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SCCC West Campus to provide diploma option through Gateway to College program

Mancos/Cortez – High school dropouts in southwest Colorado will soon have another option for completing high school. The Montezuma-Cortez High School District will partner with Pueblo Community College’s Southwest Colorado Community College (SCCC) West Campus to begin offering this highly successful program here this fall.

Gateway to College serves at-risk students, 16 to 20 years old, who have dropped out of school. The program gives them the opportunity to earn a high school diploma while achieving success by simultaneously earning college credits toward an associate degree or certificate.

What makes Gateway to College unique is that once students enter the program, they are integrated into the college environment. Students learn in a collaborative environment with experienced staff committed to working with at-risk youth. Alongside the academic curriculum, Gateway to College students learn valuable life success skills for college and beyond.

Both current faculty and some new part-time instructors will be hired to teach Gateway students at the SCCC campus in Mancos. The southwest program will be modeled after the successful Gateway to College program in Pueblo. Pueblo Community College is one of only thirty colleges nationwide that have this life-changing program. With start-up funds from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, PCC established the Gateway to College program in partnership with Pueblo City Schools.

“We’re excited that we will be able to extend to the Southwest region a program that has been very successful on the Pueblo campus for the past two years,” said Monica Moore, Gateway to College Director on the Pueblo campus. Moore will head the start-up and initial phases of the Gateway to College program at SCCC, but someone from the region will eventually be hired to oversee it.

The program was established nationally because of its impact on society. According to Henry Levin, professor of economics and education at Teachers College at Columbia University:

- Adults without a high school diploma are twice as likely to be unemployed.

- Dropouts make up nearly 70 percent of inmates crowding state prisons and at least half those on welfare.
- The average 45-year-old dropout is in worse health than the average 65-year-old high school graduate.

In Colorado, conservative estimates are that high school dropouts cost the state \$3.4 billion annually in lost earning potential. That study was published by the Donnell-Kay Foundation.

Further, Colorado ranks among the bottom 15 states for high school dropout rates. This is according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT data center.

"Expanding Gateway to College to Cortez will provide an option that these students don't really have in the area right now other than some online opportunities," noted Juanita Fuentes, Dean of Community Education & Training and Alternative High School Programs at PCC. Fuentes has overseen Gateway to College since its inception two years ago.

Gateway to College is another new initiative that has been added to southwest Colorado since the 2009 merger between the San Juan Basin Technical College and Pueblo Community College. In 2009, SCCC-West began offering additional academic classes for students to earn an associate of arts degree. In 2010, SCCC unveiled a beautiful new facility for what has proved to be a very popular cosmetology program. In 2011, SCCC expanded its workforce training activities.

Registration for the summer and fall semesters is underway at Southwest Colorado Community College. The summer semester begins May 31 and ends July 25. The fall semester begins August 22 and ends December 10. For more information, call 970.564.6200 or visit: www.enrollsouthwest.org

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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 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 Colorado campuses.