

Pursuing passion

Local institute provides students with new CTE opportunities

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Classes through The Pursuit Institute—Hamilton County’s premier high school career and technical education (CTE) provider—have begun for the 2023-2024 school year.

Founded in 2021 at the behest of Hamilton County leadership, The Pursuit Institute seeks to prepare Hamilton County’s students for a future in the workforce by providing them with practical, on-site education in any one of 15 programs.

The Institute offers a wide variety of course options, including programs in agriculture, horticulture, dentistry, nursing, cosmetology, education, cybersecurity and automotive services. The full list of programs can be found on The Pursuit Institute’s website.

Many of these programs take the place of courses previously offered through Jay Everett Light (JEL), a CTE provider that serves schools in both Marion and Hamilton County. Because JEL courses are primarily located in Marion County, few students from Hamilton County enrolled. The Pursuit Institute seeks to solve this problem by providing students with local, Hamilton County based CTE opportunities.

“The overarching mission of ours is to offer programming that’s equitable and accessible to all students,” Executive Director of The Pursuit Institute Carrie Lively said. “We want to make sure that we can remove as many barriers as possible for students to be able to access high quality programs.”

In the two years since the Institute’s founding, Lively has raised over \$3 million for student programs and opportunities. Through this fundraising, the Institute is able to pay for equipment, tools and certifications that would otherwise limit student participation in CTE programs.

Just one of the programs offered through The Pursuit Institute, Education Professions, aims to provide Hamilton County juniors and seniors the opportunity to get hands-on teaching experience and earn one full year of fully transferable college credit in elementary education through Ball State University.

Lively estimates that successful completion of the two-year program offsets the price of attending a four-year post-secondary institution by roughly \$25,000.

“One of the major [labor]

shortages—not only in Indiana but across the nation—is educator shortages,” Lively said. “Indiana and Hamilton County are not immune to those shortages. So we developed the first registered apprenticeship program in the state of Indiana where we are training future educators through a model of apprenticeship.”

Students enrolled in the Education Professions program—of which there are currently nine—attend a weekly Zoom course currently taught by Dr. Holly Hullinger-Sirken, a Ball State Teachers College adjunct faculty member.

Additionally, enrolled students spend three days a week serving as teachers-in-residency, wherein they assume the role of an educator in a live classroom setting, supervised by a teacher.

“The service hours and coursework that [the students] do with me compliment each other very well,” Dr. Hullinger-Sirken said. “What they are learning, they can apply in practice.”

In addition to providing one full year of college elementary education coursework for free, the students enrolled in the Education Professions program



are paid for their work as teachers-in-residency, further offsetting the price of attending a four-year post-secondary institution.

Lively says that through their teacher-in-residency training, students make roughly \$85,000 over the course of five years.

“Sometimes people perceive that teachers don’t make any money, and if you have to pay college loans it’s a low return on a high investment,” Lively said. “But we’re making this program an opportunity to be able to get a four-year degree in three years, to be paid a wage, not have student debt, and really come out of college with thousands of hours of experience.”

Other courses offered through The Pursuit Institute, including cosmetology and automotive services, serve the more traditional, trade-oriented approach to technical education. From the Institute’s founding, Lively and staff sought to combat the stigma associated with such CTE programs.

“A lot of times we associate career and technical education with someone who wants to go into the trades or wants to have a skill when they leave high school and not look at a post-secondary option,” Lively said. “That’s absolutely what career tech is. But it’s also for students who want to go on to college or do want to have some additional training when they leave high school.”

According to Lively and Dr.

Hullinger-Sirken, students enrolled in the Institute’s programs are often engaged and excited to learn new material.

“The students are really vibrant and they often speak from their hearts and experiences,” Dr. Hullinger-Sirken said. “We’ve had a lot of in-class discussions where we have a lot of laughter and enthusiasm.”

Katie Kizer, a junior currently enrolled in the Educations Professions program, strongly recommends that those interested in pursuing a career in education consider participating in the Education Professions program.

“[Right now], I’ve got two teachers in the classroom with me because it’s a preschool class,” Kizer said. “They’ve been very helpful and understanding. It’s fun. They keep me busy.”

Currently, there are 175 students enrolled in Pursuit Institute programs, but the capacity to enroll hundreds more is already in place.

While only 15 programs may currently exist, Lively and her team continue to develop new experiences and remain open to suggestions for future courses.

“My passion is helping kids find their passion,” Lively said. “That’s really the driving force behind what we do.”

Students interested in participating in Pursuit Institute programs are encouraged to go to The Pursuit Institute’s website and speak with their counselor.

The Pursuit Institute by numbers



175 students enrolled

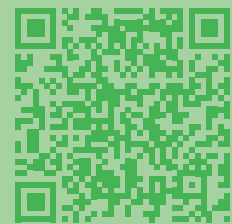


15 programs offered



3 most popular programs

- Automotive Services
- Cybersecurity
- Cosmetology



**QR code to The Pursuit
Institute Course Catalog.**

Graphic by Jakob Polly.