

Growing Future Educators: Building a Pathway for Change at Crete-Monee High School

Presented by:

Lamont Holifield,
Principal, Crete-Monee High School

Sarah Valerio
Lead Instructor, Education Pathways
Crete-Monee High School



Section 1: Context & Wonderings



The Context - Who Are We?

- Crete-Monee High School - Crete, IL - “Home of the Warriors”
- Located in the South Suburbs - approximately 25 miles from Chicago
- Approximately 1,454 students
 - 62% African American
 - 19.1% Hispanic
 - 13.4% White
 - 4.6% Two or more Races
 - 0.7% Asian
- 93% Graduation Rate



The Context - Who Are We? Cont'd

- 91 teachers
 - 79.8% White
 - 16.1% African American
 - 4.2% Hispanic
 - 51.3% Male
 - 48.7% Female
- Teacher Education
 - 57.4% Masters Degree or Higher
 - 41.5% Bachelor's Degree



Wonderings (SY 2020)

As Division Leader for Mathematics/Science/CTE, I began to wonder:

- Have we begun to think about ways to get students interested in pursuing a career in education?
- Have we exposed them to the various pathways that are possible beyond merely serving as teachers?
- Have they visited Central Office at the School District? Illinois State Board of Education? U.S. Department of Education? (to broaden their exposure to the dynamics of education in the state and nation)

Wonderings (SY 2019) Cont'd

Initial Response: “Nobody’s interested in pursuing a career in education!”



Section 2: The Birth of A Vision “Open Doors”



Opportunity Knocks

- In SY2021, I was approached by a consortium of superintendents (CM201U, Bloom Township 206, Rich Township 227 & Homewood-Flossmoor 233) to become the EFE Director for Career Prep Network) - serves the Career Tech Education needs of four unique districts.
- This opportunity served as a gateway which afforded me the opportunity to write a grant application for the Education Pathway.
- We secured the funding of \$300,000 to be divided among the districts to get the pathway up and running. The grant provides funding for four years and is renewable at that point.

Crete-Monee HS Education Pathway Theory of Action

IF Crete-Monee High School intentionally nurtures a culture where students see the power of education as a vehicle for systemic change, **AND** we provide high-impact mentorship, immersive experiences, and a clear pathway to careers in education, **THEN** we will cultivate a new generation of passionate, innovative educators who return to transform the district from within, ensuring that future students experience a more equitable, engaging, and student-centered education.

Section 3: Strategic Actions “Laying the Foundation”



Established Future Educators Academy

Establish an immersive program where high school students interested in education receive hands-on experience in classrooms, leadership training, and mentorship from veteran educators.

- Created a chapter of Educator Rising at CMHS.
- Formed a dual credit partnership with Lewis University
 - Introduction to Education
 - Integrating Technology in the Classroom
- Partnered with our early learning center, 5 elementary schools & middle school for observations & internship opportunities.



Future Educators Academy Cont'd

- Created a paid opportunity in summer at elementary schools
 - Students receive \$15/hour and their high school Workplace Experience course credit.



Recruitment Strategies

★ **Students have been the biggest recruiters.**

- Sharing their experiences - state competitions, national competitions (Orlando, FL & Washington, DC), summer employment, observations at other campuses, dual credit)
- Participating in all showcases (8th Grade Open House & Elective Fairs)

★ **Teachers are engaged.**

- All staff members have Educator Rising sweatshirts and wear on announced Fridays (walking billboards)
- Teachers distribute photo postcards with a message to select students encouraging them to become part of the program.

Recruitment Strategies

★ Visible Signage

- There are visible announcements in the academic hallways and lunchroom area.

★ Frequent Updates

- Principal Sunday Night Live Calls
- CMHS website
- CM201U Facebook page



Crete-Monee Scholarship & Career Pipelines

Partner with universities and teacher residency programs to create a seamless pathway for graduates to return as certified teachers, administrators, and change agents.

- Prepare students for the Parapro certification where they can potentially work in the district during the day and attend classes in the evening.
- Last school year, we had two Golden Apple scholarship recipients.



Student-Led Systemic Change Initiatives

Empower students to design and implement solutions addressing current educational challenges, fostering a mindset that their voice can drive meaningful reform.



Alumni Educator Network

Create a strong, visible presence of Crete-Monee alumni who have pursued careers in education, serving as mentors and role models for current students.



Community Commitment Agreements

Offer incentives such as student loan assistance or district-funded fellowships for graduates who commit to teaching within Crete-Monee School District 201U for a set number of years.



Section 4: Expected Outcomes Successes & Challenges



Expected Outcomes

- Increased enrollment in teacher preparation programs among Crete-Monee graduates.
- A measurable rise in the number of district alumni returning as educators and leaders.
- Enhanced student engagement as they see educators who share their lived experiences and community ties.
- A long-term shift toward a more culturally responsive, innovative, and student-driven education system.

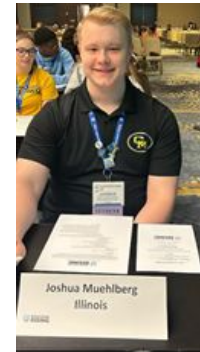
Long-Term Goal

By reimagining the educator pipeline as a **homegrown movement for systemic transformation**, Crete-Monee High School will not only produce teachers but **empowered architects of change** who deeply understand the needs of the community and are committed to revolutionizing the educational experience for future generations.



SUCSESSES

- We are the first established, fully functioning Educator Rising Program in the Chicago Southland area.
- Students from our chapter were selected to represent the State of Illinois as Student Voting Delegates at the 2024 Educator Rising National Conference Delegates Meeting.
- 43 students are participating in the Educator Rising Club
- 22 students are taking education courses.
- Principal Holifield received the Educator Rising Champion Award.
- Teacher - Leader Sarah Valerio is sought after by many schools.



Challenges

- We are starting early to ensure that students interested in dual credit opportunities in the Education Pathway are aware of the 3.0 GPA requirement with Lewis University. We will provide support & tutoring to keep them on track. Some students are very close and cannot take the education courses as dual credit.
- Despite our best efforts to market our Education Pathway, we have never ceased to hear that students are not aware of the program at graduation. We are looking to find ways to ensure that all students are familiar with this remarkable program.

Additional Resources

[CMHS Educator Rising Marketing Video](#)