

Phil Dunn, Courier-Post 6:45 p.m.
EDT October 14, 2014

Joint board to spur health care jobs

The Rowan University/Rutgers-Camden Board of Governors rolled out an initiative Tuesday to spur employment in the field of health care for Camden youth. Board members have geared the program to recruiting current Camden high school students with the goal of training, educating and employing them as medical assistants at area health care organizations.

“It’s really going to be great for the young people who get this opportunity to get a head start in life,” said Board Chairman Jack Collins. “Where today the future may be bleak or at least not clear, these young people will have a path forward.”

The board will work in conjunction with Camden’s Board of Education to identify 10 to 15 high school students to start paid apprenticeships during the last six months of their schooling. After graduation, they will be enrolled in a medical assistant training program at Camden County College. Trainees will be offered full-time employment upon completion of the program, said Kris Kolluri, the board’s chief executive officer. “It is critically important that our young graduates have access to local employment opportunities,” said Camden School Superintendent Paymon Rouhanifard.

Kolluri shared Tuesday the board targeted this learning track because health care employment in South Jersey is projected to grow by of more than 17 percent through 2018—adding nearly 50,000 new positions. “In working with a lot of primary care offices and hospitals in Camden, we have learned that medical assistants play a vital role in the health care ecosystem,” said Jared Susco, chief operating officer of the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers.

Victoria DeFiglio, the coalition’s associate clinical director, will lead the program. “What we have noticed in the course of working with providers in the city is there are specific gaps in the training that medical assistants receive,” said DeFiglio. “This gives us the opportunity to have a real time feedback loop to supplement those gaps.”

The recruitment of students will start in December and the apprenticeship program will start in January. The Board of Governors has allocated \$315,000 to develop and implement the medical assistant initiative. Partnering health care organizations will fund the apprenticeship portion of the program and tuition at Camden County College will be covered with the help of federal grants.

Board Vice Chairman Louis Bezich noted the medical assistant program is a good example of what the board can accomplish in the South Jersey. “This is what we were put in business to do and now we are doing it.”