

NEWS RELEASE

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Initiative would significantly reduce cost of education

Bladen Community College and the Bladen County School System are working to implement technology that could mean substantial savings for parents of students entering college from local high schools.

The initiative would significantly increase the availability of college level courses for local high school students by allowing them to take distance education venues not now available at their high school campuses. These courses can be accessed from community colleges, the University System, the North Carolina School of Math and Science, and others at no cost to the school system.

BCC and the Bladen County School System have long offered local high school students options to gain college credits while still in high school.

For example, the college has provided a limited number of courses on the high school campuses through the provisions of Huskins Bill legislation. These courses are taught by BCC instructors.

Another Huskins option commonly referred to as “dual enrollment” allows qualified students to attend classes at the college during their senior year in high school. Students who complete this program can enter any four-year college in the North Carolina University System as well as many private colleges as a sophomore.

Yet another option, often referred to as Tech Prep, allows students to take courses at BCC that enable them to complete the first year of a two-year technical or vocational degree while still in high school.

Huskins high school and Tech Prep are offered entirely at no cost to the student. Dual enrollment students pay no tuition but do pay for their books and insurance.

According to BCC Dean of Distance and Evening Programs Ann Russell, the number and type of courses available to local high school students could be significantly expanded if the technology to access distance education venues was available in the high schools.

The needed Interactive-TV (I-TV) equipment could be installed for less than \$40,000 per school.

Russell says the technology to fully implement the programs has been available at BCC and other community colleges for nearly a decade. This has provided access to a broad range of course offerings to local college students.

BCC has long had one of the leading distance education programs in the system and nearly 80 percent of its students take at least one course through a distance format.

Currently five types of distance format courses are offered at BCC including I-TV.

Russell says classrooms are available in the local high schools to house the technology to provide these distance education courses. However, funding constraints have prevented the local school system from installing the computer equipment needed to take advantage of the technology.

Russell and other BCC officials are working with Bladen County Schools in an effort to find funding to help advance technology available to local students.

In addition to cost savings for parents of students entering college, some advantages afforded by the addition of this distance education capability include:

- Many advanced courses could be available at no cost to the school system.
- Students could be better prepared when they enter the University System.
- High school students could take more college level courses than they currently can.
- Lost time and transportation issues would be minimized.
- Student retention and motivation has been shown to improve.
- The number of students needed to offer a course at the local high school could be significantly reduced.

The addition of Interactive TV technology can open an array of options not now available to students in local high schools. Many school systems around the state have the capability and officials in those systems say it is helping open doors for their students. Bladen Community College and local public school officials are working together to make this technology available to local students.