This charter school operator is building a $7M high school in Mesa

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Home of the Day

AAEC Early College High Schools is building a $7 million campus next to Mesa Community College.

The charter school will have about 300 slots for incoming freshmen through seniors. Students will occupy Mesa Community College classrooms while their new high school is built on an adjacent site.

AAEC offers more than just an equine program. Click through to see other programs the… [more](#)

For a look at architectural renderings of the new campus and other campuses click on the photo of the student with the horse.

DLR Group has been selected as the architect to design the new campus, but a general contractor has not yet been selected. This week, the bidding list will be narrowed to three finalists, said [Linda Proctor Downing](#), founder of the AAEC charter school system.

The project will be financed through municipal bonds, she said.

Before starting the charter school program, Downing had been a magnet programs director for Phoenix Union High School District, where she was looking to build a partnership with Arizona State University.

"It became an issue between boards who wanted to be the credit provider," Downing said.

So she left the public high school district to start the Arizona Agribusiness & Equine Center High School in 1997, partnering with South Mountain Community College to offer students the chance to earn concurrent college credits while completing high school requirements.

Usually, students will graduate with their associate's degree before they finish their high school diploma, said [Suzanne Drakes](#), assistant director of AAEC.

Since then, she has opened four other high school campuses throughout the Phoenix area and plans to open the sixth campus in Mesa.

Total enrollment at the AAEC schools is about 1,680 students, with each campus enrolling anywhere between 200 and 480 students and employing no more than 20 at each campus.

Angela Gonzales covers health, biotech and education.