INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF HEALTHCARE EMPLOYEES

By Emily Barnwell

The Partnership's strategic priority of talent is committed to preparing the workforce of the future. Often, that starts with inspiration. That was the goal of the "FutureReady Experience: Healthcare" event on Oct. 16.

The exciting event welcomed approximately 200 Wichita Public Schools seventh and eighth graders to the Healthcare FutureReady Center, where they explored a variety of healthcare careers including Certified Nurse Aids (CNA), EKG technicians, EMTs, phlebotomists, surgical technicians and athletic trainers.

"The CNA station was my favorite because my mom is a CNA. When I get home, I am going to ask her if she likes her job," shared one Robinson Middle School student during the event.

"Middle school students are at a critical age of career exploration. The 'FutureReady Experience: Healthcare' started as a talent marketing campaign and as we worked with local professionals, we realized the outreach to middle schools was critical. The launch of the campaign was designed to help the students discover their interests enabling them to make more informed career choices in high school and beyond," said Partnership Director of Talent, Workforce Development, and Community Engagement Ricki Ellison.

During the event, the students rotated through a series of immersive Mobile Health Career Stations designed to debunk common myths and illustrate that healthcare careers are not only accessible but also fulfilling, even for those who might initially shy away from the notion of "guts and gore."

"The coolest thing was the phlebotomy station. I got to mark my veins and use a light to see all my veins," said 13-year-old Desiree.

"We learned how to do CPR and tie a tourniquet," another Robinson Middle School student explained. "I also learned if you do CPR, you can break someone's ribs!"

"The hope is the hands-on activities will spark the students' curiosity and provide them with a clearer understanding of how they can contribute to the healthcare sector," said Wichita Public Schools FutureReady Center Principal Eric Shipman.

Investing in the future healthcare workforce is crucial as hospitals and health systems face staffing shortages. According to the American Hospital Association, there is an urgent need for more healthcare employees and a robust pipeline of skilled professionals.

“Through our partnerships and collaboration with the region's healthcare employers, we understand the critical need for a highly skilled and trained workforce in the healthcare industry. This event allowed students to explore the FutureReady Center and gain valuable insights into the diverse and rewarding career paths within the healthcare sector," said Lynn Loveland, WSU Tech Dean of Health Sciences.

Wichita Mayor Lily Wu also joined the students before they departed. She emphasized the importance of seizing

opportunities offered by Wichita Public Schools, sharing her pride as a graduate, and encouraging students to make thoughtful choices each day to set themselves up for success, regardless of their circumstances.

The conversation about career possibilities didn't end at the event. Each student received healthcare-themed promotional items and marketing materials to encourage ongoing career discussions with their parents or guardians.

In addition, the Mobile Health Career Stations will continue their journey, traveling to middle schools throughout Wichita Public Schools to reach another 3,000 students.

"It is important that we continue these conversations with our youth to not only inspire them to find the career that best fits their personality and distinct skills, but to ensure our workforce is truly future-ready," shared Ellison.

By investing in the greater Wichita region's youth today, the community can cultivate the healthcare leaders of tomorrow, ensuring a resilient workforce that can meet the needs of the region for years to come.

The Partnership collaborated with the HCA Healthcare Foundation, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas, Wichita State University Campus of Applied Sciences and Technology (WSU Tech) and Wichita Public Schools (WPS) to host the event.

It was made possible by a $25,000 grant from the Healthier Tomorrow Fund at the HCA Healthcare Foundation. HCA Healthcare is the parent company of Wesley Healthcare, one of Kansas' largest healthcare organizations.

William Voloch, President and CEO of Wesley Healthcare, welcomed students to the FutureReady Experience: Healthcare.

Jason Ladner, Business Development Executive at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas, closed the event on the importance of healtcare workers and how resources like the FutureReady Center are a first step towards that career field.