

HEALTH

New Alabama School of Healthcare Sciences to be established in Demopolis by 2026

Ivey's proposal includes \$62 million to construct the campus, which would be located adjacent to Whitfield Regional Hospital.

By

JACOB HOLMES

Published on March 17, 2023



STOCK

Gov. Kay Ivey announced in her State of the State address last week that the state would be establishing a the Alabama School of Healthcare Sciences to create boost the state's healthcare workforce.

Ivey's proposal outlines the details of the new school, including a \$62 million proposed budget for capital construction. The campus will be strategically located adjacent to Whitfield Regional Hospital in Demopolis.

"This is something that we've been working on for about a year now," said Senate Minority Leader Bobby Singleton, D-Greensboro, who represents the area. "Having this school located in the Black Belt will be a game-changer that will allow us to train and graduate medical support workers who can work in our area and throughout the state."

The residential high school will welcome students from across the state during their 9th or 10th grade year, allowing them to receive three-or-four years of training, which will prepare them for a broad range of healthcare jobs that they can enter immediately upon graduation, and provide a strong foundation for students who want to continue their education at two-or-four-year colleges.

"This is a visionary endeavor," said Rep. A.J. McCampbell, D-Gallion, who represents Marengo County. "Our healthcare system needs people in all areas, and this is an opportunity for us to help direct and focus young people who may have an interest in the medical field. This high school will give them a little head start on gaining the skills needed to immediately get them into the workforce."

Healthcare is the second biggest state industry by employment, representing 14 percent of Alabama jobs. Health industry jobs make up many of the top 50 highest earning occupations in the state, including 9 of the top 10. According to the Alabama Department of Labor, the state's top 40 fastest growing occupations between 2014-2024 include 17 health-related professions. These include dentists and dental hygienists, physical and occupational therapists, advanced practice providers, registered nurses, social workers, and speech and language pathologists, as well as assistant positions like medical and nursing assistants, physical therapy assistants, and home health and personal care aides.

Shortages are not confined to direct patient care roles, but also impact other critical positions including roles in information management, nutrition services, and healthcare administration. The overall projections for all healthcare occupations show a cumulative need in Alabama for at least 5,815 new positions each year between now and the year 2024.