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Area Partnership Seeks to Increase Panhandle Health Services

AMARILLO, TX – Several Amarillo-area entities have formed a collaborative partnership they hope will have a major impact on the future of health care services available to Texas Panhandle residents.

The partnership, known as the Gateway to Health Careers project, will seek to expand workforce availability for rural community health care employers in the Panhandle by increasing the number of area high school campuses offering health science programs. Collaborators include the Coalition of Health Services of Amarillo; SimCentral, an alliance between Amarillo College, the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in Amarillo and West Texas A&M University; the Texas Panhandle Coalition for Nursing; Harrington Regional Medical Center, Inc.; and the Amarillo Independent School District.

The project expects to establish health science programs in 13 rural Texas Panhandle communities over a three-year period through distance learning. A mobile clinical simulation classroom will provide on-site instruction at the rural campuses. Didactic instruction will originate from the Amarillo Area Center for Advanced Learning (AACAL) and will be delivered via video conferencing. The existing AACAL network infrastructure will be augmented to support the video conferencing capabilities.

The Gateway to Health Careers project will support two health science instructors — one to provide the didactic instruction from AACAL and the second to provide on-site clinical instruction utilizing the mobile clinical simulation classroom, which will be supported through SimCentral. In addition, high school campuses will provide a program coordinator for the health sciences program.
In-kind contributions by the high school campuses to pay program coordinator salaries will be $35,793 per year. Each school district will contribute $250 per student each semester for tuition. In addition, each high school campus will also partner with local community long-term care providers, emergency medical service providers and hospital emergency rooms to provide the remaining clinical experiences needed outside the classroom.

Students participating in the certified medical assistant (CMA) and emergency medical technician (EMT) courses will qualify for dual credit, creating an opportunity for Amarillo College, Frank Phillips College and Clarendon College to expand the number of credits a student can earn and subsequently apply toward post-secondary education programs.

Examining project effectiveness will be an ongoing effort from the start and a comprehensive evaluation will be submitted to all project participants at the end of the first full year of instruction and implementation. The evaluation measures will include, but not be limited to, the number of school districts served; the number of students participating and completing programs; the number of students achieving initial certification; the number of students who enroll in postsecondary education in a health career cluster; and the number of students who gain employment in Panhandle-area communities.

The Gateway to Health Careers partnership estimates 620 students will benefit from the project during the first three years at a projected cost of $1.475 million. The project committee is working with the Amarillo Area Foundation, the Bivins Foundation in Amarillo, the Laura W. Bush Institute for Women’s Health from TTUHSC, the Meadows Foundation in Dallas and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in Princeton, New Jersey to provide additional funding to ensure the project’s sustainability beyond the initial three years.