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## **PCC awarded federal grant funds to expand diversity in Nursing workforce**

**PUEBLO** – Pueblo Community College is about to become an even stronger workforce development leader in the Pueblo community after landing a grant to help disadvantaged students enter the Nursing profession. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services' Health Resources and Service Administration will award PCC \$791,491 over three years through federal stimulus funding made available through the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act.

The Nursing Workforce Diversity grant will enable PCC to enhance and expand opportunities for diverse and disadvantaged students to enter and succeed in earning an Associate Degree of Nursing and then to pass the National Council Licensing Examination. The ultimate goal is to increase the number of people entering the nursing workforce in Pueblo County from diverse and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

The grant will be used to plan, develop and implement student-related components in four phases:

1. Pre-entry preparation
2. Retention efforts
3. Educational support to help them succeed
4. Scholarships

The grant will enable PCC's Nursing program to fund or expand strategies that it has been adopting over the past few years. Among them is giving entrance exams to students to determine where remediation might be needed. Other strategies include mentoring, tutoring, study programs, teaching assistance and even family support. The mentoring will be provided by Parkview Medical Center staff members, and the goal is to utilize as many as possible from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Because PCC's Nursing program has a qualifying system, particularly important will be the services that will be provided to help students qualify to be admitted to the program.

“Many of our program applicants are first generation college students and require additional academic support,” explained Eva Tapia, who chairs PCC’s Nursing program. “This grant will assist pre-entry students and provide them the assistance necessary to be successful in a rigorous and demanding program.”

PCC admits about 60 new students into its Nursing program each year, and they come from throughout southeast Colorado and even as far away as Denver. Thirty students graduated from the Associate Degree in Nursing program last May, and 93 percent of them passed the National Council Licensing Examination on their first attempt and all 100% of them by the second try.

“Now our goal is to increase the diversity of those graduates,” Tapia added.

The Health Resources and Service Administration has targeted the Nursing profession because a 6% shortage of nurses in 2000 is expected to increase to 29% by the year 2020 according to the U.S. Department of Health Professionals Bureau of Health Professions. The U.S. Department of Labor reports that medical advancements and an aging population that requires more health care is making health professions, including nurses, the country’s fastest-growing occupations.

Because of this universal need for skilled nurses, virtually 100 percent of PCC graduates are hired in hospitals, long-term care facilities, hospices and other facilities. Many elect to return to their home towns to work.

Ultimately, the grant program is another way that PCC is taking a community lead in reducing the local poverty rate and driving the economy by helping a disadvantaged population acquire the skills needed to enter the workforce.

Grant writer Linda Tremblay collaborated with Tapia to write the grant proposal.

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*Founded in 1933, Pueblo Community College is a premier teaching institution focused on providing academic and service excellence to help its students acquire the 21<sup>st</sup> 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.*