

GO CAPS Monett

Where Rural Students Become Professionals Through Immersion

Monett, Missouri · Profession-Based Program · ~60-70 Students Annually



"I've noticed that I've been better at talking and communicating. I can talk to people in a group better or I can have conversations better."

— Grace, Teacher Education Strand

School Snapshot

Location	Greater Ozarks region, rural southwestern Missouri
Type	Year-long profession-based program; seven-district consortium (Aurora, Hurley, Marionville, Mt. Vernon, Monett, Pierce City, Purdy, Wheaton, Verona)
Enrollment	~60-70 juniors and seniors annually across four strands
Daily Commitment	2.5 hours, totaling 400+ annual hours
Strands	Agri-Business & Food Systems, Global Business & Entrepreneurism, Medicine & Healthcare, Teacher Education
Philosophy	Students develop durable skills through daily immersion in authentic professional settings, not classrooms simulating professional work

Who They Serve

GO CAPS Monett serves students from seven rural school districts across the Greater Ozarks region. Students apply based on career interest and commit to half-day immersion in professional environments alongside their home school schedules. Thirteen total districts have participated over the program's ten-year history. Student-instructor ratio is 12-20:1 per strand.

Embedded Classrooms	Medicine students at Cox Monett Hospital, Mercy Aurora, and Barry-Lawrence County Ambulance District; Teacher Education in elementary classrooms across seven districts; Global Business at Jack Henry corporate campus; Agri-Business at MU Southwest Research, Extension and Education Center
15+	sustained business partnerships
150_	community members attend Mission Innovation capstone showcase
Professional Certifications	EMT, agricultural credentials available

What Makes It Distinctive

- **Embedded classroom model:** students attend school inside actual professional settings, not school buildings
- **Seven-district rural consortium** pooling students, instructors, funding, and partnerships to create critical mass impossible for any single district
- **Seven explicitly named durable skills** (Communication, Teamwork, Perseverance, Organization, Leadership, Creativity, Critical Thinking) organizing all learning
- **Intensive two-week Leadership Summit** with real client projects launching every year
- **Growth-focused assessment** measuring transformation rather than absolute performance

Opening: From Weekend Fear to Professional Confidence

Grace from Monett arrived at the GO CAPS Leadership Summit carrying social anxiety so severe that meeting strangers triggered genuine fear. “I was very nervous. I don’t like talking to people that I’m uncomfortable with. And so it was very nerve wracking coming into it and having to talk to all these new people.” The first weekend, creating professional presentations for actual business clients alongside 100+ students from seven different school districts, seemed impossible.

Yet by semester’s end, Grace confidently presented her innovative kindergarten math materials to rooms full of educators, parents, and community members at Mission Innovation. She taught real children multiple times weekly, managed classroom challenges independently, and built professional relationships with mentor teachers who requested to keep using her materials after her placement ended.

Her transformation wasn’t unique. Across the program, students who entered rating themselves dramatically lower than peers in other CAPS programs showed the highest growth of any program studied. This pattern, from lowest self-assessment to greatest gains, reveals something profound about unlocking potential in students who haven’t previously seen themselves as capable or professional.

The Model: Profession-Based Learning in the Places Where Professionals Work

GO CAPS Monett was established in 2014 when administrators and business leaders recognized that rural students deserved competitive advantages comparable to metropolitan peers. Starting with two strands serving only Monett, it expanded over ten years to four strands serving seven districts. The model’s core conviction: students develop professional capabilities most effectively by working inside professional environments, not by simulating them in classrooms.

Each strand operates from an actual professional setting. Medicine students work at Cox Monett Hospital wearing scrubs, rotating through surgery, emergency, obstetrics, physical therapy, radiology, and laboratory. Teacher Education students teach real children in actual elementary classrooms. Global Business students tackle genuine client projects from Jack Henry’s corporate campus. Agri-Business students conduct research at the MU Southwest Research, Extension and Education Center alongside university scientists.

The program organizes all learning around seven explicitly identified durable skills: Communication, Teamwork, Perseverance, Organization, Leadership, Creativity, and Critical Thinking. These emerged through collaborative instructor deliberation, creating shared ownership across all four strands. Instructor Garrison Earnest explained: “We put together the seven durable skills that we as a GO CAPS team decided to focus on.” The simplicity proves strategic: seven skills students can remember and use, creating common language across strands, districts, and business partnerships.

The Leadership Summit: Immersion From Day One

Every GO CAPS year begins with a two-week intensive Leadership Summit that establishes professional norms, builds cross-district community, and introduces the seven skills through immediate authentic challenge. Students from seven rival school districts must rapidly develop working relationships. The cultural challenge is significant: students from schools that compete athletically must collaborate professionally.

The Summit culminates in a real client project. The Monett Area Chamber of Commerce podcast studio challenge required cross-strand teams to manage budget limitations, space specifications, and client expectations, then present recommendations to stakeholders who would make actual implementation decisions. This authentic accountability, not simulated work, creates genuine professional immersion from the first weeks.

GO CAPS didn't build its framework by consulting durable skills research. They built it by asking what rural students need to succeed professionally. What they constructed aligns remarkably with what researchers identify as most transferable. Communication, Teamwork (Collaboration), Perseverance (Fortitude), Leadership, Creativity, and Critical Thinking map directly. Organization captures elements of Metacognition and self-management. And the embedded classroom model develops Growth Mindset and Character through daily immersion in professional cultures where those qualities are tested constantly. The convergence reflects the same pattern seen across the study: communities that authentically engage with what graduates need arrive at what the research validates.

In Practice: Two Student Journeys

Brooke: From Hands-On Expectations to EMT Certification

Brooke entered Medicine & Healthcare expecting hands-on experiences but unprepared for rigorous professional training. "Coming into the program, I was looking forward to a lot of the hands-on things, and it didn't quite cross my mind that the thick textbook was going to be given to us on the first day." She wasn't much of a studier and never really had been. Yet facing professional certification standards, with no accommodation for high school students, meant developing sophisticated study habits quickly or failing.

Hospital shadowing rotations revealed diverse medical specialties' realities. The emergency room exposed trauma responses requiring rapid assessment. Operating rooms demonstrated surgical team dynamics. Obstetrics revealed maternal-newborn care's emotional and technical dimensions. Through twice-weekly visits across the full year, Brooke built relationships with healthcare professionals who became mentors.

The twelve-hour ambulance ride-alongs with Barry-Lawrence County Ambulance District transformed healthcare from abstraction into visceral reality. Paramedic Shala Bass, with eleven years of experience, became instrumental in Brooke's development. Shala's philosophy about EMS work, being trusted in somebody's home to care for them on potentially the worst day of their life, profoundly shaped how Brooke understood healthcare's emotional weight beyond technical procedures.

A guest speaker discussing flight nursing sparked her career vision: caring for critically ill patients, managing complex situations requiring organization and critical thinking, working quickly under pressure. "Without that mindset, I think I would have been defeated, because it's been hard, it's been really hard." State certification exam success validated genuine competence meeting adult EMT standards.

THROUGH A DURABLE SKILLS LENS: FORTITUDE · CRITICAL THINKING · GROWTH MINDSET · METACOGNITION

Brooke's story is the study's clearest example of Informed Vision enabling persistence. She didn't push through 1,000+ pages of EMT material because a teacher told her to. She persisted because authentic immersion in emergency medicine revealed a career worth the struggle. The study habits she developed, reading carefully, highlighting strategically, watching supplementary videos, became her biggest takeaway: a transferable approach to mastering complex material that will serve her through nursing school and beyond. And the EMT certification itself carries weight no school grade can match. It's the same credential held by working paramedics, earned by meeting the same professional standards.

Chris: From Reluctant Speaker to Confident Business Communicator

Chris entered Global Business rating his communication skills at 3 out of 10 and his leadership at just 1 out of 10. Instructor Bill Whitman remembered bluntly: “You weren’t very good on that first day.” Getting up in front of people triggered genuine discomfort.

The airport brochure project became his breakthrough. Working with teammates to create marketing materials for Monett Regional Airport, he faced moments “when I didn’t know what to do on a project, or where to go to move forward.” The ambiguity forced him to communicate with teammates generating ideas, consult with business partners understanding their preferences, and participate in group decision-making. Navigating uncertainty without predetermined correct answers forced developing confidence in his own thinking. Chris identifies the project as the moment “a little light bulb went off” and he thought “Wow, I get this now.”

By capstone presentation time, something fundamental had shifted. When Bill asked how he felt about presenting, Chris revealed: “I felt confident at the same time. I was almost looking forward to it.” Looking forward to presenting, not just tolerating it. Bill observed the transformation: “You seem much more confident, and you’re able to get up and talk and you’re able to contribute, and that’s a big deal.” Chris now rated his communication at 8 out of 10 and his leadership at 7, dramatic growth from his starting 3 and 1.

THROUGH A DURABLE SKILLS LENS: COMMUNICATION · LEADERSHIP · FORTITUDE · AGENCY

Chris’s numerical growth (communication 3 to 8, leadership 1 to 7) is the kind of data that makes transformation visible and undeniable. But the qualitative shift matters more: from someone who avoided contributing to someone who looked forward to presenting. The authentic business context, where unclear communication meant failing a real client rather than losing points on an assignment, created stakes that accelerated his development. And Bill’s year-long relationship with Chris enabled calibrated challenge at each stage, knowing when to push and when to support.

What Makes It Work: Where GO CAPS Monett Excels

Every school in The Path Forward study embraces the three core principles and draws on the four amplifiers to varying degrees. GO CAPS Monett demonstrates all of them. Three stand out as genuinely distinctive.

Authentic Experiences: The Embedded Classroom Model

GO CAPS’s most distinctive feature is that students don’t learn about professional work in school buildings. They do professional work in professional settings. Medicine students inhabit hospital culture daily, learning unwritten norms, developing professional relationships, and experiencing workplace rhythms that field trips and guest speakers can’t convey. Teacher Education students teach real children whose learning genuinely depends on their effectiveness. Global Business students manage client relationships at Jack Henry’s corporate campus. Agri-Business students contribute to university research where sloppy data collection could invalidate entire studies.

This immersion creates stakes that grades alone cannot generate. When Grace’s kindergarten students didn’t understand math concepts, real learning opportunities were lost. When business students presented recommendations to clients, proposals would be adopted or rejected based on professional merit. When medical students worked with patients during ride-alongs, professional responsibility created focus no classroom assignment could replicate. Students worked weekends

voluntarily on capstone projects, practiced elevator speeches obsessively, and sought additional shadowing hours when discovering unexpected interests. That's intrinsic motivation emerging from authentic work.

Attention to Context: Building on Rural Assets

GO CAPS Monett challenges deficit narratives about rural education by demonstrating that rural contexts provide unique assets when leveraged intentionally. Tight-knit communities enable sustained partnerships where reputation matters and personal connections drive opportunities. Regional business networks create authentic accountability. Agricultural and healthcare sectors vital to local economies provide meaningful professional work.

The seven-district consortium itself is a rural innovation. No single district could justify specialized instructors, diverse business partnerships, and four professional strands independently. By pooling students, funding, and partnerships, the consortium creates critical mass for metropolitan-quality opportunities. The ten-year sustainability validates the model: benefits justify coordination costs when districts genuinely commit to collaboration.

The dual framing proves essential for rural students who may feel torn between hometown loyalty and professional ambition. Brooke's aspiration to become a flight nurse serving rural areas exemplifies integration: sophisticated professional development enabling her to pursue nursing education anywhere while planning to return addressing her community's healthcare challenges. Students aren't learning "rural skills" limiting them to hometown contexts. They're developing professional capabilities enabling success anywhere while simultaneously addressing regional workforce needs.

Director Rebecca Merriman articulated the deeper question the data raised: "Why do our students in this area rate themselves so low before they begin GO CAPS? What is it within a district or within a community, or within a region or within a mindset?" The answer wasn't capability deficit. It was limited exposure. When given authentic professional experiences, sustained mentorship, and explicit recognition of developing capabilities, rural students flourished.

Sustained Relationships: Year-Long Professional Mentorship

Unlike one-time shadowing or brief guest speaker visits, GO CAPS students work with the same mentors throughout the year. The program coordinates 50+ professional mentors across seven districts, and these relationships evolve through predictable stages: early rapport-building and expectation-setting, mid-year calibrated challenge as mentors assess capabilities and adjust responsibilities, and late-year professional delegation where mentors trust students with authentic responsibilities requiring genuine judgment.

Shala Bass's mentorship of Brooke exemplified this progression. With eleven years of EMT experience, Shala modeled continuous professional development while trusting students with genuine patient care responsibility. The year-long contact enabled her to know when Brooke was ready for more complex situations and when she needed support.

Bill Whitman's relationship with Chris enabled witnessing transformation from someone who "wasn't very good on that first day" to someone who felt confident and looked forward to presenting. Bill could calibrate challenges throughout the year because he knew Chris's development trajectory intimately; understanding which challenges would stretch him productively versus overwhelm him, recognizing subtle growth indicators, and providing encouragement grounded in observed progress rather than empty praise.

Grace's sustained relationship with her mentor teacher created conditions where her social anxiety didn't prevent development. The mentor's consistent presence across months provided safety for risk-taking: attempting uncomfortable interactions knowing she had support if things went poorly. In brief encounters, students with Grace's level of anxiety never get past the initial discomfort. In year-long relationships, they develop through it.

Beyond Skills: Agency, Identity, and Possibility

What GO CAPS Monett ultimately produces extends beyond capabilities. It produces agency, professional identity, and informed vision.

Agency develops through the program's increasing expectations of self-direction. Leah exemplified this through her Bundles of Love capstone project supporting foster care families. Not having a voice before GO CAPS, going along with what others said, she developed the ability to cold-call churches securing partnerships, coordinate logistics across organizations, and present her project to community stakeholders. Javier captured the mechanism: he recognized that taking more opportunities for public speaking, putting himself out there, produced his communication improvement from 4-5 to 7-8. The recognition that seeking opportunities rather than waiting for them produces development is agency at its core.

Professional identity formation is perhaps the program's most powerful outcome. Brooke sees herself as a healthcare provider who earned state EMT certification, not a student who completed a program. Grace identifies as a teacher whose innovative materials mentor teachers requested to continue using, not an education student who did required placement hours. Chris recognizes himself as a capable business communicator, not someone who improved presentation skills. These identity shifts prove durable because they emerge from demonstrated competence validated by working professionals who had no incentive to provide false praise.

Informed vision appears in the specificity and groundedness of students' career plans. Brooke's nursing and flight nurse aspirations emerged from 150+ hours of hospital shadowing and ambulance ride-alongs. Grace confirmed teaching as genuine calling through 80+ hours in actual elementary classrooms. Matthew crystallized agronomy interests through sustained research center apprenticeship. Some students discovered their initial interests didn't align with professional realities, saving them from costly educational investments in ill-fitting careers. Teresa Huntress noted that students who entered wanting to become veterinarians sometimes reconsidered after experiencing agricultural research's scientific rigor. This exploratory function proved as valuable as confirmation.

Transferable Insights for School Leaders

Pool resources across districts. Individual rural districts can't justify specialized programming independently. GO CAPS's seven-district consortium created four professional strands with specialized instructors, 50+ business partnerships, and metropolitan-quality opportunities through collaboration. The model requires committed superintendents, formalized governance, and skilled coordination, but the ten-year track record demonstrates viability.

Measure growth, not just performance. GO CAPS's most profound insight came from troubling comparative data: students who entered rating themselves lowest showed the highest growth. Growth-focused assessment validated development traditional metrics missed. When assessment celebrates transformation, students starting at 1 and reaching 7 receive equal or greater recognition than students starting at 6 and reaching 8.

Immerse immediately. Rather than easing students gradually into professional contexts, GO CAPS plunges them into authentic challenges from day one through the Leadership Summit. Embedded classrooms in actual professional settings create daily immersion impossible through field trips or simulations. The immediate immersion establishes expectations before students default to typical student behaviors.

Let rural be an asset, not an apology. The program explicitly connects professional skill development to regional economic vitality. Students understand that capabilities they're developing serve both personal advancement and community workforce needs. The dual framing, professional skills enabling success anywhere while honoring those who choose to stay, proves essential for rural students navigating the tension between hometown loyalty and career ambition.

A Note on the Model's Limits

GO CAPS Monett's results are remarkable. They are also the product of specific conditions: a ten-year investment in multi-district consortium governance, strong relationships with regional employers willing to host students daily, a community culture where personal connections and reputation facilitate partnerships, and the geographic reality that students drive 30-45 minutes each way (creating self-selection for motivated students while potentially excluding those without reliable transportation). Replicating GO CAPS wholesale is not the point. The point is that the underlying commitments, embedding students in actual professional settings, pooling rural resources through regional collaboration, measuring growth rather than just performance, and building from community assets rather than lamenting limitations, can be adapted across very different contexts. GO CAPS Monett proves they work. The work for other school and community leaders is to find their own version of the question: What professional settings already exist in your region where students could do real work, and what would it take to open those doors?

This profile is part of a series documenting schools whose approaches have produced remarkable outcomes for students, and whose work, examined closely, illuminates how the capabilities researchers call durable skills develop in practice. It draws on interviews with GO CAPS Monett students, educators, and leadership conducted during the 2024-25 school year. All student names are pseudonyms.



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