

Growing our own teachers

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The “Grow Your Own” program creates educational pathways and support for paraprofessionals to become teachers.

Paraprofessionals are vital members of our school community and support services, but they often face obstacles to becoming certified teachers. At Easterseals Serving Chicagoland and Greater Rockford, the “Grow Your Own” program has made great strides by creating educational pathways and support for paraprofessionals to become teachers.

We spoke with Terence Brown, MAT, M.s.Ed., Principal of Machesney Park Campus, about their

successes and the school's impact on teacher preparation.

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Teacher shortages have been a critical, pressing issue both nationally as well as in Illinois; particularly in difficult to staff areas such as math, science, and special education. In March of this year, a new survey of Illinois school districts found that most face difficulties filling open positions with qualified teachers. This shortage sparked interest in creating this program and better investing in teacher preparation.

"It really came out of our teacher shortage," says Brown. "We talked a few years ago about what we could do to find more teachers, and we had paraprofessionals who expressed an interest in going back to school, so Easterseals created this wonderful education assistance policy."

At Machesney Park, paraprofessionals apply for funds to support their education and agree to remain at the school as teachers once they've graduated for at least three years. Machesney Park Academy has several paraprofessionals on track to finish their education program.

"We have two that just finished. They finished their MA program last semester, and got their teaching license issued last month," says Brown. "Then we have four more that are in school now. Three of them are almost done, and another is student teaching in the fall."

By investing in education assistance, Easterseals is supporting paraprofessionals to reach their career goals and growing the number of high-quality teachers serving students at our schools.