

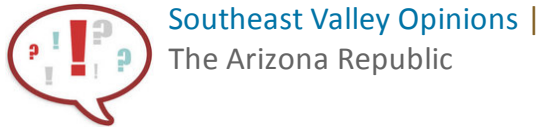


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Editorials, columns and letters about the Southeast Valley, including Chandler, Gilbert, Mesa, Tempe and Ahwatukee.

College pilot program for prep dropouts deserves support

By SOUTHEAST VALLEY OPINIONS

Tue, Oct 09 2012

Our view: By Southeast Valley editorial board

The Southeast Valley is most fortunate to be a beneficiary of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

With the help of the Gates' \$3 million grant, the program known as Mesa Counts on College is trying to persuade young adults who have dropped out of school to go back and complete their education.

Here's hoping that a pilot program gets the community's support. It's well worth it.

The pilot will choose young people, ages 16-26, who have completed, or are working to complete, a GED. The students also need to have the desire to attend Mesa Community College, a partner in the program, and finish an associate's degree.

Another program partner, Mesa Public Schools, will provide applicants from its adult education arm.

But community organizations can refer applicants, too, said Christine Niven, an adult-education specialist for Mesa Public Schools, as long as they are here legally.

Business owners and community leaders also should get involved as mentoring these students, regardless of whether they are picked for the Gates-funded program.

This is important stuff.

In 2008, high-school graduates earned an average of \$8,580 more per year than non-graduates.

Also, research has shown that 20 percent of high-school diplomas issued each year are issued through GEDs, Nevin said. And 43 percent of GED recipients enroll in post-secondary education but only 12 percent actually graduate from post-secondary education.

Adult-education programs in the state have been working toward getting students on the college track and helping them to stay in college.

"Finding these students can be an interesting issue," Niven said. "Often, they have had bad experiences in school and don't want to go back."



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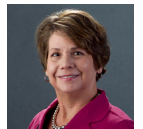
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"It takes time for them to make the decision."

Now is as good a time as any, both for the students and the community.

As Niven said, "This is the beginning. We hope this becomes a model for other programs and other states to follow."

For the program to become a true model, business people, educators and community leaders need to get involved as mentors, employers or by assigning them community-service roles. Everyone will benefit.

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David Lucier · Top Commenter · Works at Arizona Veterans & Military Leadership Alliance

While I commend the project and its objectives, why are we depending on a "high priced bake sale" to reach out to these lost students. Where is the public policy and the public investment? Where is John Huppenthal? and why isn't he doing something like...oh yeah...his job in advocating and managing the state's educational system?

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