How did Project SEARCH get started at Armstrong?

Project SEARCH in Savannah is a collaborative effort between the Savannah-Chatham County School System, St. Joseph's/Candler Hospital, Armstrong State University, Coastal Center for Developmental Services, and Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation. Project SEARCH began in 1996 at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. Currently the model has been implemented in over 300 sites across the United States, Canada, England, Scotland, Ireland, and Australia. Project SEARCH is a unique transformational program that allows members of the community and individuals with disabilities to discover their capabilities.

Project SEARCH began in Savannah at Candler Hospital in 2008. The program expanded to St. Joseph's Hospital in 2011. After losing their onsite classroom, which is a key element of the program model, at St. Joseph's due to restructuring of departments, Project SEARCH Savannah was very close to facing a setback. However, Transition Specialist Dr. JayJay Hendrix and the Dean of the College of Education at Armstrong at the time guaranteed this did not happen by bringing Project SEARCH to Armstrong. In just a few months an onsite classroom, intern placements in various departments, and other essential program components were secured to ensure the program would remain intact. Armstrong opened their doors for the Project SEARCH program and allows student interns the opportunity to have a real world work experience on campus. Since 2013, there have been 26 Armstrong program graduates and the majority of these graduates have obtained employment as a result of their internship with Project SEARCH at Armstrong.
Andre Smith is a 19 year old senior from Beach High School who will graduate in May 2017. He was nominated to be a Project SEARCH intern by one of his high school teachers. He’s currently interning on the surgical floor at St. Joseph’s Hospital, performing care preparation and environmental services. Andre believes his job is fantastic. Some of his duties, pictured on the left, include cleaning up after patients, cleaning the surgical room, moving beds to different rooms, restocking supplies, and sterilizing surgical equipment. Soon he’ll begin helping transport patients to critical care. Some of Andre’s strengths are being a team player, listening to the ideas and opinions of others, and caring for others by helping them if they’re having trouble with something or just by listening to them. He believes he’s a good employee because he works hard, helps others, and always stays positive while at work. Supervisors have commented on how Andre always has a smile when he clocks in, which is infectious to patients and coworkers. Andre also has perfect attendance and is on time every day. Throughout his internship at St. Joseph’s Andre has learned a lot, but he thinks there’s still more learning to do. In the training classroom at Armstrong he’s learned time management, communication, and independent living skills, as well as to always present himself as professionally as possible while at work. He’s so glad he met Dr. JayJay and Miss Gwen because they’ve taught him so much and he knows he can always ask them for help. Andre states his goal is to never quit a job because his motto is “failure is not an option”. After completing Project SEARCH he wants to look for a good paying job with benefits that involve his basic skills and abilities. Andre’s next placement will still be at the hospital, performing more clerical type work, such as preparing and filing patient charts. Andre loves working at the hospital and thinks his current job is perfect for him, but he can’t wait to learn about different jobs throughout the hospital and meet new people along the way.