

STEM Scholars Receive Dual-Enrollment Classes at Their Schools Through Distance Learning Partnerships with Regional Colleges

Participating School Districts



Panhandle Area Educational Consortium

Patrick L. McDaniel, Executive Director

Calhoun
Franklin
Gadsden
Gulf
Holmes
Jackson
Jefferson
Liberty
Madison
Taylor
Wakulla
Walton
Washington



Heartland Educational Consortium

Tom Conner, Executive Director

DeSoto
Glades
Hardee
Hendry
Highlands
Okeechobee



North East Florida Educational Consortium

James Surrency, Ph.D., Executive Director

Columbia
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In order to maximize STEM-related experiences for the gifted and talented high school students served through the *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* Project, partnerships have been established with higher education faculty, businesses and industry, government agencies, and workforce development systems. One highly valued outcome of these wonderful partnerships has been the delivery of dual-enrollment classes through two-way interactive distance learning programs by North Florida Community College (NFCC) and Tallahassee Community College (TCC) to rural high schools in their respective districts.

Students at Taylor County High School in Perry, Florida have had access this semester to dual-enrollment classes from North Florida Community College. These are being offered at their high school using distance learning technology provided by the *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* Project's Distance Learning Initiative. Although the classes are available to all students, many of those involved are STEM scholars. Students, teachers, and administrators have all been pleased with this initiative.

Becky Walker, a senior at Taylor County High School, is in her third year as part of the STEM Scholars Project. She shared her appreciation for the dual enrollment classes being offered at her high school by NFCC. She said, "This year I am enrolled in three different schools, so the class was like a godsend for me. I have been taking some business administration courses out at the voc tech school, and I'm taking some high school classes, and I'm trying to take as many college classes as I can. When they started the distance learning classes, it made it a lot easier on me. I was trying to go to three different schools, all in one day, five days a week. It was so much easier for it to be offered at the school, instead of me driving back and forth."

Grant Parker, also a senior at Taylor County High School and a STEM scholar, is particularly grateful for the college credits he is earning through the partnership with NFCC. "I'm taking three dual enrollment classes this year, and two of them are via distance learning with NFCC. These have been really good. I'll get two college courses, but I get to stay at the high school. I don't have to drive there. I'll enter college with 18 college credits."

Caren Prichard, who has led the distance learning portion of the project, states "This is an aspect of the project that helps students make the transition from high school to college and is one that can continue to benefit students in small and rural districts long after the funding period ends."

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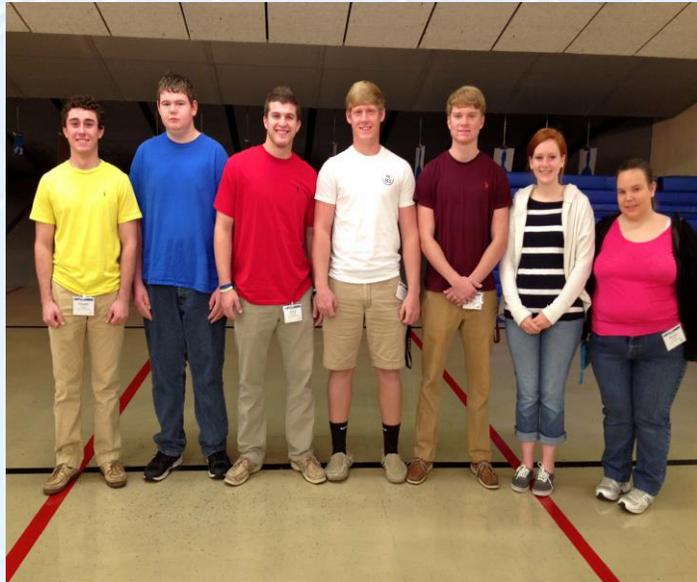
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These STEM scholars from Taylor County High School are enjoying being able to take dual enrollment classes from North Florida Community College without leaving their campus. Pictured (L-R) are Daniel Dudley, Anthony Carter, Evan Grambling, Daniel Wentworth, Grant Parker, Morgan Mixon, Becky Walker.

Taylor County STEM mentor teachers John Carson and P.J. Piland shared their perspective on the benefits of the distance learning classes to their students and their families. John Carson said, “I think having our students involved in the distance learning classes not only exposes them to the college setting and to some of the teachers at NFCC, but it also has a positive economic impact on the families by cutting down on the amount of travel required for the students. For our students to travel to North Florida and back, it’s probably an hour and a half round trip. Just the weekly gas money that cuts down on is significant. With these classes, the kids can still achieve their educational goals, but now they can do that and stay on campus.”

P.J. Piland agreed as to the value of the distance learning classes, and spoke about the importance of being able to keep their school leaders and good role models on campus. In closing, she added the following comment about the STEM Scholars project in general. “At our school, the STEM project has become a very popular program that has allowed “being smart” to become “being cool.”

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Taylor County High School STEM mentor teachers P.J. Piland and John Carson see many advantages of the dual enrollment program with NFCC for their students and their families.

Dr. Sharon Erle, Dean of Academic Affairs at NFCC, is delighted with the distance learning program they have developed with Taylor County. She said at first the offer of “free equipment” through the STEM grant was appealing, but because NFCC serves such a large district and has found it difficult in the past to provide opportunities for dual enrollment without students coming to campus, she quickly saw other advantages. She realized this partnership between PAEC, the school district, and the college could result in their being able to do something they had been trying to do for years...offer the courses remotely for students.

Dr. Sharon Erle, Dean of Academic Affairs, North Florida Community College



She described the program as an “extended classroom” and added, “If you’re on site on our side, you just look at the back wall of the classroom, and it’s like you’re looking into another space, and there are the students sitting in the other classroom. It’s

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like one big class with people in two locations. This program has facilitated Taylor having an opportunity for classes that typically they would not have had. For example, next semester we're doing a college-level trig course. This semester we did college algebra and a beginning English class. The two classes together in both locations added up to about 40 students. It's very popular."

"I'd like to see this program expanded to other counties where it's possible because of the size of our district, and because oftentimes schools don't have many students who need a particular course at that level. With this program it doesn't matter on that side if they have 3 people, 13 people, or 30 people." Dr. Erle concluded by saying, "It's been a great collaboration all the way around...with Taylor County and with PAEC. It's really been great!"

Tallahassee Community College has also been a leader in providing two-way interactive dual enrollment classes through the STEM distance learning initiative. Dr. Calandra Stringer, Dean for Curriculum and Instruction at TCC, is very pleased with the success they have had. She spoke recently about their partnerships with Wakulla and Gadsden school districts. "Currently we have a partnership with Wakulla High School. This fall we offered a course for them that normally would not have been taught at the high school level because usually there are not enough students to make a full class. We plan to continue with Wakulla, and next semester we're adding classes for East and West Gadsden High Schools."

Dr. Stringer sees many benefits of these partnerships. "It's always good to be able to partner with our school districts, and one way we do that is through our dual enrollment classes. This program kind of expands TCC's dual enrollment. For example, in Gadsden County we really have not been able to do a lot at the high school level with dual enrollment because we can't find appropriately certified teachers who would be willing to drive out to Gadsden County and teach the classes, and not have enough students. On the other hand, many of the students can't afford or don't have transportation to drive into Tallahassee."

"Using the equipment provided by the STEM project has allowed students to take these high level courses and have almost the same experience as if they were here at TCC. They're not walking around on the campus physically, but they're in a class with actual college students. It's also a good thing for our traditional college students who are in these classes. It allows them to be able to see what the high school students are doing. Then they can start to mentor them, although it will be more virtually, but at least that opportunity is there."

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Dr. Stringer concluded by saying, “We enjoy any way we can partner with our communities. If there is any way we can help high schools out or help students be successful, we’re on board and ready to go!”

The partnerships that NFCC and TCC have developed with the school districts they serve, along with the technology and support made available through the *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* Distance Learning Initiative, have been highly successful. The number of students enrolled in Level 3 STEM courses has increased significantly. Their overall educational experience has been enhanced, and learning opportunities have been provided for students who might not have had them otherwise.

The *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* Project is funded through the Florida Department of Education’s Race to the Top award and involves a partnership among Florida’s three educational consortia, which provide critical educational support services to Florida’s small and rural school districts. The consortia are Panhandle Area Educational Consortium (PAEC) in northwest Florida, Heartland Educational Consortium (HEC) in south central Florida, and North East Florida Educational Consortium (NEFEC) in the northeast part of the state.

The Project is focused on serving gifted and talented students in grades 9 – 12 who reside in the small and rural school districts served by PAEC, HEC, and NEFEC. It affords rich opportunities for the participants, including collaborative problem-solving experiences, leadership development, and information and experiences which ensure that the students and their families are well informed about STEM higher education and career options in Florida.