The project objective is to design innovative approaches to nursing education that offers high school students the opportunity to obtain an Associate Degree in Nursing upon graduation. Such a program can help to address the current workforce shortage, recruitment, and retention. By combining an entry to practice solution with professional development support, the local community is able to realize the benefit of an adequate supply of nurses while addressing the recommendation of increasing the proportion of registered nurses with a BSN degree. It will help ensure the nursing workforce is not only adequate in terms of quantity, but also in quality.

High school dual enrollment programs have proven successful in South Texas where over 12,500 students are currently enrolled (South Texas College, 2014) and dual enrollment student success rates are higher than traditional community college students (PSJA ISD, 2013). In an effort to engage these motivated students and help meet the demand for qualified nurses, a proposal has been made to local community partners to develop a high school dual enrollment nursing program. This program is unique in that upon high school graduation the dual enrollment students are concurrently awarded an Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN). The creation of public and private community partnerships connect a nursing college, local school districts, a regional education service center and a health system with the goal of cultivating a continuous pipeline of professional nurses to fill nursing vacancies. Moreover, much like an apprenticeship, this program allows students to have practice experiences thus building a relationship with their future employer. Interactive and evidence-based teaching strategies enhance both clinical and simulation experiences (Richardson, Gilmartin & Fulmer, 2012), structured and self-directed integrative clinical experiences (Brown, Nurse, & Matheres, 2013), and dedicated education units (Muñoz-Strick et al., 2013) are incorporated. All partners and the community at large benefit from such a program as it positively impacts this underserved region by providing health, economic, and financial benefits.

The nursing shortage has been well documented in both the United States and globally (AANCC, 2014; Burton, O’M & Daviss, 2013; World Health Organization, 2010). It is estimated that by 2030 the nursing shortage in the United States will grow to almost one million registered nurses (Jurascheck, Zhang, Ranganathan, & Vernon, 2012). While it is difficult to compare the nursing workforce worldwide, there are indications that a global problem exists. According to the World Health Organization (2010), over 70% of the 77 member states indicate a shortage of nurses. The nursing shortage is a multi-faceted issue and will require solutions in multiple forms.