

SSTRIDE program helps rural-minority students with mentoring, real world experience

It's graduation week and homework isn't the greatest obstacle some students face when pursuing an education.

Immokalee High School senior Jacqueline Perez dreams of making a difference in her hometown of Immokalee, where she sees people like her parents struggling

"I think when people think of Immokalee they think of low-class, uneducated," she said. "It's really incredible that you just prove everybody wrong, that just because you come from a lower class doesn't mean you can't get an education."

Perez is aiming high and wanted to be the first of her family to go to college, and to become a doctor. She was accepted to FSU with scholarships, "I was really happy and they were really happy too, because it's like a weight off their shoulders"

Perez says she wants to come back to Immokalee and open her own health clinic. And now she's one step closer to her medical goals, thanks to a Florida State University outreach program called SSTRIDE.

The [Science Students Together Reaching Instructional Diversity and Excellence program](#) is designed to address the challenges rural minority students face and give them hope, according to SSTRIDE founder Thesla Anderson.

She says her program provides rural-minority students with in-school mentoring and real world experience. It provides connections in their field via field trips so they can achieve a career in STEM areas.

LINK: [More info on FSU SSTRIDE Program](#)

"A lot of our student population at Immokalee High School are first-time graduates, so it's a little scary for them. So what SSTRIDE has done with the infusion of allowing mentors is it helps support them because that's what they need," Says Clara Calderon, Immokalee High School Principal.

"This program allows them to understand that this is reachable for them. It's taking them from not really understanding to what is out there in the medical industry to being able to pursue it as a choice."

Maria Jimenez-Lara, Naples Children & Education Foundation CEO said it helps young people create a college and career path, "Jacqueline was able to follow that path and she's one step closer to her dreams. I know her dream is to be an OBGYN and this program has allowed her to reach that potential. Jacqueline Perez is representative of our impact "

Every SSTRIDE student eligible for graduation will walk this week.

The project was piloted in Southwest Florida at Immokalee High School and the founder says they plan to continue expanding its reach to more schools in the area.

