

## Project LION (Learning In Our Neighborhoods): A Community Partnership

Project LION: A Community Partnership is funded by Entergy Charitable Foundation through Southeastern Foundation awarded to Dr. Gerlinde Beckers.

Southeastern Louisiana University and its community partners, will use the Entergy Charitable Foundation funding to support Project LION "Learning in Our Neighborhood" after-school project in Hammond, Louisiana. This initial after-school project created through Hammond Youth Education Alliance provides affordable after-school academic and enrichment activities for middle-school students within their neighborhoods. The project also provides real-world experience in diverse settings for Southeastern teacher candidates.

Most middle-school participants of Project LION after-school program come from low-income families with low educational attainment levels. Currently, 28% of Hammond's high school students drop-out, and by age 25, 23.5% have not earned a high school diploma. School attendance rates fall dramatically in grades 6-8 and suspension rates increase during high school, and of all 2013 arrests made in Hammond, 5.35% were juveniles. Many students lack positive role models and have scarce opportunities. The most successful students are those whose after-school time is occupied with enrichment activities that reinforce and extend classroom learning. Children with unoccupied time are more at risk for engaging in unhealthy and/or delinquent behaviors, further widening what has been called the "Opportunity Gap". Generally speaking, middle-class families are able to invest in extracurricular opportunities. For families living in poverty, however, the cost of extracurricular activities is often prohibitive. As a result, children from these families tend to fall behind their middle-class counterparts, both academically and socially. The cost of the after-school program is based on family income, and the fees per child range from \$5/week to \$30/week. Scholarship assistance will be provided by Project LION through the Entergy Charitable grant which will allow children unable to participate because they lack the financial resources the opportunity to attend the Hammond After school program.

Project LION is a community partnership of Southeastern, Tangipahoa Parish School Board, and the City of Hammond. Southeastern teacher candidates, certified Tangipahoa parish classroom teachers, and community volunteers, are working with high-need, middle-school students within their neighborhoods. Project LION aims to address the "Opportunity Gap" by providing programming that focuses on school engagement, academic performance, and personal and social skills. While the primary focus is to benefit the students, the teacher candidates will also benefit from the field experience making them real-world ready to address the "Opportunity Gap" issues they will likely encounter as certified teachers.