

## Nursing available for high schoolers

### Bevill State program is first in the state

By ED HOWELL  
Eagle Senior Writer

In a state pilot program exclusively set in Walker County, high school students in Jasper City Schools and Walker County Schools will now be able to prepare to be a licensed practical nurse (LPN) while still getting a high school diploma.

"It's an exciting initiative to get students in the work force right after high school," said Penne Mott, associate dean of health sciences at Bevill State.

Bevill State Community College announced in a release Thursday that a two-year pilot high school LPN program will begin this fall in Walker County. Selected students will be able to graduate from high school on time and complete their practical nursing certificate after just one additional summer term at Bevill State.

Students interested in admission to the pilot program should take sophomore level healthcare electives beginning in this fall. Mott said she has been trying to reach all the county and city schools to talk to students up to ninth-grade about the program. She plans to talk to Carbon Hill students this week, although she said students are also encouraged to talk to their guidance counselors about the program.

On Thursday, Mott said she had just talked to a mother who was interested in getting her son in the program, as the son had brought home a brochure about the program.

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Ernie wants

Fanin worked for Inwood Chapel Mortuary in Birmingham for a couple of years and as a economic devel-

opment specialist for the permanent location. In the past, we've merely used funeral homes," he said. "We need

he also wants to look at long-term goals for helping improve the county.

# Nurses

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Harold Wade, the president of the college, could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Mott, who submitted a proposal to the state last fall and has worked on the plan for a year, said the program is part of a work force initiative that is being pushed by Postsecondary Chancellor Roy Johnson. She said it will be especially beneficial in addressing the nationwide shortage of nurses.

In the end, the Alabama College System and the Alabama Department of Education's Career/Technical Division selected Beville State as the site for the pilot project.

According to the release from Beville State, "The pilot location was selected because of the demonstrated quality of the Beville State nursing program, the academic performance of the high schools, the support of local clinical partners and the strength of the local career/technical program in healthcare."

"This went before a vote with the Alabama State Board of Education on April 13. It was unanimously approved," Mott said. "Dr. Wade is very excited about this. He was very instrumental in getting this program."

Mott said that while the program is new to Alabama, it is active in other states such as New Mexico, New York, Florida and Virginia. Mott went to Miami to see one program firsthand, while the director of health science in the state's postsecondary system looked at one in New York.

In Miami, where classes were as small as those planned for Beville State, every student was able to pass the test for obtaining a license, Mott said, adding that the retention rate is very good.

"We feel with the caliber of students we have, we will be able to retain them. These students will be successful," Mott said.

Students in the program will not pay tuition, although Mott said students will have to pay for uniforms and some supply and testing fees, "but that is very minimal."

After two years, Mott said the pilot program will be reviewed by the state and possibly expanded to other areas of the state, as well as other areas of career technical education. She said there has been talk of including paramedic students in the future.

A combined 16 slots for the program for Jasper and Walker County students have been set aside, Mott said, although it is not known yet where those students will come from in the county.

"If we get two or three from each school, that would be ideal," Mott said — although she pointed out Walker High School has 250 ninth-grade students.

While a student can opt out of the program after a semester and become a regular high school student again, an orientation for parents and students will be required to enter the program, so that they understand how much is involved.

"We don't want them to enter into this lightly, so that

they understand the rigors of the program," she said. "It's going to be a rigorous program. It's not for every high school student."

Mott said students will have to have a grade point average of 3.0, which is a B average, and officials will look at the student's attendance, maturity level, their ability to focus and their passion to enter into the medical profession.

After taking two health science electives in the ninth-grade, students will attend classes during their junior and senior years, spending two blocks, or about three hours, at the high school in regular classwork and another two blocks of their day in nursing education classes. The classes are expected to take place at local medical institutions, such as nursing homes and Walker Baptist Medical Center.

Students will complete their high school graduation requirements along with the nursing courses. They will be able to participate in selected high school activities and graduate with their class.

When they graduate, however, they will be just a few weeks away from LPN graduation and eligibility to apply for licensure in one of the fastest growing fields in the country, Mott said. Essentially, they will complete one more semester to get their LPN license, and will then be able to go into what will be referred to as the "RN mobility" program at Beville State, under the new Alabama College System Nursing Curricu-

lum.

While it usually takes five semesters to go to the next level as a registered nurse, or RN, the new coursework will allow the RN and LPN work to start with the same coursework over the first two semesters, she said. As that will have been covered in the LPN program, the LPNs will then take just three semesters to become an RN.

"The program is expected to produce LPNs who will continue their education to obtain RN credentials, engage more high school students in considering healthcare work force training and nursing, and prepare students quickly to meet rising job demands," according to the release from Beville State.

"The High School LPN Initiative brings together two powerful national trends: The high-growth job demands in nursing and the need to break down barriers between K-12 education and postsecondary education, making it easier for high school students to prepare for the work world and reach higher education goals," the release stated.

High school freshman who are interested should talk with their guidance counselor or Mott. Students should apply to the program by April 15 of their sophomore year after passing all components of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam.

For more information, contact Mott at 1-800-648-3271, ext. 5759, or e-mail her at pmott@bscc.edu. Students may also contact their guidance counselors.