

It's all in the timing for Jessica Allen, Susan McClelland and the Lowndes County School District's Career Technology Center (CTC).

Five years ago, Allen considered getting her Cosmetology instructor's license but decided against it. At the time, she remembers thinking the CTC, which opened in August 2018, needed a Cosmetology program.

"I didn't have the data to present that it would be an effective program," Allen said.

Today, armed with her Cosmetology instructor's license and her five-year teaching license, Allen is the face of the CTC's new Cosmetology program, which was introduced at the start of the 2023-24 school year.

"I have had my Cosmetology license for almost 18 years," Allen said. "This is what I know. This has been my life for a long time."

In the Cosmetology program, students explore safety, infection control and decontamination issues associated with the field. The course provides a detailed look at the histology of the skin and allows students to study aspects of the human anatomy and physiology to understand their importance to Cosmetology.

Students also are introduced to the properties of the hair and scalp, learn about the principles of hair design to understand basic techniques for styling and are introduced to scalp cleansing to understand the importance of techniques such as shampooing and conditioning. Additional science-related content includes the study of basic chemistry and electricity as it relates to Cosmetology.

"The Lowndes County School District is thrilled to introduce Cosmetology as part of our curriculum at the Career Technical Center," LCSD Superintendent Sam Allison said. "After conducting a survey of our students, it became evident there is a significant and passionate

interest in the field of Cosmetology. We recognize providing this course holds the promise of profoundly impacting students' lives and shaping their futures. Our commitment is to equip our students with the skills and knowledge they need to confidently embrace their next life chapters.”

McClelland, the director of the CTC, said there are 39 students in the program this year. Next year, she said there will be 15 year-two students and 30 spots for first-year students. McClelland said discussions haven't started about plans for year-three students, but she is confident the program will be a success. The LCSD joins the Jackson Public School District and the West Bolivar Consolidated School District as the only ones in the state of Mississippi with a Cosmetology program.

“I hope the students are as excited about the program as we are to offer it to them,” McClelland said. “We hope this ignites a fire of a lifelong passion for our students. There are so many students who are interested in this, and we are thrilled to offer it to them.”

McClelland said the LCSD is working on articulation agreements with East Mississippi Community College and Vaughn Beauty College in Aberdeen. She said EMCC and Vaughn's have assured her that the hours students earn in the Cosmetology program at the CTC will be accepted for students who want to transfer. That fits perfectly with the CTC's mission to best prepare students so they have the option of going to work or furthering their education.

“We want to offer what our community needs and our students are interested in,” McClelland said. “This center was built six years ago, and from the time it opened to this year, our enrollment has increased 50%. I think our greatest way to get information out is word of mouth. We have tours every year with eighth- and ninth-graders, but I think there is nothing like the students going back and saying, ‘Man, I love

automotive class, or I love health science. You have got to get to the CTC'. That just peaks more and more interest with students."

Allen taught math last year at the Lowndes County Alternative School. Before that, she worked at New Hope Elementary School. Prior to getting into teaching, Allen taught Cosmetology at Vaughn Beauty College, which is fully licensed through the Mississippi State Board of Cosmetology. She worked there for a year and a half while she worked on her instructor's license.

Allen admits there has been a lot of anticipation about the Cosmetology program at the CTC. She said each piece of equipment that has been added to the room has increased the excitement leading up to the grand opening Friday.

"Just being in here and sitting at this table was exciting for all three blocks," Allen said. "They're ready. They seem motivated to get on the floor and get their hands on a mannequin."

Allen and McClelland agree the Cosmetology program will be a great way for students to get hands-on experience and see if the field is truly for them. If it isn't, McClelland said the students will be able to save their families money they would have committed to a college. If it is, Allen said she will do her best to show the myriad ways students can build a future in Cosmetology.

"I am going to make sure they know my past and path and how it has led me here, and the importance of continuing education because you never know where you want to be in the future," Allen said. "I went back to Cosmetology school to get my instructor's license not knowing this was going to be where I would end up in a few years, but this is where I wanted to end up, and it all kind of played out."

The 55,000-square foot, \$11 million CTC offers students in the LCSD an opportunity to earn valuable hands-on experience in Educator Prep II, Culinary Arts, Health Science, Engineering & Robotics, Automotive Maintenance, Construction/Carpentry, Cosmetology and Welding and Industrial Maintenance.

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