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Area Health Education Centers Receives \$2.1 Million to “Grow Our Own” Health Professionals

Statewide jobs preparation project supports Vermont students to meet
Vermont workforce needs in health care.

CHAMPLAIN VALLEY, VT - The three Vermont Area Health Education Centers (AHECs) located in the Champlain Valley, Southern Vermont and Northeastern Vermont, recently received a grant for more than \$2.1 million over three years to provide academic enrichment and college preparation to Vermont students interested in careers in health care. The Health Careers Opportunity Program (HCOP) awarded to the state AHEC centers was one of only 14 grants nationwide for 2012 from the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Bureau of Health Professionals. Over 109 applications were submitted for this highly competitive grant award.

The Vermont Health Careers Opportunities Pipeline (VT HCOP) project will serve the students of Franklin, Grand Isle, Chittenden and Addison counties by lengthening and strengthening the health care workforce “pipeline” in Vermont by reaching younger students in grades K through 5 for health career exploration and by introducing new programming to students in secondary and post-secondary grades.

The VT HCOP project is aimed at increasing the competitiveness of Vermont students to enter post-secondary training programs in the fields of behavioral health, mental health and pharmacy. In the summer of 2012, a six-week academic enrichment camp will be offered for rising high school seniors interested in careers in these fields at the College of St. Joseph in Rutland, Vermont.

The pipeline consists of: early health career exploration paired with personal and community health education topics for the primary grades; increased community and work-based learning opportunities and extracurricular enrichment for middle school students; and college preparation, counseling, and mentoring in the high school years. All activities will be aligned with health training program entry requirements at Vermont colleges and universities and with health care industry standards.

“By starting with our youngest students, and supporting them throughout their education with information and opportunities, we hope that VT HCOP will inspire young people to be healthy, to participate in the health of their community, and to excel in science, technology, and math,” says Laura Remick, VT HCOP’s Project Manager.

“This partnership is a great example of educators working with community partners and employers to educate more students in ways that support the health care sector,” says Bob Whittaker, Dean of

Institutional Advancement at Lyndon State College, a partner in the VT HCOP project. “Health care is one of Vermont’s key industry clusters best positioned to keep and create jobs.”

“Fourteen of the twenty fastest-growing occupations in Vermont are in health care,” says Helen Riehle, Executive Director of the Northeastern Vermont AHEC. “It is important to prepare Vermont students to fill those positions. VT HCOP will strengthen an existing ‘grow our own’ approach to meeting Vermont’s health care workforce needs. We are delighted to be part of the statewide collaborative effort with NEVAHEC and SVAHEC.”

The VT HCOP project engaged broad collaboration from health, education and workforce interests in Vermont during its development. The Leahy Center for Rural Students at Lyndon State College will spearhead the evaluation and research component of this project. Other partners include Lyndon State College and the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, the Community College of Vermont, the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation, the Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, the UVM School of Social Work and the Vermont Interdisciplinary Leadership Education for Health Professionals (VT-ILEHP) program at the University Of Vermont College Of Medicine. Program implementation will begin initially with students of River Valley Technical Center, Lyndon Institute, Lyndon Town School, and expand statewide by year three.

The Vermont AHEC is a network of academic and community partners working together to improve the distribution, supply and quality of the health care workforce in Vermont. The network consists of a Program Office at the University Of Vermont College Of Medicine and three Regional Centers. Vermont AHEC brings more than 14 years of experience in health care workforce development to this project.

“This project has an ambitious scope, and among the organizations involved a tremendous amount of collective expertise. I am excited that Northeastern Vermont AHEC, who is the lead organization, will be working with the Champlain Valley AHEC on this statewide collaborative endeavor,” says Ms. Riehle.

For more information about projects and programs of the Champlain Valley AHEC, please visit the website www.cvahec.org.