

TeacherTech was a perfect solution for us.

Just What the Doctor Ordered

Teacher Extern Retools Mini-Medical School Program

Situation

Home to more than 2,500 faculty and staff members, the University of Kansas Medical Center (KUMC) is a nationally recognized leader in medical research, education and patient care. As KUMC continues to grow, so does its commitment to providing learning opportunities that inspire and educate the next generation of health care professionals.

One component of the center's outreach effort is its Mini-Medical School program, a science curriculum for students in four rural Kansas school districts who are interested in pursuing health care careers.

Opportunity

For 10 years, the Mini-Medical School program targeted adult learners and was delivered in a six- to eight-week lecture series format. But in 2007, KUMC decided to significantly expand the program's reach to include high school students—a decision that required a major program overhaul.

"TeacherTech was a perfect solution for us," said Ile Haggins, KUMC's TeacherTech supervisor. "When we decided to redesign the curriculum, we had a concept and a target audience in mind,



TeacherTech Extern Jen Dolson in the lab at University of Kansas Medical Center

but not much more. We wanted to develop a curriculum for high school students but knew very little about how to reach high school

students. So when the opportunity to hire a summer extern presented itself, we jumped on it."

KUMC hired Raytown South High School biology teacher Jen Dolson as its first teacher extern. Dolson spent her summer working closely with doctors, researchers and partnering districts throughout Kansas, developing activities and lesson plans for the new curriculum.

"We wanted input and advice from the teachers involved in the pilot program," Haggins said. "So having someone who already spoke their language and knew the target audience was a huge help."

The benefits were reciprocal. In addition to gaining real-world work experience in a medical setting, Dolson's externship helped her find ways to be a more effective biology teacher.

"It's important to me to always find new methods of teaching and give my students the best science education possible," she said. "After working at the KU School of Medicine, I feel better equipped to answer the 'why do we have to learn this?' questions students often ask."

Dolson also finds great satisfaction in knowing her mentors learned a lot from her. "I think I was a good resource for helping the doctors understand what methods work well with students in the classroom, and what methods are usually unsuccessful," she said.

In addition to being a subject matter expert, Dolson's initiative and project management skills were appreciated as well.

"Hiring someone of Jen's caliber allowed us to literally hand this project over to her," Haggins said. "She took our concepts and turned them into a real program and was comfortable taking the lead, contacting doctors, researchers and fellow teachers alike."