

Aligned Case Study:

Visiting Scholars Teacher Certificate Brings Invaluable Professional Expertise to High School Instruction

In this case study, we showcase the success of the Visiting Scholars Certification Pathway. In 2018, Aligned worked with the Missouri General Assembly to pass legislation establishing and expanding the Visiting Scholar Certificate. This certificate is available to individuals with an academic degree or related occupational experience in a secondary content area. Qualified individuals must be employed by a Missouri public school district as part of a business-education partnership initiative designed to build career pathways systems for students or employed as part of an initiative designed to fill vacant positions in hard-to-staff public schools or hard-to-fill subject areas for students in a grade or grades not lower than the ninth grade.

In Cape Girardeau, high school students can learn basic flight skills from a U.S. Air Force veteran and receive healthcare instruction from a nurse practitioner with a master's degree.

“They are both excellent, excellent teachers who bring ... a wealth of knowledge to the table,” said Libby Guilliams, former director of the Cape Girardeau Career & Technical Center (CGCTC). “But I don’t think we would have gotten them if they had to go through the regular, traditional (teacher certification).”

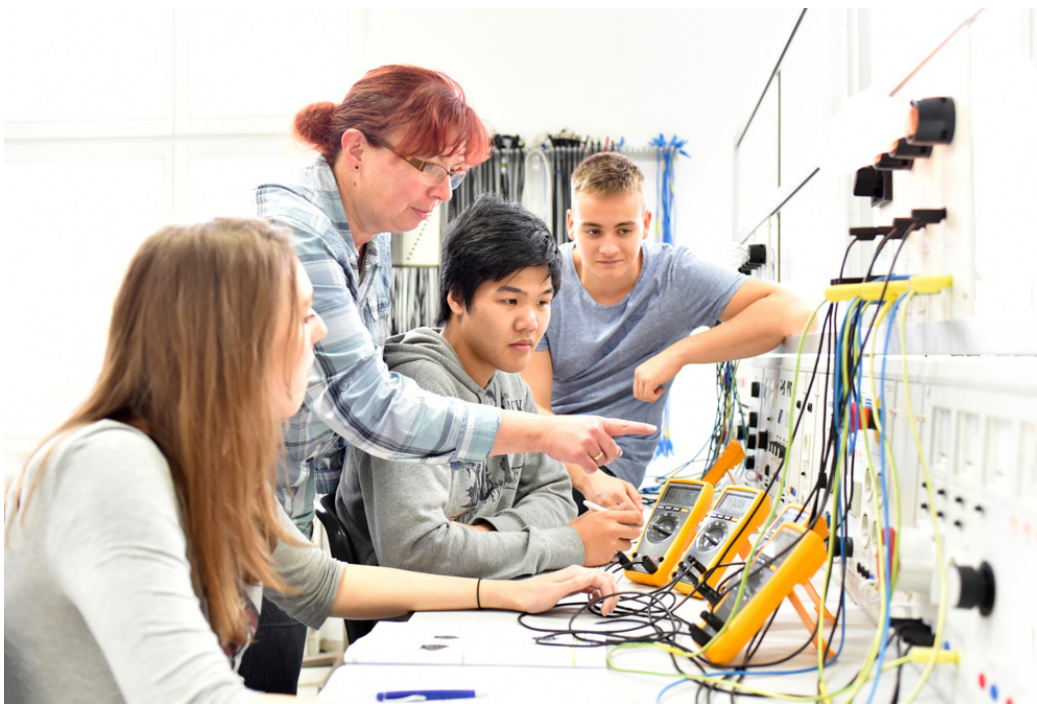
The same goes for the marketing teacher skilled enough to have students take over the center’s social media accounts from an outside paid contractor, said Guilliams, who remains involved with the center as a student advisor for Mineral Area College.

All the instructors came to the center as Visiting Scholars. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) program allows school districts to hire industry experts for up to three years on one-year renewable contracts at the high school level.

The program differs from other teacher-certification routes that require participants to pass assessments after completing college-level education courses.

The CGCTC has been one of the primary users of Visiting Scholars, which former state Rep. Kathy Swan, a Cape Girardeau Republican, championed during her time





in the General Assembly. She served in the Missouri House from 2012 to 2020.

Swan sponsored the 2018 legislation establishing the program and pushed for amended language two years later allowing Visiting Scholars to be used in hard-to-staff schools and for hard-to-staff subjects. The original legislation limited participation to teachers hired through business partnerships geared toward career pathway programs.

Swan recalled the idea for the program came from a visit

to the Northland Center for Advanced Professional Studies (Northland CAPS) in the Kansas City area. Through Northland CAPS, high school juniors and seniors attend classes housed in businesses in Clay and Platte counties.

She said Northland CAPS was a “little pocket of excellence” that she wanted to replicate throughout the state by having “people who are actively involved in those careers, in those fields, to come in and share their knowledge and information with students.”

Mike Stradinger shared Swan’s passion for career education as CEO of Holland 1916, a manufacturing company based in North Kansas City, Missouri. Holland 1916 is a business partner with Northland CAPS and Stradinger is a longtime board member of Aligned.

As a business-led organization dedicated to improving K-12 education and post-secondary outcomes in Missouri and Kansas, Aligned joined Swan in her push to establish Visiting Scholars. She credited Aligned for being a “critical resource” in getting Visiting Scholar legislation through the General Assembly.

Like Swan, Aligned considered Visiting Scholars as an innovative approach to career education and a way to address the shortage of qualified teachers that remains an issue today.

“The best part of the Visiting Scholar Program is that, should I have not enjoyed teaching, there was no harm no foul at the end of it, and I could have just walked away into another career. But instead, I fell in love with it.”

A commission established by the Missouri Board of Education reported last year that about 8% of its full-time teaching positions in the state were either vacant or filled by teachers not fully qualified.

There are about three dozen Visiting Scholars around the state, according to DESE, and the number of classes they teach has steadily increased to about 200 this year.

Guilliams said one of the biggest benefits of Visiting Scholars is that it allows business professionals to see if they like teaching before spending the time and money on the college courses required to get

certified through DESE. That was the case with the Air Force veteran and nurse.

“We have been able to bring in some people who were later on in their career and with even more experience, where if we hadn’t had the Visiting Scholars, I’m not sure we would have gotten those people in,” Guilliams said.

Visiting Scholars has also provided an avenue into teaching for people at other stages of their careers.

Examples include a 23-year-old with an undergraduate degree in business administration and a 43-year-old with experience in healthcare and banking. The former served as a Visiting Scholar in Booneville while the latter did so in the Fox school district in Arnold.

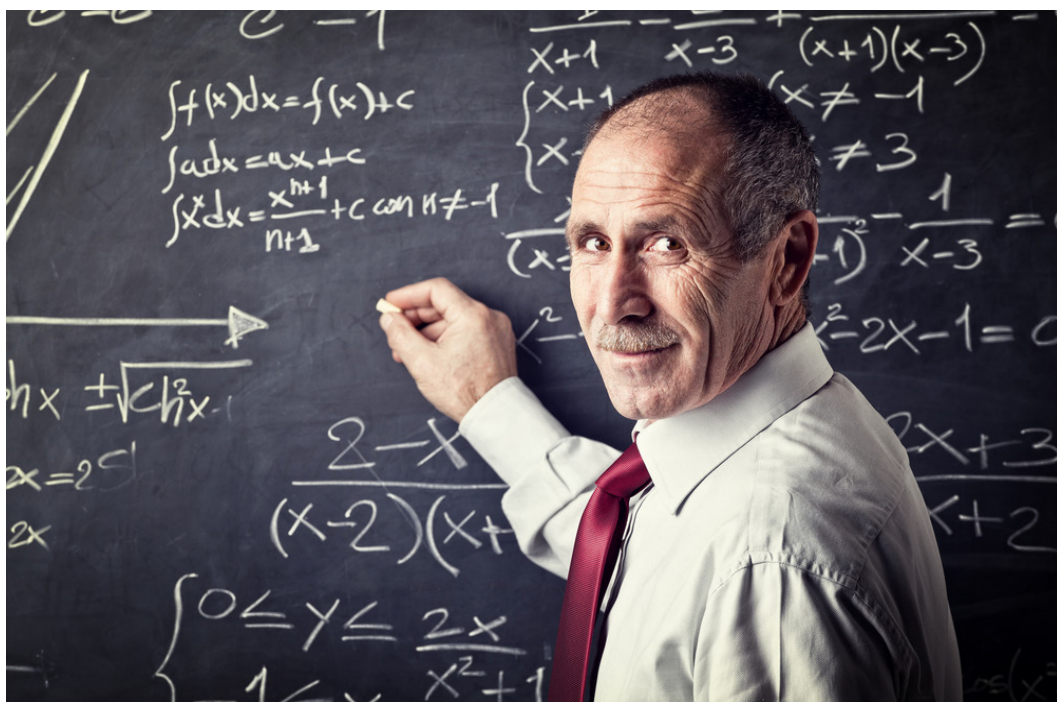
Both men shared their experiences in conversations with Aligned.

The younger Visiting Scholar decided to try teaching when he found marketing positions available during the pandemic undesirable. He loved his high school marketing teacher and was involved with DECA, and after spending time in Visiting Scholars, he has moved to the Blue Springs school district in suburban Kansas City and is pursuing a master’s in education.

“I think the best part of the Visiting Scholar Program is that, should I have not enjoyed teaching, there was no harm no foul at the end of it, and I could have just walked away into another career,” he said. “But instead, I fell in love with it.”

The older Visiting Scholar pursued the certification to pursue a passion for teaching that was rekindled when he was coaching his kids in youth sports. He received his Visiting Scholars certification in marketing on his way toward earning a master’s in special education.

The ultimate success of the program depends upon how it works in the classroom, and Guilliams summed up the impact on students in Cape Girardeau: “It’s been huge.”



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