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Governor Ritter signs bill merging PCC's Southwest Campus, SJBTC

DENVER – Governor Bill Ritter has signed into law legislation that merges Pueblo Community College's Southwest Campus and the San Juan Basin Technical College into Southwest Colorado Community College. SCCC will operate as a division of Pueblo Community College.

The new comprehensive two-year community college will have two locations, one in the former SJBTC building located eight miles east of Cortez and the second at The Commons building in downtown Durango. The Durango site has been designated the East Campus while the Cortez/Mancos location at 33057 U.S. Highway 160 is the West Campus.

The SCCC also will offer courses at various high school and community sites throughout Southwest Colorado's Four Corners region that includes Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma and San Juan counties.

In the past, the two colleges have had different educational focuses. PCC has offered programs that lead to associate degrees or transfer to four-year colleges and universities. The technical college has provided professional trade certificates.

"The merger of San Juan Basin Technical College and Pueblo Community College is an exciting opportunity to create a unified, comprehensive community college in Southwest Colorado," said Shannon South, President of the SJBTC. "Between the two colleges, students in Region 9 have benefited from certificates and two-year degree programs for almost 40 years. This merger bridges the gap between the two providers, which is seen as a tremendous benefit to students in the region."

The merger will provide exciting new opportunities in higher education and will greatly impact economic development through enhanced workforce development in the region. Among the benefits:

- Expanded program opportunities available to students;
- Ensured credit transfer and the creation of seamless educational pathways toward employment in the workforce and pursuit of further education;
- Enhanced financial aid opportunities for students;
- A more efficient use of human, financial and physical resources;
- Elimination of student confusion that has existed for many years.

“We are excited to provide a new, robust economic engine to the region and to create comprehensive, lifetime learning pathways in higher education for the community,” said PCC President Dr. J.D. Garvin.

All credits that have been earned at SJBTC will transfer to SCCC, and the technical college’s employee staff will be retained, although some may have somewhat different roles and responsibilities.

Registration is now under way for summer and fall semester classes, and the course schedules are available both on site at the SCCC divisions as well as online at www.enrollSouthwest.org. More information about courses and programs is available by calling the SCCC offices toll free at 1-877-544-0744.

“The merger of these two schools will improve the college experience for most students because everything will be aligned — admissions, registration, transcripts, and more,” said Dr. Lynn Urban, the Southwest Campus director. “We anticipate that this will reduce frustration and increase success in our programs. For the first time in our region, students will see more options available to them by having career, technical, and general education under one institution.”

The merger legislative bill was introduced in the current Colorado Legislature by State Senator James Isgar of Hesperus and State Representative Ellen Roberts of Durango. Both have been strong supporters of the merger since the concept was first proposed in late 2007.

The innovative merger is the result of more than a year of discussions that included a series of community town hall meetings, approved support from regional school boards (Cortez, Dolores and Montezuma), a feasibility study that showed a need for a unified higher education voice in southwest Colorado, and more than six months of tireless work by a merger steering committee comprised of representatives from business, education, and tribal and community sectors within the five-county southwest region.

The merger committee was chaired by Joe Keck, the director of the region’s Small Business Development Center. The committee’s business plan was approved by the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education in September, setting the stage for legislative action.

“When this idea was first proposed to the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education and the Colorado Community College System, we saw the wonderful opportunities for individuals in southwestern Colorado to have a comprehensive community college,” said Dr. Nancy McCallin, president of the Colorado Community College System. “The collaboration between the two institutions and throughout the community was outstanding – and noted by the legislature when the bill was going through the process. When I visited San Juan Basin Technical College last year, I could see the enthusiasm for this new venture. Congratulations to everyone and thank you for your hard work.”

PCC beefed up its financial and personnel commitment at its Southwest Campus after a memorandum of understanding was signed in March for SJBTC and PCC to work together and share resources. Last summer, the Southwest Campus offices and operating staff were moved to the SJBTC site and developed expanded summer and fall scheduling. Dr. Urban took over as its director in July.

The result was a Southwest Campus headcount enrollment jump of 21 percent in the fall semester and another 16 percent this spring. Full-time equivalency (FTE) enrollment leaped 45 percent and 21 percent, respectively, in those same fall and spring semesters.

A press conference will be held following the final merger steering committee meeting at 11 a.m. Friday, June 5, at the West (Mancos) Campus. The new community college’s logo, programs, class schedule and catalog will be debuted as well as the new advisory board structure.

Founded in 1933, Pueblo Community College is a premier teaching institution focused on providing academic and service excellence to help its students acquire the 21st Century skills needed to better their lives. An educational and technological leader, PCC fosters economic development and utilizes strong partnerships in the communities it serves through its Pueblo, Fremont and Southwest campuses.

The Colorado Community College System comprises the state’s largest system of high education serving more than 107,000 students annually. CCCS oversees career and academic programs in the 13 state community colleges and career and technical programs in more than 160 school districts and seven other post-secondary institutions.