



CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION



Josie Roll

Like many high school students, Josie Roll wasn't sure what she wanted to do for a career after graduating. The Moscow High senior-to-be was almost sure it was a career in healthcare but wasn't certain.

"I guess I could say I've wanted to go into healthcare for a really long time, but I didn't know if it would be worth it to me or if it would be something I would be good at," she said.

She does now. Josie took a Career Technical Education (CTE) course during spring semester that allowed her to earn her license to work as a nursing assistant. More importantly, the course affirmed that pursuing a healthcare career is the right choice.

"The course really made me realize that it was something I was really passionate about," she said. "It's not like a dream that isn't achievable. It's something I can do and will enjoy doing. It was really eye opening and made it feel more real."

CTE courses are designed to prepare Idaho youth for high-skill, in-demand careers. They give students, like Josie, the chance to explore a field to see if it is something they want to pursue. They also serve another important function – creating a qualified workforce for employers.

"It's important that we get high school kids thinking about health professions – doctors, lab techs, LPNs – all of these professions," said Brad Huerta, the CEO of Lost Rivers Medical Center in Arco. "Some of the bigger hospitals can recruit for specific positions, but we recruit for everything."

Recruiting healthcare workers isn't easy. Idaho has a severe shortage of healthcare workers. CTE programs are one way to help address this crisis, which is why the Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health awarded nearly \$600,000 in grants in the spring to help launch or expand CTE health professions programs in 14 Idaho school districts.

Health Professions CTE Grantees

Idaho has a severe healthcare workforce shortage across most health professions, and these shortages may be more magnified depending on the county. The Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health is helping to address this workforce shortage by helping 14 Idaho school districts launch or expand their career technical education (CTE) programs that focus on health professions. The grants, which totaled more than \$567,000, were awarded to the following schools:

- American Falls School District
- Boise Public Schools
- Butte School District
- Cassia Joint School District
- Elevate Academy North
- Firth School District
- Jerome School District
- Kamiah Joint School District
- Middleton School District
- Moscow School District
- Orofino Joint School District
- Payette River Technical Academy
- Joint School District 60 (Shelley)
- Sugar Salem Joint School District

“We spend a lot of time listening to educators and healthcare providers about the needs in our state,” Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health Executive Director Kendra Witt-Doyle said. “It was evident that there is a strong desire and need to create and expand health professions CTE programs in Idaho. These programs will help address the healthcare workforce shortage and prepare Idaho students for rewarding careers.”

The Idaho Division of Career Technical Education has six approved Health Professions pathways – Nursing Assisting, Medical Assisting, Dental Assisting, Pharmacy Technician, Emergency Medical Technician, and Rehabilitation Services – which prepare students for these in-demand careers.

“It’s important for students to know that healthcare is more than doctors – there is a world of other health professions to choose from,” said Kodi Hyde, Firth School District.

A DESIRE FOR HEALTHCARE CTE

CTE programs are gaining popularity in Idaho high schools. More than 117,000 students enrolled in CTE programs in the 2023-24 school year, including 9,466 in health professions and public safety courses. Because of this interest and demand, many schools and districts are looking to expand their CTE programs in both seats available and offering new courses.

The American Falls School District began offering health professions programs due to “significant student interest,” said Spencer Christensen, the district’s CTE administrator. The district, located in rural Power County, will introduce programs in Pharmacy Technician and Certified Nursing Assistant in the 2024-25 school year.

“Locally, our industry partners have also expressed a pressing need for qualified personnel in these areas,” Christensen said. “As a rural community, we face challenges in meeting local employment demands. By expanding our health professions programs, we can better prepare our students for these in-demand careers and support the needs of our community.”

This spring, Idaho Department of Labor reported more than 1,100 job openings for registered nurses and another 1,000-plus for nursing assistants. Idaho Launch, a new state government grant program that provides funding for high school seniors to pursue educational opportunities after high school, released its application numbers. Nursing and medical technician were among the top requested programs.

“The desire of our students is there, the demand is there, and this training is desperately needed,” said Robyn Robison, college and career counselor for the Sugar-Salem School District. “The courses and curriculum that we offer will provide students with a pathway into the medical field. Whether their goal is to become a certified nursing assistant, a medical assistant, nurse or doctor, we are creating a critical steppingstone in their path toward success.”

The Payette River Regional Tech Academy offers a medical assisting program because of its flexibility and value it brings to the students.

“There are many career options in the Medical Assisting Pathway, and all but a few of them show double digit growth projections over

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IN IDAHO, FOR IDAHO.



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Meridian DTEC photo credit:

Idaho Division of Career Technical Education. Dental Assisting Program.

“They contacted us and described how there is a mammoth need for medical assistants in the Magic Valley,” said Kit Kanekoa, CTE director for Cassia County Schools.

In rural Idaho, these partnerships are even more crucial because a lack of qualified instructors. In remote Butte County, the school district will partner with Lost Rivers Medical Center and a local dental office for instructors and opportunities for clinical rotations that make CTE programs invaluable to students. Similar arrangements occur in other parts of the state.

The Lost Rivers Medical Center in Arco already is a preceptor for the University of Utah and Idaho WWAMI medical schools. It also welcomes students from Idaho State University’s physician assistant and Pharmacy programs, as well as nursing students from the College of Eastern Idaho and College of Southern Idaho.

Huerta, the CEO, is excited about the new CTE program in the community.

“We’re excited to see the presence of actual high school students here to get them in the door,” said Huerta, the Lost Rivers Medical Center CEO. “We don’t have the ability to recruit outside talent because not a lot of people want to live in a rural area. We have to grow our own, and that’s a huge strategy and one we count on.”

Butte County School District Superintendent Joe Steele views the new program as a service to the students and the community.

the next 10 years,” said Cherrie Moore, a teacher at the Payette River Regional Tech Academy in Emmett. “This pathway is a great choice for our students and our community as the careers range from entry level to advanced and all levels need workers.”

CTE health professions programs often offer students a chance to experience learning outside of the classroom. Students have opportunities to learn and work at healthcare centers, care facilities, and other places. For Josie, this was what she enjoyed most.

“I liked that it wasn’t just book learning,” she said. “We did hands-on learning. We got to go work in a long-term care facility, and getting to work with people already in the field was great.”

In American Falls, a student survey showed that 91 percent of students preferred in-person instruction as opposed to taking some of the CTE courses online. That, of course, requires schools to find qualified instructors, which sometimes can be a challenge.

PARTNERSHIPS ARE CRUCIAL

CTE healthcare professions programs teachers can come from a variety of places, and it’s common for schools and districts to partner with healthcare organizations, colleges, and universities to provide instructors for the courses.

One example: A clinic based in southern Idaho is paying a teacher’s salary to provide instruction in the Cassia County Joint School District’s Medical Assistant CTE program.



Did You Know?

Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health Executive Director Kendra Witt-Doyle took health professions CTE courses during high school. She said the experience is what prompted her to get undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees in public health.