifestyle, visits to local medical facilities, math and reading assessments for accurate class

placements and a tour and history of the school neighborhood.

Now fully immersed in their first year, students overwhelmingly give kudos to the program. And those from St. Louis county who took an especially big leap of faith — pulling out of their reputable districts to enroll in a new city public school with no track record — point out the various features that make it a good fit for them.

Andrea Jennemann, from the Lindbergh school district, likes the challenging curriculum and the insight she is gaining about professions within the medical field. "I have always wanted to become an anesthesiologist, but other ideas are now floating around in my head. The program at CSMB has helped me think about my future, what I'm looking for in a college and the options I have."

Emily Nelson, of the Ladue school district, likes the small school environment and the fact that CSMB is harder than her other schools. "It's not a waste of my time," reports the aspiring neurosurgeon. And while the material is difficult, "our teachers give us help and support," she confirms.

The partnerships with medical institutions provide "huge opportunities for us," points out Hamza Jalal, of the Parkway district. Already students have visited SLU and Washington University medical schools, as well as Goldfarb School of Nursing at Barnes-Jewish College. "We saw a high-fidelity clinical simulator used to train medical students and heard about how doctors make diagnoses. These visits are quite hands-on and very valuable."

Noah Hamoud, of the Valley Park district, mentions the low student/teacher ratio (11:1) when talking about the positive learning environment at his school. "We also take higher level classes earlier than students at other schools." He likes the experience of attending a school where the student population is so diverse. "We're all closely connected, like a family. Everyone wants each other to be as successful as can be."

Chip Clatto is justifiably proud of the school he has created with the help of his team of educators and professionals — those within the school and district, as well as those affiliated with medical and research facilities. "There are so many possibilities for our school in terms of being able to supply a local workforce for the medical and research fields."