

South Suburban South Suburban



A South Suburban cohort meeting.

A number of south suburban school districts had held detailed conversations and planning regarding a program to help long-time paraprofessionals become certified teachers for several years prior to the passage of the Illinois Grow Your Own Teachers legislation. Therefore, the school districts that spearheaded the project had strong working relationships before the first consortium-formation meeting in the middle of a snowstorm in December 2005.

The partner organizations are:

South Suburban School Districts: Crete-Monee #201U, Harvey #152, Dolton #148, Patton #133, Prairie Hill #144, Cook County #130 (Blue Island)

**Governors State University
Prairie State College
Illinois ACORN**

The Center for Educational Change (CEC), an affiliate of the Illinois Education Association that has worked with all these districts on other projects, is assisting in the coordination of the project.

The university is the fiscal agent on the grant.

The Cohort: The South Suburban cohort has 40 active participants, including one man. Eighty percent are African-American, the rest Hispanic; they range in age from early 20s to early 60s, including one mother-daughter pair. All of them reside in seven zip codes served by the school districts that developed the program.

The South Suburban consortium for Grow Your Own is proud of its students. Our students are mothers and fathers who have made a commitment to improve their lives. This commitment means sacrificing time with family and friends, but each student has done this enthusiastically. We celebrate the beginning of a journey toward improving the lives of our families through education and better employment. We celebrate the beginning of a journey toward improving the lives of the students in our communities through preparing better teachers. We celebrate the commitment of the state of Illinois and the members of Grow Your Own for making this opportunity possible.

Each partner on the steering committee has played an important role. But especially we have to celebrate the work that Prairie State College has done. Because it is the starting place for all of the students in our cohort, it is at Prairie State College that we have learned what to do and what not to do! Each time we have learned what not to do, Prairie State has taken the initiative to make change. We celebrate the leadership and the work of all the Prairie State staff who have committed to the Grow Your Own project. Their commitment to the program and their willingness to change policies and procedures has made this program possible.

This year we continue to celebrate as we get to know our students better. The pictures you see come from our cohort meetings, where we did an exercise called "dispositions bag". Candidates and staff placed into their brown paper bag the things that encouraged them to become teachers and that guide them as they continue in their programs, and then shared these things with the group as a whole. These candidates are inspired by their children, important people in their lives, their spouses, and the desire to make a difference in this world. As a result of this activity we know the teachers we are producing will have not only the skills but the heart to become outstanding teachers.

One of our students sharing from her dispositions bag. In the dispositions bag students place the reasons why they want to be a teacher.

