



Southernmost Southernmost

The Southernmost Grow Your Own project, funded for the first time in 2007, serves a large geographical area in the far southeast corner of the state, including Cairo and a large number of other small, mostly rural communities. It is also unique in that the Regional Office of Education has taken a substantial supporting role, facilitating the initial planning and assisting in the coordination of this effort. The candidates are working towards certification in the area of special education.

The partner organizations are:

Federation of Community United Services
of Southern Illinois, Inc. (FoCUS)

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale
Shawnee Community College

School Districts: Anna, Anna-Jonesboro
High School, Buncombe Elementary, Cairo,
Century, Cobden, Egyptian, Goreville,
JAMP Special Education Services, Joppa
Maple Grove, Lick Creek, Massac County,
Meridian, Tri-County Education Cooperative,
Vienna Elementary and High School
Districts, Alternative Education—ROE 02
Regional Office #2 (serves only to assist in
administration of the grant)

FoCUS, the community organization, is the fiscal agent on the grant.

Although its cohort is newly formed, the Southernmost GYO program can rightly be proud of many accomplishments. We have had a true collaboration between organizations and schools with representatives from the consortium members coming together repeatedly, traveling some distances, to plan and then implement our program. Superintendents of the member schools have expressed their support for the cohort candidates, confirming their commitment to assist these future special education teachers by allowing them to keep their teachers' aides' positions and salaries while meeting the requirement to student teach. The community college has responded quickly to the needs of the cohort members, offering numerous preparatory classes for them, and the university has exemplified flexibility, for instance, adjusting the deadline for entry into the Teacher Education Program to accommodate our group of cohorts who are ready for entry into SIUC.

Most importantly, Southernmost Grow Your Own has provided a means whereby individuals can realize higher career goals for themselves. Many of our cohort members would not have considered continuing their education and achieving their goal of being special education teachers, were it not for the supports afforded by GYO. They in turn serve as examples for family members and others in the community, creating a ripple effect throughout the rural counties. FoCUS, as a group committed to economic development and job growth in the region, is most proud of the positive impact GYO is making in the lives of the cohorts and in their school communities.

The Cohort: The Southernmost Cohort has 30 active participants, of whom 3 are men; 60% are white and 30% African-American. Their median age is 38. All but one of the candidates had some college experience before entering the program. Of the 29 who are employed (23 full-time), 16 work in the schools; 27 have dependent children in their households. Given the large geographic area served, it's not surprising that cohort members reside in 18 different zip codes.