Health Science Program of Study Implementation in Rural Alaska—October 2013

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Rural high schools in Alaska are implementing Health Science Programs of Study with the assistance of regional Area Health Education Centers (AHECs) and State of Alaska, Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DOL/WD) grant funding. Two years of successful outreach and facilitation in small rural communities in the Interior of Alaska has resulted in five high schools implementing a Health Science Program of Study and a planned expansion of the AHEC program to the Southeast Region.

The process consists of a series of facilitated, face-to-face meetings with school personnel, an AHEC education specialist and a retired health science teacher serving as a technical consultant. These meetings dedicate time for program planning and implementation. A Health Academy is scheduled in each community, offering health career exploration along with a First Aid and CPR course to recruit prospective students. The DOL/WD funding allows AHEC to provide start-up materials including textbooks and equipment and professional development and mentoring for the identified teacher(s). The new teachers receive a variety of professional development trainings and appreciate the support of on-going mentoring throughout the courses. The courses are entry level courses from the University of Alaska’s Allied Health and Pre-Nursing Programs, providing as much as a full semester worth of credit to students taking advantage of the full sequence of courses. An additional key program component includes assistance developing a Health Science Advisory Committee, consisting of local leaders and health care providers, school leadership and post-secondary partners.

With great success in the Interior, Alaska’s AHEC Program Office applied for additional grant funding this year to expand efforts to Southeast Alaska. Outreach meetings are presently underway in several communities. The opportunity to address critical workforce needs and expand student horizons are compelling reasons for school districts to take on the challenge to re-arrange school schedules to accommodate the implementation of a new program of study. Alaska is fortunate to have its AHEC committed to this implementation of health science programs of study as their outreach priority.