



Del Norte & Tribal Lands
Health Career Pathways
2022 Relaunch

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Background

The Health Career Pathways (HCP) project is part of a larger, statewide initiative funded by The California Endowment. The intent of the Health Career Pathways project is “to grow our own health workforce” from within, through working with local educators, health employers, youth, and health professionals in a variety of fields. When the initiative launched in 2016, leaders of the pathway held a convening with 22 community stakeholders representing a mix of healthcare, education, and nonprofit leaders. The stakeholders helped identify the current state of health careers in the community, in addition to strategizing around where they would like to see the initiative end up.

Figure 1: Current & Desired States for Del Norte HCP

Current State	Desired Future State
<p>Workforce Development: Institutions do not have a cohesive vision for health workforce development.</p>	<p>Our community understands the workforce needs, partners have a shared vision of workforce development, and Institutions have actively committed to specific roles in building the health workforce.</p>
<p>Limited Entry Level Positions: Employees entering the health workforce often stay where they are and do not advance, allowing few opportunities for young people.</p>	<p>Institutions employ move up strategies to make room for entry-level jobs and growing from within.</p>
<p>Changes in Healthcare: The landscape of healthcare is quickly evolving, especially for rural communities.</p>	<p>Stakeholders have a long-term plan on how to gracefully evolve with the changing landscape of healthcare and unique challenges of rural medicine.</p>
<p>Education & Training: Options for higher education for various health professions are limited locally and regionally.</p>	<p>There are a variety of regional training opportunities due to expanded programs and distance learning opportunities.</p>
<p>Youth Exposure: Few young people see diversified healthcare as a viable career option.</p>	<p>Youth are excited about the many opportunities in health related fields.</p>

The ideas for a desired future state helped solidify a number of goals related to workforce and education, some of which have been met with great success in the past five years. Some of the highlights include a commitment to being involved in the initiative from all the major healthcare employers, in addition to the school district being willing to implement new educational opportunities wherever possible. The goals identified at the start of the project are outlined in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2: Original Goals & Progress

Workforce Goals

Goal #1:

By December 2018, all modalities of local health employers, representing 1000+ jobs in the community sign a proclamation to “grow our own health workforce” through school outreach, work based learning, and/or workforce development policies.

Progress: By the end of 2019, all four of the major healthcare employers in Del Norte County signed a proclamation committing to this work.

Goal #2:

By December 2018, all modalities of local health employers representing 1000+ jobs in the community partner to provide work-based learning, with applicable employers implementing workforce development policies and move up strategies.

Progress: All employers have provided some form of work-based learning opportunity, including educational opportunities.

Education Goals

Goal #1:

K-12: By 2020 every school in Del Norte County offers health career exploration, with 50 middle school students advancing each year to health pathway classes and/or activities at the high school level.

Progress: Almost all schools in Del Norte have had access to some form of health career pathways. We are still working towards the goal of 50 middle school students advancing each year.

Goal #2:

By 2023 Del Norte County Unified School District graduates 30 senior health pathway students each spring with 100% of them prepared with A-G to advance to employment or onto higher education in the health field.

Progress: We are still working towards this goal.

Goal #3:

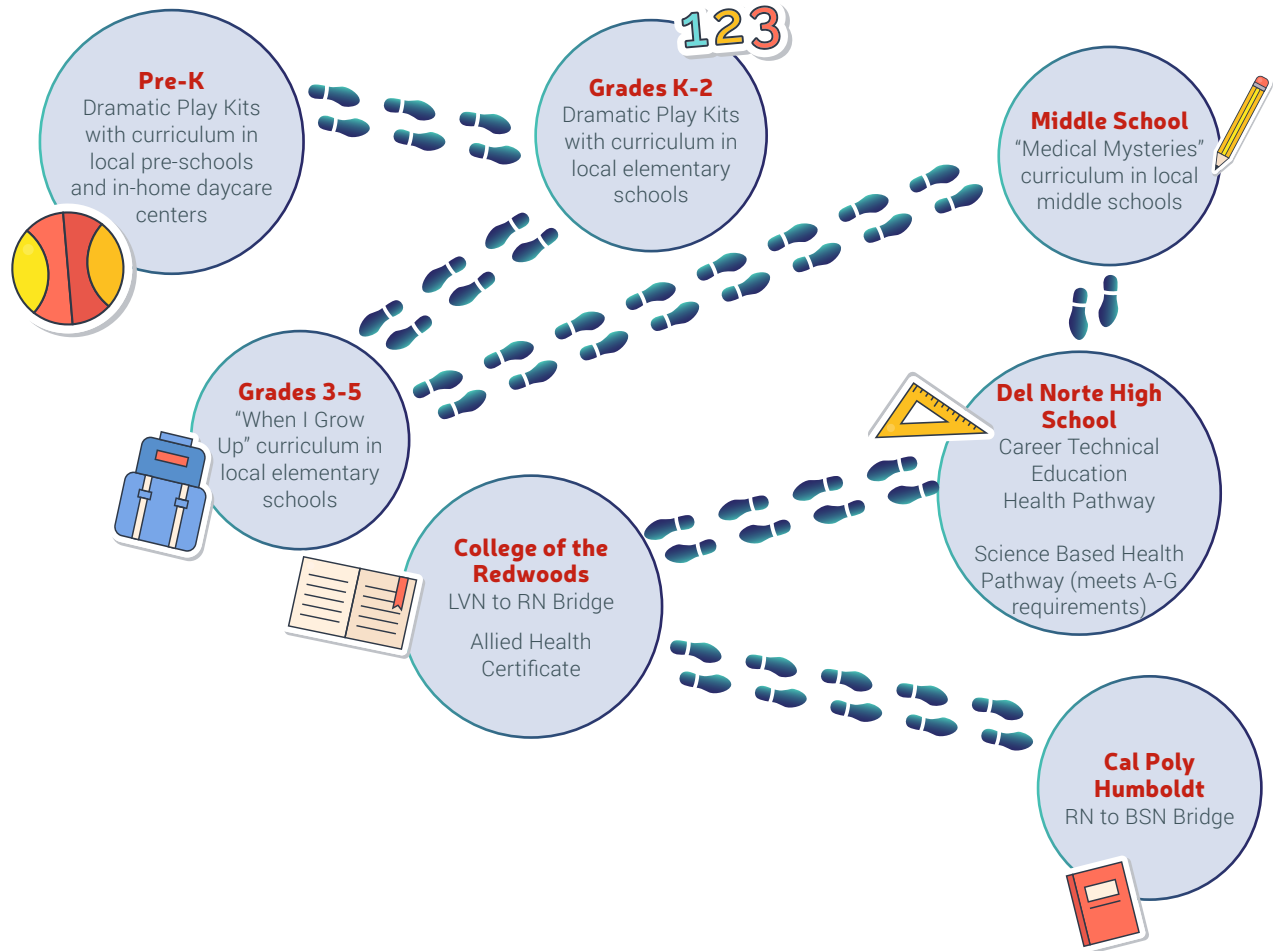
By 2023 we will develop a post-secondary Allied Health program that will allow students to advance to employment providing direct client services or office administration, or on to higher education.

Progress: The Front Office/Medical Front Office Receptionist course launched in 2021 and was available to high school and college students, in addition to those already employed in the health workforce.



Figure 3 below displays all the educational opportunities that have been implemented in Del Norte County so far. The purpose of this latest research project is to discuss how these opportunities might be relaunched during the COVID-19 pandemic, and where there is room for new opportunities.

Figure 3: Educational Pathway Map





Research Overview

As outlined in the background section, the HCP initiative has already accomplished many of its goals during the first five years; however, there's always more room for growth and change. Between April-July 2021, staff at the California Center for Rural Policy conducted a series of interviews and informal conversations with members of the Del Norte community that have contributed, or have the potential to contribute to the Health Career Pathway Initiative. A total of 16 interviews were conducted with a mix of local teachers, education administrators and specialists, healthcare employers, youth, and community members. The primary purpose of the interviews was to gain insight into how the environments and opportunities for healthcare and education have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and where future Health Care Pathway Initiative efforts would best fit in. The three categories of overarching research questions are as follows:

Workforce

- ▶ What are their current needs?
- ▶ How can they continue to support this effort with education and work based learning opportunities?

Education

- ▶ How can we rebuild the CTE pathway at Del Norte High School?
- ▶ What else can we do to reach youth that is not based on being in the classroom?

Youth

- ▶ How can we inspire more youth to pursue a career in healthcare?

This latest research revealed 10 insights, in addition to helping generate a list of new activities/initiatives to launch in the fall 2022 semester across the Del Norte Unified School District (DNUSD). This report will explain each of the insights and lay out a plan for the next steps of the health career pathway work, starting at Pre-K and going to post secondary education and beyond.



Key Research Insights

Education & Healthcare

1 There is strong support for Health Career Pathways now and in the future.

Everyone that participated in the interview process has a strong interest in expanding exposure to health careers and identified tangible ways for moving the work forward. Community partners from both education and healthcare sectors are committed to working together and using whatever resources they have access to to make it happen, with the target demographic ranging from preschool aged children all the way up to adults already in the workforce.

"What we want to do more than anything is provide as many possible opportunities for our high school students to take advantage of programs that are here in the community. When I say in the community, I mean, whether it be from Del Norte High School or Sunset High School or College of the Redwoods and then on to Cal Poly Humboldt."

-DNUSD Administrator

2 In spite of the many challenges, there is strong support on the part of the school district to build a successful Health Career Pathway, with both a science-based A-G pathway and a Career Technical Education (CTE) pathway. Finding and paying qualified teachers is one of the primary barriers to building a successful health career pathway.

While there has been great success with the science-based A-G pathway housed at Del Norte High School, the challenge of finding a teacher and sustainable funding for a CTE health pathway still exists. Education leaders are now confident in the ability to fund a program through the recent funds from the federal and state governments; however, finding a qualified teacher remains a barrier. If the school decides to stick with the patient care pathway as done in previous years, one new idea that emerged from the interviews is to work with a local healthcare provider to find a registered nurse (RN) that is interested in splitting time between practicing as a nurse and teaching the pathway. Another new idea is to transition the pathway to a focus on behavioral health, instead of patient care, as there may be more locals with the experience needed to teach the class. Regardless of the pathway chosen, the teacher will have to commit to a year-long, online CTE credential program, which the school district will pay for them to attend.

"There's not only COVID funding, we're getting additional funding from the federal government for expanded learning opportunities which might be a great way to facilitate this."

-Del Norte High School

"With somebody who has the work experience, we can get them patient care industry sector credentials pretty easily. The part they have to do, that is the pain, is they have to commit to a year-long [CTE] credential program."

-DNUSD Administrator



3 **There is a desire to use the activities and curriculum we have put in place, but there needs to be more support to implement and/or sustain use.**

Through the Health Career Pathway Initiative, activity kits and curriculum have been developed for children in preschool through grade 5. Though some teachers and administrators are familiar with the resources, many of those who were around when everything was first introduced have retired or transitioned roles. Those interviewed suggested a relaunch of the resources for all the grade levels by doing targeted outreach to each grade level and letting everyone know it's available to all teachers. Plans for the relaunch are discussed in the 'Program Relaunch' section below.

"She is a natural excited, engaged educator that other teachers kind of gravitate to, and if she was able to use any part of it or she could be re-energized to use it in her classroom that would be the selling point for getting it into other classrooms."

-DNUSD Teacher

4 **The potential exists to work in partnership with College of the Redwoods-Del Norte Campus for co-enrollment and/or certificate programs.**

While partnerships already exist between College of the Redwoods (CR) and the local schools, there is room to expand those even further. With the option for high school students to enroll in college-level courses through co or dual enrollment, administrators can work with students and teachers to help adjust daily schedules and allow time for students to take these classes during the day.

Another option which has already proven to be successful is to offer certificate programs such as the Front Office Receptionist Course offered in the spring/summer of 2021 as a pilot program. This class was available to high school students and those already in the workforce and proved to be successful for both demographics.

"What we want to do is expand our outreach. We want to find ways where our district office and county office can support the programs, like the one at the College of the Redwoods...We want to get more students to know about it. Our big thing is increasing student awareness and if we have to look at developing scholarships, we can do that."

-DNUSD Administrator



5 **Motivating students, particularly students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and ethnically diverse communities into this pathway, requires exposure all through their educational journey and guidance from counselors.**

Interviews revealed that students who don't have personal exposure to professionals in healthcare are less likely to pursue these educational and career pathways for themselves. Within this community, the lack of exposure is often true for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, from ethnically diverse communities, or with high Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) scores. It's important that these students especially get exposure to all the available options and know what opportunities are available to them. This communication can be done through educators, but also through school counselors and mentors. If the community can help change the perception of what these students are capable of, the students may change the perception of themselves.

"When kids choose to be in the CTE pathway they really want them to hang in there. They really want them to stay in there and to push through some of the obstacles that they come across."

-DNUSD Administrator

"You might have students who have high ACEs scores shy away from careers that are health related, but you might find others who are attracted [to health careers]. People could go either direction."

-Healthcare Administrator

6 **There has been a shortage of counselors to provide guidance—especially at the middle school level. This is changing somewhat, but has impacted students' understanding of what is available to them when they enter high school.**

School counselors play a vital role in the lives of Del Norte students. While their primary role is meant to be education and career guidance, they often end up spending more time working on the social emotional needs of students. With a limited number of school counselors, especially at the middle school level, there isn't much time to focus on career guidance and informing students of the different options or resources available to them.

Interviews suggested there is not only a need for more school counselors, but also for more school psychologists so counselors can focus more on guidance and less on therapeutic needs. They also suggested HCP coordinators work more closely with counselors at all schools to make sure they are informed of all the health career pathway options available to them at any given time.

"I feel like that shouldn't be a counselor's place unless you're working on academic or career goals. I feel like it's a social emotional thing and that's therapy. It needs to go through a school psych...we need more school psychs."

-DNUSD School Counselor



7 The COVID-19 pandemic has added to the already overwhelming mental health needs of students.

As outlined in the previous findings, mental health needs are highly prevalent among students in Del Norte County and Tribal Lands. These needs were only exasperated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As students have returned to school from remote or hybrid learning environments the adjustment has been challenging for many students. Not only do they have to catch up on educational lessons, but they also have to adjust to the social aspect of being back in school after over a year of isolation. The changes not only impact the students, but also the teachers and school administrators as they have to spend more time supporting emotional needs, and less time teaching curriculum.

"We need to start practicing being back in public again and practicing how school works in person. She enrolled her and didn't really talk to her or recognize that she had some serious anxiety... When she went to school she walked up to the front doors and had a full panic attack that ended up at the hospital."

-DNUUSD School Counselor

8 The COVID-19 pandemic has made moving this pathway forward extremely difficult.

Both teachers and students have struggled to adjust to the learning environment during a pandemic. This makes moving the pathway forward extremely challenging as classes are more focused on catching up on the required curriculum, and therefore have less time to spend on health focused lessons or activities. Additionally, healthcare providers who normally help support the pathway through guest speakers, shadowing, or work experience haven't been able to participate either due to safety precautions and/or operating at maximum capacity in their roles.

"Our teachers are just still so overwhelmed with the hybrid learning."

-DNUUSD Administrator

"The learning curve [for Zoom technology] was steep. We had to take 2 weeks just to bring everyone up to speed so we could push out this system... This is super hard for me, it's got to be way harder for our kids."

-DNUUSD Teacher



9 There aren't a lot of opportunities to collect information and data beyond state test scores.

While we can determine there's a need for expansion of health career pathway work through qualitative data such as key informant interviews, the amount of quantitative data is limited. Beyond state testing scores, there isn't much data available to assess the progress of students as they progress through their education. Some ideas for future data to consider collecting to reflect the progress of the Health Career Pathway Initiative include tracking the number of students prepared to enter A-G courses in high school, the number of students graduating with all A-G requirements, the number of students completing a CTE health career pathway, and the number of students who go on and complete college. There's also interest in collecting data on teachers to understand what it takes to become a CTE teacher and the difference in income for working as a teacher instead of a health care provider. To collect such data points would require commitment not only at the district level, but also from the schools themselves.

"I don't know if we have to reinvent the wheel here...If someone has already figured out how to create this metric we can push it out here either through surveys, through grades, or through interest. Whatever metric you need for this grant we can make happen. I just don't know what it would look like."

-DNUSD Administrator

10 A health career pathway coordinator is key to connecting and preparing students for education and work based learning opportunities.

As evidenced in the first nine findings of this report, there is a lot of work that goes into creating and maintaining a successful health career pathway. In order for the pathway to reach its highest level of success, a program coordinator who can work locally and help connect all the different components of the program is key. This person should be knowledgeable of all the different opportunities and serve as a liaison between students, parents, educators, and local employers.

"Our community is rural and we need to home grow our healthcare workers here. I just know that we haven't had the program builder and program pusher in place."

-DNUSD Administrator



Plans for Program Relaunch

How to get there & next steps

Over the past six years that the Health Career Pathway Initiative has been a part of the Del Norte Community, there have been a number of education and workforce opportunities available for youth and entry level healthcare workforce. The different opportunities and how we hope to re-introduce them to the community are outlined by age group or career path below. All of these ideas will be discussed and finalized with the Del Norte Health Career Pathway Design Team and our intention is to launch them throughout the fall of 2022.

Preschool & Pre-kindergarten

Health Care Dramatic play kits for preschool and pre-kindergarten aged children have been available for local classrooms since 2016. The kits include toy medical supplies such as play stethoscopes, thermometers, lab coats, and more. When they were first created they were available for teachers to check out through the Del Norte Education Resource Center. Through interviews and conversations with local educators we learned that many of the teachers that were around when the kits were first introduced have since retired or moved on to other positions, so the current teachers aren't even aware they're available.

Through conversations with early education and specialists new ideas to expand classroom participation emerged. The first suggestion was to include some form of activity card in the kit that gives teachers ideas for how kids can play with the play medical supplies and recognize how they are related to different health professions. The next suggestion was for career coordinators to work closely with the local early education specialist to market the kits and ensure that educators know they are available at no cost to each school or to daycare centers. Through these efforts, children as young as age three will have the opportunity to start getting exposure to the world of healthcare.

Kindergarten-Grade 5

In March of 2020, curriculum was developed for children in kindergarten through second grades. The curriculum includes six different lessons, each of which focuses on a different profession or health and wellness technique. The curriculum packet comes with an activity kit that includes a variety of different props to go along with each of the six lessons and promotes hands-on experiential learning. Since this resource was created at the start of the pandemic there hasn't been an opportunity to test it out in classrooms yet, but it will be available to all local teachers who are interested starting in fall 2022.

The next educational resource is a curriculum and activity kit for children in grades 3-5 known as "When I Grow Up". It was created specifically for Del Norte County schools after-school programs and includes nine separate lessons, each of which focuses on a health professional or cultural healing practice used in the local community. This resource has been available to schools for a number of years now and has been met with great success. We were able to distribute six more kits in 2021.

In order to introduce the K-2 curriculum and gain wider distribution of "When I Grow Up" curriculum, health career pathway coordinators plan to attend the all grade level meetings and/or in-school service days throughout the fall of 2022 to market the two curriculums to as many teachers as possible. Through the interviews we learned that finding a teacher to serve as a "champion" of the work and help promote the resources will help it gain momentum even faster.



Grades 6-8

Youth in grades 6-8 have been some of the hardest to reach for health career pathway opportunities. With large class sizes and a robust list of state standards to meet, the time to add anything else into the curriculum is limited. In prior years, science teachers introduced an activity known as “Medical Mysteries” during which students had the opportunity to regularly participate in hands-on science activities related to some form of healthcare. Unfortunately, those opportunities haven’t been able to be offered in recent years due to a number of factors.

Through interviews with middle school educators and administrators we learned there is definitely interest in bringing some form of health related activity back into the classrooms. The first goal is to bring back some form of the medical mystery activity, even if it isn’t as frequent as before. The next goal is to connect with teachers and help get guest speakers from different health professions into the classrooms to help students gain awareness of all the different professions out there, and get them on track for taking the right courses at the high school level.

Again the plan to launch this effort is for fall of 2022. This time frame was chosen specifically after state testing and before summer break, as there’s often a down time in the required curriculum so it will be easier for teachers to test these different opportunities out and see how they might fit into the schedule for future academic years.

High School

The high school aged youth have been the demographic where we’ve seen some of the most success, but there’s still room for progress. The biggest success that already exists and continues to run smoothly is the science-based health career pathway at Del Norte High School. Two champion teachers have changed their curriculum for biology and chemistry classes to include health related activities, and still count as an A-G course (a series of classes required for high school students to go straight into a 4-year university). The Health Career Pathway Initiative will continue to support this pathway through purchasing materials to teach lessons when needed and helping teachers connect with local health professionals that can offer classroom education or one-on-one mentorship for students.

The biggest challenge at the high school level has been sustaining a Career Technical Education (CTE) pathway. The focus for the past few years has been on patient care, but that’s been met with limited success due to the regular turnover in teachers. One new idea that emerged from the interviews is to work with a local healthcare provider to find a registered nurse (RN) that is interested in splitting time between practicing as a nurse and teaching the pathway, in hopes that that will make the pathway more sustainable. Another new idea is to transition the pathway to a focus on behavioral health, instead of patient care, as there may be more locals with the experience needed to teach the class. Regardless of the pathway chosen, the teacher will have to commit to a year-long, online CTE credential program, which the school district will pay for them to attend, but requires some time in finding the right person.

Opportunity Youth (Aged 14-24)

The final age group for which we hope to expand opportunities for are those aged 14-24, often known as Opportunity Youth. This age group is a mix of high school and college students, as well as some who have already entered the entry-level workforce. There are two summer programs that already exist for this age group and that the health career pathway program has been a part of for five years now: Youth Training Academy (YTA) and Employment, Education, Experience (E3). Both of these programs offer paid experiential learning opportunities to youth, with the E3 program providing 6-8 week job placements with local healthcare providers. These programs have been on hold during the pandemic, but the plan for the summer of 2022 is to create a mix of both programs and offer a Health Exploration Summer Institute (HESI). With HESI, youth will have the



opportunity to participate in a couple weeks of classroom instruction focused specifically on health career and employment skills, and then be placed with a local health facility for short term employment. This program has been implemented in neighboring counties and has been quite successful.

The next opportunity for this age range is the Front Office Medical Reception Course, a curriculum created with CR and local healthcare employers that is intended to improve front office medical skills for those already working in the field or interested in entering the field. An online pilot course was offered in fall of 2021 and another one is being planned for later in 2022, with some adjustments from the first time the course was offered. This class will be available to high school and college students, as well as adults who have already entered the health workforce or are looking to get a job soon. Those that pass the course are provided a certificate that is recognized by the local healthcare employers that helped create the curriculum and will help get the student an interview.



Conclusion

At the time this report is being finalized, many efforts are on hold due to the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. With over 100 open positions throughout the Del Norte Unified School District, there is not capacity within the schools to focus on extra initiatives. This is also true for the local healthcare organizations as they are experiencing workforce shortages as well and are operating at maximum capacity. The program directors are continuing to stay in contact with the Health Career Pathway Design Team, as well as contacts within the school district and healthcare organizations. The program plans outlined in this report are ready to launch whenever the community expresses interest and there's enough capacity from all essential partners.