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Graduation program helps make college a realistic goal

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RELATED INFO

GED to MCC Registration and Testing : June 17 or July 30.

Traditional GED Registration and Testing: Aug. 10 or Aug. 17

Appointments: 480-472-7259

Cost: \$20-\$40

A new GED test will begin in January. Anyone who has not completed the current test must start over with the GED 2014.

Visit www.mpsaz.org/gedtomcc

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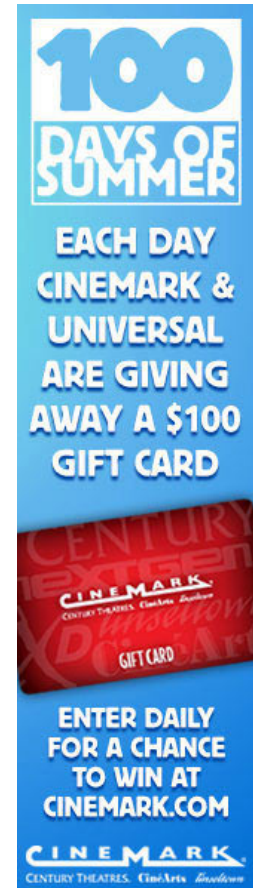
Submitted by Kathy Bareiss. Bareiss is the Mesa Public Schools representative for Mesa Counts on College and part of the GED to MCC planning team.

Preston Smith and Christi Williams walked across the stage to the cheers of family, friends and teachers.

Their graduation from Mesa's first GED-to-MCC group moved them a step closer to successful college completion.

The program, sponsored by Mesa Counts on College with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is among the many strategies under development to boost the number of college graduates in our community from the baseline of 29 percent.

Research paints a picture of the benefits available for college completers:



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A bigger paycheck; higher likelihood of getting and keeping a job; more job satisfaction; and greater probability of being offered employee benefits such as health insurance and retirement.

Not only does increased education offer a higher quality of life for the graduate, but an educated workforce can benefit Mesa's economic development.

While many consider college to be a traditional four-year bachelor's degree, it also applies to a two-year associate's degree or trade certificate.

Mesa Counts on College is a partnership among the city of Mesa, Mesa Community College and Mesa Public Schools. The three partners have created new programs, made systems changes and connected existing Mesa resources. These ideas focus on areas where individuals are at risk of being derailed from education: graduating from high school, enrolling in college and persisting to completion.

Although the \$3 million grant concludes this month, the initiative will continue.

To successfully create a community of college graduates, the concept must be embraced by everyone. Each of us has a role in helping students achieve a college education and take their place in the world of work.

It begins with parents and family who plant the seeds of a college education. The ideas are nurtured and enhanced throughout the K-12 experience. As students transition into higher education, they find a supportive learning environment that cultivates career-ready studies.

Along the way, social-service organizations lend a hand when obstacles arise. Employers provide jobs so students can pay for college and gain work experience.

In GED to MCC, students think about "when" they go to college rather than "if." For Smith, 21, the high-school experience was less than perfect. Now he will pursue his degree in fire science at Mesa Community College and eventually earn his bachelor's. But only a few months ago, his perspective was very different.

"I thought it wasn't for me," he said. "Now, college is doable. I am confident I can do it."

Williams, 19, always knew she would go to college, but there were some obstacles in her way. Now she is college-bound.

"Anyone who has struggled with school in the past should know there are options for you to succeed," Williams said. "There is always an opportunity to reach your dreams. You just need to look for the right path."



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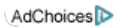
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