

Stories of Impact

Health Professions CTE Programs in Butte County



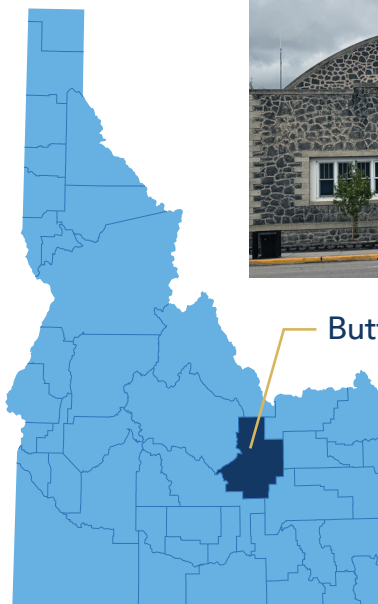
Addressing Idaho's Healthcare Workforce Crisis: Rural School District Prepares Students for In-Demand Careers

Idaho has a severe need for healthcare workers. There aren't enough primary care doctors, specialists, counselors, nurses, technicians, and other workforce members whose roles are critical to providing care in the Gem State. This crisis is magnified in rural parts of our vast and geographically diverse state.

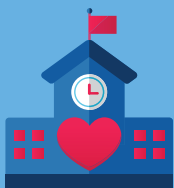
One way to increase the number of healthcare workers is through Career Technical Education (CTE) programs. CTE programs provide high school students with training and skills that prepare them for in-demand careers, including health professions.

That's one reason why the Arco-based Butte County School District started offering health professions CTE courses. Arco is a small, rural community that struggles to find healthcare workers. The stories included in this case study tell the story behind the programs.

The Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health provided the school district with catalytic grant funding that helped launch health professions CTE courses, including certified nursing assistant, emergency medical technician, and dental assisting.



Butte County



Butte County High Offers Health Professions CTE Courses

Program helps prepare students for in-demand careers



10 STUDENTS

took health professions CTE courses during the 2024-25 academic year

Butte is the third least populous county in Idaho, which can make it difficult to find healthcare workers to serve the roughly 2,500 residents of the rural county located about an hour west of Idaho Falls.

That was part of the motivation for Butte County High School to expand its Career Technical Education (CTE) program to include a health professions pathway. Students take courses such as Medical Terminology, Anatomy and Physiology, Health Careers Today, and others to help prepare them for careers in the healthcare sector.

Kendra Riddle enjoyed the Health Careers Today course, which included in-person visits from different healthcare professionals to talk about their role. Riddle likes way the courses are taught.

"These classes helped give me an idea of what I might want to do and what I like."

Cambree Lyon
Butte County High School
Sohphmore interested in becoming a pediatric nurse



"I really think they are fun because of the activities and the presentations we do."

Kendra Riddle
Emergency Technician
Student



Students can receive dual credit at College of Eastern Idaho or College of Southern Idaho.

"That's going to be helpful, especially with costs,"
Riddle said.

Former Butte County Superintendent of Schools Joe Steele, who retired June 30, pointed out the importance of preparing students for in-demand careers through CTE programs offered at the high school in Arco.

"In a small community like Arco, getting services like these is difficult," Steele said. **"If we can grow our own and keep workers in needed fields locally, the community benefits."**

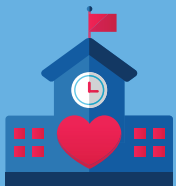
All students in the health professions CTE programs became CPR certified with the local EMT department doing the training and donating the fees.

The Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health supported the expansion of the Butte County School District's CTE program with a grant that funded the purchase of necessary textbooks, curriculum and materials for the health professions pathway.

CTE programs provide students another option after graduation.

"We try to promote CTE for those who aren't interested in a four-year college," said Angie McAfee, the CTE teacher at Butte County High.

"We need skilled people, but traditional education may not be the style. These programs help students get out into the world."



Dental Assisting Programs are a Rarity in Idaho

Teacher brings real-life experience to the classroom

The Idaho Division of Career Technical Education has approved only four high school dental assisting programs in the state, and one of those is in the remote city of Arco.

Butte County High School is offering a dental assisting as a part of its health professions CTE program. It's the only program in Idaho offered outside of the Treasure Valley. Boise, Kuna and Nampa school districts are the others that offer dental assisting.

"We're definitely the smallest school that offers this program for such a specific job."

Angie McAfee

Butte County High School

Health Professions CTE teacher



CTE programs help prepare students for in-demand careers. Health professions CTE programs are vital in Idaho because of the healthcare workforce shortage in the state. The Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health has supported the launch or expansion of health professions CTE programs in 31 schools, including Butte County High School, in the past two years.

The healthcare workforce shortage is more pronounced in rural areas such as Butte County, which has about 2,500 residents and is located about an hour from Idaho Falls.

Eagle Rock Dental, a practice that has offices in Arco, Idaho Falls and Rexburg, serves on the school's health occupations board in an advisory capacity. The practice understands the need for training more dental assistants.



Dental models help students learn about teeth

"Finding qualified dental assistants anywhere in Southeastern Idaho is difficult right now," said Jeffrey Barnard, regional manager of Eagle Rock Dental. "The College of Eastern Idaho in Idaho Falls has ramped up its program and is turning out highly qualified dental assistants, but it is going to take several classes to catch up with demand. Arco, being a very small community, presents a larger issue. We love that all our team members come from the area, but it does pose an issue when we need a dental assistant or hygienist."

McAfee, the CTE teacher, can attest. She has been a dental hygienist for 25 years and has seen the negative effects when Eagle Rock loses a team member.

"When we lose an assistant, there's a gap," she said. "It's hard in a small community because you don't have qualified people to replace someone who leaves."

McAfee now plays a critical role in training Butte County High students to become qualified. Two years, the school lost a science teacher and was struggling to find a replacement. McAfee got her teaching certificate and just completed her second year of teaching science and the health professions CTE courses. She continues to work part-time as a hygienist.

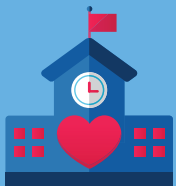
"We and Butte High are some fortunate to have someone like Angie lead the health professions program," Barnard said. "Angie gives the students a real-world look at health professions because she has been and is practicing currently. Angie has a love for helping students grow and learn. I can't imagine and better leader to help these students find and pursue their interests in health professions."

The dental assisting program received a donation of six dental chairs from the College of Southern Idaho in 2024. Those chairs are being installed in the CTE classroom and will be ready for use this fall.

"We're really excited about this program," McAfee said.

A model shows the stages of gingivitis





High School Student Already Getting On-the-Job Experience

Senior gets rave reviews for work in dental office

Butte County High School student Saige Wanstrom sometimes stopped into the local Eagle Rock Dental office after school to see her mom, Cindy, who works there as a receptionist.

Now Saige is her mom's co-worker, filling a vacancy as a dental assistant.

"I think when she would visit, it kind of piqued her interest," Cindy said. "She started learning about parts and tools and helping out in the rooms with odd jobs and kept progressing, and then one of our assistants left."



Saige Wanstrom works part time as a dental assistant at Eagle Rock Dental in Arco

Saige is a senior-to-be at Butte County High School who is enrolled in Health Professions Career Technical Education (CTE) courses that prepare students for careers in healthcare fields. She takes a variety of medical-related classes, including anatomy and physiology, and medical terminology.

Former Butte County School District Superintendent Joe Steele, who retired June 30, called Saige "the success story" of the school's health professions CTE program.

"It's exciting," Saige said. "I've learned a lot at Eagle Rock and am learning new stuff in the medical terminology class, and I'm able to understand things more. This whole process has been a good learning experience. It also helps you understand your own health."

Saige's CTE teacher is also a co-worker at Eagle Rock. In addition to teaching, Angie McAfee is a part-time dental hygienist at the office.

"I love working with Angie. As a teacher, she brings the perspective of someone who is in the field, and that's important."

Saige Wanstrom

Butte County High School

Senior enrolled in Health Professions Career Technical Education (CTE) courses



Dental assisting involves greeting patients, sterilizing instruments, cleaning exam rooms, and setting up and taking down chairs between patients.

"I can't think of a better way for someone to find out if they like the field of dentistry by working in it," said Jeffrey Barnard, regional manager at Eagle Rock. "The team enjoys seeing her and working with her. She is getting a great idea of how a dental office works and is doing a great job. I hope she feels the experience has been valuable for her, too."

The combination of the CTE courses and work experience will position Saige to do a capstone project, which is an assignment that allows students to demonstrate knowledge and skills in a real-world context.

"Saige has learned a lot of things," McAfee said. "She gets paid and learns on the job."

Saige said she enjoys the CTE classes because they expose her to a variety of healthcare careers. She is considering exploring careers as a dental hygienist or ultrasound technician. The CTE courses will help her decide what career to pursue.

Saige also serves as a mentor to younger students, which she enjoys. Her senior project is a fundraiser to help earn money that the school can use to purchase additional materials for the health professions CTE courses.