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For Immediate Release

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The Education Foundation of Alachua County Expands CNA Certification Opportunities for High School Students with Support from HCA Healthcare Foundation Grant

17 local high school students taking Certified Nursing Assistant exams after completing new program

~Inaugural CNA course funded by HCA Healthcare Foundation~

Gainesville, FL — In June 2024, the Education Foundation of Alachua County was awarded a \$60,000 multi-year grant from the HCA Healthcare Foundation to support career pathway development for local high school students. Less than a year later, the investment is already making a measurable impact, helping students at Eastside High School and Hawthorne Middle/High School pursue Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) certifications.

During the 2024–2025 school year, 17 students interested in pursuing a career in health science at Eastside High School and Hawthorne Middle/High School completed a CNA Prep Course provided by Gator CNA. The six-week course, funded by the HCA Healthcare Foundation grant, included comprehensive training, study materials, and exam preparation to equip students with the knowledge and skills to take the Florida Board of Nursing Assistant state exam.

The Education Foundation and Career Technical Education (CTE) Department of the Alachua County Public Schools collaborated on this effort. Shannon Ritter, the director of CTE shares, "Our partnership with The Education Foundation and HCA Healthcare has created new opportunities for students in our district—opportunities that previously didn't exist. With a growing need for healthcare professionals in our local workforce, we're excited to see these students step into vital roles and thrive within our community's healthcare industry."

Of the 11 Eastside students who began the program in the fall, five have already completed the exam, while six will sit for the exam later this spring once they turn 18. An additional seven students from Hawthorne Middle/High School completed the course in April 2025 and will also take the exam this spring.



"I would like to thank HCA for their commitment and support in fostering the next generation of healthcare professionals, said Lamonica Davis, Medical Skills Program Coordinator at Eastside High School. "This opportunity for my students has made a significant impact on their educational journeys and career readiness. Many of EHS' MSP students are now well on their way to entering the healthcare field with confidence and purpose."

This marks the first-time students enrolled at these two high schools have had access to CNA certification while still in school—an opportunity made possible by the HCA Healthcare Foundation grant. Importantly, **all 17 students have either completed or are scheduled to complete their CNA exam**, laying the foundation for immediate career opportunities in healthcare following graduation.

"We are proud to be part of enhancing educational opportunities and increasing access to healthcare careers for young people in our community," said Gabe Bullaro, chief executive officer of HCA Florida North Florida Hospital. "By providing these educational resources through the HCA Healthcare Foundation grant, we aim to bridge the gap between ambition and opportunity, allowing young leaders to pursue careers in healthcare right here at home with the right tools and guidance. This initiative will not only empower students but also strengthen our local healthcare talent pipeline, creating healthier tomorrows for all."

The Education Foundation's goal was to remove financial barriers for students reluctant or unable to pursue CNA certification due to out-of-pocket costs. The grant has helped cover expenses such as background checks, fingerprinting, uniforms, and exam fees—costs that often prevent students from participating.

"We are so grateful for the HCA Healthcare Foundation's generosity and we are proud of these students for making a commitment to further their education," said Tia Brock-Paul, Executive Director of The Education Foundation of Alachua County. "This partnership with the HCA Healthcare Foundation is not only opening doors to future careers—it's building a stronger healthcare workforce pipeline right here in our community."



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The Education Foundation of Alachua County, Inc. is a 501(C)3 organization founded in 1986 to support the Alachua County Public Schools. The Foundation has three programs: Senior Scholarship, Take Stock in Children, and Catalyst for Change. For more information, please visit <http://edfoundationac.org/about-us/>.

Previous Press:

https://edfoundationac.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/news-HCA-Healthcare-announces-HCA-Healthcare-Foundations-1-million-grant-to-the-Consortium-of-Florida-Education-Foundations_FINAL-1.pdf

<https://www.mainstreetdailynews.com/education/education-foundation-alachua-county-60k-grant>