

From High School to Practice: Creating an Educational Pathway *Pathways to Health Careers*

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Introduction

Pathways to Health Careers is designed to motivate underrepresented minority youth to explore careers in the health professions and to begin preparation for that pursuit while in high school. The program strives to take a holistic approach to the personal and academic development of these young people. Hence, collaborating fully with the high schools and other identified agencies within their community. It is important that the community has a sense of ownership so that they may maintain the programs long after the three-year grant funding has ended. The rural areas and its citizens will be the beneficiaries of "*Pathways to Health Careers*," a component of the Interdisciplinary Rural Health Training Program. The long-term goal of the program is to increase the participation of underrepresented minority students in all the health professions.

Collaborators

Eastern Area Health Education Center (AHEC)
East Carolina University (ECU) Brody School of Medicine Interdisciplinary Rural Health Training Program
Hertford County Schools
Bertie County Schools
Gates County Schools

Eastern AHEC's Role

Eastern AHEC's role in the Pathways to Health Careers program was that of coordination and facilitation of all activities. All activities took place on a Saturday in a location central to all three communities.

Year 1 (academic year 1999-2000)

- **Encouraged** and supported the interest of underrepresented minority youth in a career in the health professions.
- **Provided** information and exposure to a select group of high school students on academic preparation for a health career.
- **Provided** information /support sessions for parents
- **Enriched** the educational process to include information pertinent to the health sciences.

Activities included

- Planning with key contacts at each of the three participating schools
- Curriculum development.
- Marketing the program to students via counselor information sessions.
- Selections of students (25 per school)
- Scheduling program activities for years 2 and 3 for students and parents.

Year 2 (academic year 2000-2001)

Year Two activities began with academic development and were designed to get the students thinking about their future. Three Saturday programs were planned to aid the students in this enrichment process.

- **Gathering Materials:** Self-assessment, personal awareness and career awareness using self-inventories and temperament tests. Students also developed a comprehensive career exploration packet.
- **The Journey Begins:** Academic enrichment and test taking skill development.
- **Taking the Scenic View:** Health career awareness, trends and roles of health professionals. Explored individual interest areas.

Year 3 (academic year 2001-2002)

Year Three activities included academic preparation and career shadowing to provide students the opportunity to explore the choices they have made and understand the professional health career environment.

- **Mapping the Journey:** Students reviewed the discussion about the trends in health care options, role-played interview skills and proper office etiquette and attire, and began preparing for their clinical experiences.
- **Clinical Experiences:** Took place in the spring and fall. Students had experience with the clinical setting.
- **How do I Pay for College** was presented as an evening parent program by the College Foundation of North Carolina.
- **SAT Preparation:** Reviewed effective testing skills for the SAT.
- **Show and Tell/Field Trip:** The final class activity combined a summary of all programs and a field trip to ECU during an ECU open house day.
- **Exploring Academic Options:** Students were encouraged to take part in "suggested activities" which included contacting and visiting various colleges around North Carolina.

Summary

The program was successful the students who remained committed to the three year time period. The program provided opportunities that would otherwise not be available to students in this region.

Evaluation

An onsite visit was conducted at each school to process and evaluate the program. The goal was to gain feedback on the program and discuss ways to continue the effort.

Successes

- Enriching for students who otherwise would not have had this opportunity.
- Helped students prepare for college requirements.
- Feedback from participating students was positive.

Barriers

- Transportation in rural counties.
- Conflict with extra-curricular school activities on weekends.
- Students had personal events that conflicted with the program.

Next Steps

- Continued school support
- Interdisciplinary education

Proposed Outcomes

- Encourage students to pursue a health science profession.
- Increase the level of academic preparation.
- Increase awareness of opportunities.
- Link schools and community resources.