



Media Contacts:

Leslee Wright  
Director of Communications  
Bentonville Schools  
[lwright@bentonvillek12.org](mailto:lwright@bentonvillek12.org)

Diane Carroll  
Chief Communications Officer  
Alice L Walton Foundation  
[Diane.Carroll@aweoffice.org](mailto:Diane.Carroll@aweoffice.org)

## **Alice L. Walton Foundation, Heartland Whole Health Institute, and Bentonville Schools Collaborate to Expand Ignite Professional Studies Program on Future Bentonville Health Care Campus**

***Additional Northwest Arkansas School Districts Plan to Participate in Future Ignite Program Expansion***

***Images available for download (link to come)***

**BENTONVILLE, ARKANSAS** (December 9, 2025) – Today, [Alice L. Walton Foundation](#), [Heartland Whole Health Institute](#), and [Bentonville Schools](#) announced plans to partner on an expansion of Ignite Professional Studies on the future [Bentonville Health Care Campus](#). Discussions are underway for the Foundation to provide a new building that could house a possible expansion.

Additionally, eight regional school districts plan to participate in future studies at the new campus. Programs will include Health Sciences, Technology, Global Business, and Engineering.

Planning for the future partnership has recently commenced in order to address the increasing regional need for health care professionals. A 2024 report, [“Northwest Arkansas Health Care Vision 2030: Continuing the Transformation,”](#) identified a growing need to support existing workforce development efforts and create a robust



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pipeline for future health care professionals. The report, conducted by [Tripp Umbach](#) and released through the [Northwest Arkansas Council](#) and Heartland Whole Health Institute, concluded that strategic partnerships with school districts, higher education institutions, health care systems, and public agencies will be crucial in sustaining these efforts, enabling Northwest Arkansas to cultivate a health care workforce that is highly skilled and deeply embedded in the community.

Through the Ignite program, students in grades 11-12 gain valuable work-based learning experience, industry-valued credentials, and high-quality classroom instruction across a variety of career areas. In the health sciences strand, students engage in hands-on learning labs, mentorships with clinicians and wellness leaders, and connect classroom learning to community health.

Alice L. Walton Foundation has previously [announced](#) plans for its future Bentonville Health Care Campus as a site for specialty care and other services focused on whole health. This year, it announced the [campus location](#) on a 100-acre site approximately two miles east of downtown Bentonville, and adjacent to Interstate 49. Recently, the Foundation announced the design for its [initial phase of construction](#), focused on a Center for Advanced Specialty Care, planned to open in December, 2028. The future expansion of the Ignite program is intended for phase two.

“The innovative Ignite program puts students in real workplaces with mentors, where they earn industry credentials, build confidence, and learn how to care for people,” said Alice Walton, Founder of Alice L. Walton Foundation and Heartland Whole Health Institute. “Through planning to expand the program to the Bentonville Health Care Campus, we can offer a unique opportunity for Ignite students to learn on a world-class health care campus. Ultimately, the program expansion could help strengthen the health and well-being of our region and serve as a model for how communities can increase access to health care education.”

Eight school districts have committed to participation in the possible expansion of Ignite Professional Studies on the future Bentonville Community Health Care Campus: Decatur Public Schools, Fayetteville Public Schools, Gentry Public Schools, Gravette Public Schools, Pea Ridge Public Schools, Rogers Public Schools, Siloam Springs Public Schools, and Springdale Public Schools.

“This first-of-its-kind collaboration would be a tremendous opportunity for our students and Northwest Arkansas,” said Dr. Debbie Jones, Superintendent of Bentonville Schools. “Through planning with the Foundation and Institute, as well as working with



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neighboring districts, we're reinforcing our shared commitment to providing exceptional educational opportunities for every student.”

Heartland Whole Health Institute collaborated with the school districts to identify this expansion opportunity and will help develop partnership plans. Dr. Sarah Bemis, Associate Vice President of Workforce and Policy at the Institute, said an expansion will expose more students to health care career opportunities and help fill the crucial health care workforce gaps in our region. Enrollment capacity could potentially double.

“Launching this initiative shows what’s possible when school districts come together with a shared vision,” said Dr. Bemis. “By collaborating across our region, we will not only expand opportunities for students but also strengthen the health care workforce pipeline that our communities depend on.”

### **Ignite’s Career Pathways and Program Experience**

The Ignite Professional Studies program is strategically hosted across five dedicated locations throughout the Bentonville area. These unique sites—ranging from high-tech labs to business incubation spaces—provide specialized environments designed to immerse students directly into their chosen industries, maximizing hands-on learning and professional networking opportunities across 10 career strands.

Students earn both high school and college credit as well as industry credentials. Classroom expansion is necessary to provide additional Bentonville and regional students with the opportunity to participate. Currently, approximately 60% of student applicants are accepted due to limited capacity.

The most requested program, Ignite Health Sciences, provides students the opportunity to engage in learning experiences that help them earn credentials for medical and medical-adjacent occupations such as emergency medical tech, certified nursing assistant, phlebotomy tech, pharmacy tech, electrocardiogram, registered medical assistant, physical therapy tech, mental health first aid, human nutrition, data science certificate, biomanufacturing, and registered behavior technician. Career pathways include pre-nursing, emergency medicine, integrative and public health, medical assisting, maternal health, biotech, and behavioral health.

“Expanding the Ignite Health Sciences strand means much more than just classroom instruction—it’s about giving students real-world experience and advanced training through strategic and thoughtful partnerships,” said Jessica Imel, Director of Ignite.



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“These programs ensure graduates enter the field with the skills and confidence to make an immediate impact.”

More information on this program will be shared as it becomes available.

### **About the Alice L. Walton Foundation**

Founded in 2017, the [Alice L. Walton Foundation](#) works to enhance the quality of life for individuals through providing access to offerings that improve well-being and create inclusive communities. The foundation focuses on philanthropist Alice Walton’s commitment to increasing access to the arts, improving education outcomes, enhancing health, and advancing economic opportunity for all. Through this work, the foundation strives to deliver meaningful and lasting change to individuals and communities most in need.

### **About Bentonville Schools**

Established in 1841, [Bentonville Schools](#) is the premier public school system in Arkansas, serving more than 19,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Twenty-four schools, spanning more than 143 miles across Northwest Arkansas, call the district home. Bentonville Schools is critically acclaimed for its academics, arts and athletics and is committed to excellence through innovative, inspiring learning experiences. For more information, visit [bentonvillek12.org](http://bentonvillek12.org)

### **About Heartland Whole Health Institute**

Founded in 2019 by philanthropist Alice Walton, [Heartland Whole Health Institute](#) puts a whole health approach at the center of the broader health care system to address the current health care crisis. The vision is to advocate, educate, and guide the implementation of an innovative system, rooted in whole health and the realignment of financial incentives. The Institute was driven by its founder’s health care experience and furthered by research revealing that the United States has one of the highest levels of health care spending worldwide yet relatively low rankings in overall health. In conjunction with Alice L. Walton School of Medicine, the Institute will transform health care by improving outcomes, reducing costs, and expanding access, beginning in the Heartland and scaling nationally.

### **About Ignite Professional Studies**

[Ignite Professional Studies](#) is a program within Bentonville Schools for juniors and seniors to gain valuable work-based learning experience, industry-valued credentials and high-quality classroom instruction across 10 career areas: Aviation- Air Mobility, Construction Management, Culinary Arts, Digital Media, Education Innovation, Engineering-Industrial Design, Global Business, Health Sciences, Law- Public Policy and Technology.