

Alcoa City Schools, Case Study

Summer 2022

Districts in Tennessee that received funding through the Innovative High School Models Grant have shared summaries of their work along with lessons learned along the way.

The Innovation

Alcoa City Schools set a goal of continuing to increase their Ready Graduate rate from 78 percent to 80 percent and began to consider how they could use the High School Innovation Grant to make progress in this area. They looked at their data to ask where they had weak spots in their subgroups around their Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathways and found there was a gap in health sciences. They also worked to understand more about the students who were enrolled in these courses. They found that over past year they had the highest number of economically disadvantaged students and students with individualized education programs (IEPs) in their Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) class.

With this clear gap, and particularly for students who need additional support financially and academically to be successful, Alcoa City Schools applied for grant funds to increase student access to early postsecondary opportunities in health sciences by leveraging the following innovative approaches.

- **Time And Space:** This program gives students the opportunity during the day to take courses at the Tennessee College of Applied Technology in Knoxville (TCAT-Knoxville) and engage in clinicals at Blount Memorial Hospital and area long-term care facilities to get real-world experience and apply their skills.
- **Partnerships:** This model began with intentional engagement of district health science teachers to discuss the need to move the anatomy and physiology course into the health sciences cluster for conversion into a dual enrollment course. From there, the district worked to deepen their partnership with TCAT-Knoxville to finalize the dual enrollment offering. Alcoa City Schools also worked to deepen their partnerships with Blount Memorial Hospital and a long-term care facility partner in the region to give students more access to real-world experiences.
- **Modes Of Learning:** Alcoa City Schools provided students with one-on-one meetings with the college and career coach while they were off campus to support more real-time conversations about their experiences and goals and to help them take next steps in the program. Also, given the interest in the program, the district worked to expand the Health Sciences CTE cluster to include additional blocks of CNA dual enrollment courses and a new practical nursing course.

By expanding and reconfiguring the programming in the health sciences cluster, Alcoa City Schools is working to put more students on a path to earning a certificate in CNA before high

school graduation, transitioning directly to the TCAT to continue work on their certificate in practical nursing, and giving students access to career exploration in the field of health care.

The Grant

Alcoa City Schools was awarded \$758,134.70 for this innovation. The district has allocated funds to:

- Hire a dedicated college and career coach for students enrolled in these programs
- Hire a paraprofessional to specifically focus on supporting students in the program with IEPs
- Offer financial support to students who would need it for uniforms and textbooks
- Purchase a van to transport students to TCAT-Knoxville, Blount Memorial Hospital, and the long-term care facility partner
- Purchase equipment to mirror equipment used in corresponding TCAT courses
- Pay the health sciences teachers a stipend to support their efforts to learn the new anatomy and physiology coursework, plan new lessons and syllabi, and travel to the TCAT to observe instruction and deepen partnerships

Lessons Learned

Alcoa City Schools has learned key lessons over the first year around how to strategically spend down grant funds and thoughtfully engage teachers and external partners in new work.

- **Pace yourself on spending down funds.** While Alcoa City Schools spent down part of their grant funds in the first year to support the salaries of the college and career coach, the paraprofessional, student textbooks and uniforms, and the vehicle, they also worked to save a significant portion of the funding for a second year. By the end of the first year, the health sciences teachers had a clear sense of equipment they wanted to buy, an interest in adding another skills course in the spring to support students further, and other ideas about ways in which funds could be spent to continue to build and improve the program. By giving themselves that space, they will now be able to more strategically spend funds to best support students.
- **Deepen relationships with TCAT instructors as a priority.** The reality is that TCAT instructors will be evaluated on post-tests and passing rates for all students enrolled, and opening up their classes to high school students is a big shift. Take the time to understand how TCAT instructors would like to partner on supporting high school students to be successful in their courses and ensure consistent communication about progress.
- **Embrace new learning for teachers as well as students.** Adding new courses, particularly dual enrollment courses, takes a great deal of time and energy from teachers as they work to deepen their own content knowledge, consider how to develop a syllabus and lesson plans, and invest in relationships with postsecondary institutions. Expect a learning curve and be prepared to support them as they navigate new content and new partnerships.



Sustaining The Work

Based on previous enrollment data in the health sciences cluster, Alcoa City Schools estimated they would have 11-13 students enroll in the new dual-credit option. However, they ended up with 37 dual-enrolled students, requiring them to offer an additional block for the clinical dual enrollment course. While Alcoa City Schools invested in a career coach and a paraprofessional, they were able to increase the size of their health sciences program and offer students access to dual enrollment without hiring additional teaching staff. Additionally, the paraprofessional supporting the program is a former health sciences student from the district who is also currently working through a Grow Your Own program with the goal of making her the full-time college and career coach as well as the paraprofessional for the program.

Keeping track of this kind of data and having a clear communication plan is also central to the district's sustainability strategy. Alcoa City Schools is also proactively working to capture and share their learnings and progress with their school board, who recently voted to continue to fund testing fees and student licenses for early postsecondary opportunities. While there is potential for ongoing equipment needs, the district believes that, given the clear need for health-care staff in the region and the greater than expected interest from district students in this field, TCAT-Knoxville and Blount Memorial Hospital will continue to see the value of their deep partnership and allow students ongoing access to the best equipment available on their sites.

Learn More

To learn more, contact the [Patty Thomas, CTE Director, Alcoa City Schools](#).

