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## Students First – Dr. Carrion visits SSTRIDE at IHS

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(Submitted photo/Jennifer L. Kupiec) Dr. Jennifer Carrion, Lee Memorial Hospital, speaks to SSTRIDE students at Immokalee High School.

One by one, Dr. Jennifer Carrion went around the room, “Pediatrician, Biomedical Engineer, Nurse, Rheumatologist,” she heard. Dr. Carrion, a guest speaker from Lee Memorial Hospital, was visiting Nathaniel Benson’s SSTRIDE (Science Students Together Reaching Instructional Diversity & Excellence) class at Immokalee High School to speak about her journey into family medicine. The story resonated with the students as it was very similar to those sitting in the class.

SSTRIDE, an outreach effort of the Florida State University (FSU) College of Medicine with support from Florida’s Area Health Education Centers, is made possible through grant support by the Naples Children and Education Foundation (NCEF). The mission of the program is to identify students who have a genuine interest in pursuing a career in science, engineering, mathematics, health, or medicine and to give those students the support services necessary for success in their chosen field. Ultimately, the goal is to have them come back to the area in which they were raised, such as Immokalee, to fulfill the needs of the community.

“Our (SSTRIDE) students have a clear pathway to college and beyond,” shares Benson. “We provide some of the most intensive and in-depth curriculum in the county. Our students regularly outperform some of the best in the county in test scores, and I

personally feel a deep sense of accomplishment and pride when I see just how successful our students have become.”

The students in Immokalee’s SSTRIDE program started their journey at Immokalee Middle School. Now in year five of the grant, the first class of students is set to graduate. While some are choosing to begin their journey in the Army and Navy, others will be attending schools such as FSU, Immokalee Technical College (ITECH), and Tallahassee Community College.

“I would be delighted to see some of these students achieve their dreams of giving back to the community,” adds Benson. “It would make me incredibly proud to come back in a few years and see a stronger, healthier community as a result. These students are amazing role models and some of the brightest minds I have ever had the pleasure of teaching.”

SSTRIDE can also be found in Walton, Sarasota, Orange, Okaloosa, Madison, Leon, and Gadsden counties.

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