

50 Immokalee students inducted into SSTRIDE program



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(Photo: Luke Franke/Naples Daily News)

Fifty students in Immokalee made commitments Monday night that will prepare them for life careers with mentors helping them stay on course.

The Naples Children & Education Foundation has allocated a \$500,000 grant for a Florida State University program in Immokalee called SSTRIDE, which stands for Science Together Reaching Instructional Diversity and Excellence.

The program was started in 1993 by FSU's College of Medicine to steer students into medical fields. Many students who have gone through the program in other communities have gone on to medical school.

The program aims to foster careers in health care fields among students who historically are underrepresented in medicine, according to FSU.

In Florida, 20 percent of the physician workforce is comprised of minorities, yet blacks and Hispanics account for 40 percent of the population.

The 50 students were inducted into the program at a ceremony at Immokalee Technical College, at 508 Ninth St. in Immokalee. They are in the eighth through 10th grades in Immokalee Middle School and Immokalee High School.

Maria Jimenez-Lara, chief executive officer of NCEF, the sponsors of the Naples Winter Wine Festival, said the foundation grant was committed in 2015 but that it takes some time to get the program up and running.

The induction ceremony signifies the students and their families making a commitment to stick with the program with mentors to help them.

"It's almost like an honors society with a lot of work," she said.

The program's mission involves identifying students who have a strong interest in pursuing careers in science, engineering, mathematics, health and medicine and giving them the support, motivation and responsibility to stick with it, according to the program website.

The program has been operating in Gadsden County, west of Tallahassee; Leon County, home to Tallahassee; Madison County, east of Tallahassee; Okaloosa County, east of Pensacola; Orange County, where Orlando is located; and Walton County, near Destin.



Candelaria Escobar, left, laughs with her daughter Maria Lopez, 14, center, and Maria's mentor Michelle Kennedy, right, before the start of the inaugural SSTRIDE Induction Ceremony at Immokalee Technical College on Monday, Sept. 12, 2016, in Immokalee. Maria, a ninth-grader at Immokalee High School, has dreams to become a biomedical engineer. The SSTRIDE program, funded by the Naples Children and Education Foundation, aids students throughout high school to gain a knowledge and understanding of careers related to medicine and science. *(Photo: Luke Franke/Naples Daily News)*