The University of Nevada School of Medicine continues to build its partnerships with three Nevada high schools, each of which is focusing on an educational track leading to a career in the medical profession for their young students.

Students at Reno’s Hug High School and East Career and Technical Academy and Northwest Career and Technical Academy, both in Las Vegas, work with medical students enrolled in the fourth-year elective course, “Clinical Problem Solving for High School Health Professions.”

The course gives medical students the opportunity to help high school students learn to work through a clinical case, come up with differential diagnoses, interpret and understand lab work and take part in interactive physical exams facilitated by medical students. High school students also participate in standardized patient sessions, learn to speak effectively with patients while taking a brief medical history, all while working toward a medical career in high school.

Kristen McKinnon, a fourth-year medical student, is one of six working with both high schools in Las Vegas. She said the partnership benefits medical and high school students alike.

“It includes the opportunity to give back to the community,” McKinnon says. “It allows me to work on teaching and hopefully inspires some students to continue their education, possibly in the medical field.”

Ann Diggins ’86 (journalism), ’01M.A. (counseling and educational psychology), the School of Medicine’s director of recruitment, says medical students in the high school classroom provide powerful experiences for students at both levels.

“Medical students learn how to teach effectively and communicate complex scientific...
and clinical ideas to high school students,” Diggins says. “The time the medical students give to be in the high school classrooms lets the kids know they are important and can aspire to become like our medical students.”

Dennis Ryan, teacher at East Career and Technical Academy High, a school with a population of 1,772, said it is a pleasure for him to have medical students in his classroom.

“We have 412 high school students in the medical program here who are learning about the field of medicine before making college career choices,” Ryan says. “Before teaching, I was employed as an orthopaedic assistant, which allows me to bring the practical application of medicine to my honors anatomy and physiology class.”

Ryan adds that the medical students describe their personal pathways from high school through medical school, which allows high school students to see what is necessary to become a physician.

“The medical students use case studies in presentations,” Ryan says. “High school students are able to assume the role of physicians and with the help of the medical students, develop diagnoses and treatments for individuals portrayed in case studies. The medical students engage the high school students in relevant problem solving and the application of anatomy to these medical cases.”

Ryan says the relationships developed between medical and high school students are meaningful in that high school students recognize they can apply academic principles of anatomy and physiology to medicine.

“The medical students provide much-needed information and viewpoints about medicine and medical careers,” Ryan says. “Our program would not be the same without them.”

Dr. Richard Green is a physician who teaches at Northwest Career and Technical Academy, a school with a student population of 1,900 students, of which 500 are enrolled in the medical program. Green says that the partnership is “incredible.”

“The medical profession can be difficult to understand, and I enjoy helping them learn as much as possible about it with the help of the medical students,” Green says. “We teach them how to do EKGs, casting, professional portfolios and much more.”

“Right now we’re working on a new national program called “Project Lead the Way,” which is at the heart of today’s high-tech global economy,” he adds. “The program offers hands-on biomedical, science, technology and engineering classes for middle and high school students to prepare them for college and career success.”

As for Reno’s Hug High School, which has a student population of 1,300, Principal Lauren Ford-Baxter says the newly created student Health Science Academy “fosters a challenging learning environment allowing our students to explore health careers. The partnership with the School of Medicine is dedicated to the diverse needs of both students and the communities of Nevada and offers a more personalized approach to assist students’ exploration of health occupations.”

Gina K. Sella ’97 (psychology), ’07M.A. (counseling and educational psychology), the School of Medicine’s education outreach coordinator in Reno, adds: “I really am excited that we are renewing our long-standing partnership with Hug High School through the new Health Science Academy for the high school students. This gives us an opportunity to work with the students from the time they are freshmen in high school.”

Isabella Michel, ’93 (biological sciences), ’97M.S. (secondary education), ’03Ph.D. (curriculum and instruction), director of Hug High’s new Health Science Academy, agrees.

“We have been fortunate to have had a partnership with the medical school since the mid-1990s,” she says. “The School of Medicine agreed to expand our existing partnership to include the Health Science Academy this past year, which has given 23 freshmen opportunities for experiences that are unique to our high school. We are looking forward to more students participating in the upcoming year.”

Michel, who also teaches biology and has been at Hug High for 19 years, adds that building students’ foundational knowledge, exposing them to different careers and opportunities in health science, building academic skills, giving them the opportunity to work with medical students and nurturing future health care professionals dedicated to the delivery of quality care for all are just a few of the goals of the academy.

Maria Cox, a freshman enrolled in the Health Science Academy, is looking to a career as an anesthesiologist, pediatrician or sports doctor.

“I like the academy because it opens many doors to the health world,” Cox says. “The program is helpful to me because it takes it step-by-step. I feel truly blessed to be a part of this experience.”

Her classmate Daisy Ruiz says her goal is to become a veterinarian.

“This program is very helpful because it keeps me focused,” Ruiz says. “The academy is fun and you can be yourself and everyone accepts you for just being you. Being around the academy members all the time makes you feel like it’s your family, and I know the others feel that way, too.”

LEFT: After sharing insights on training to be a doctor, medical student Jeffrey Dorrity works with high school students in an interactive, team-building activity. Students assume roles on a team and collaborate on reassembling a toy family quickly and efficiently within a certain timeframe. East Career Technical Academy in Las Vegas is a partner high school of the University of Nevada School of Medicine. RIGHT: Medical student Norlan Maltez, left, demonstrates the life-like chest sounds of “Sim Man” to Hug High School students Kevin Martinez and Karina Salgado, who are enrolled in Hug High’s Health Science Academy.