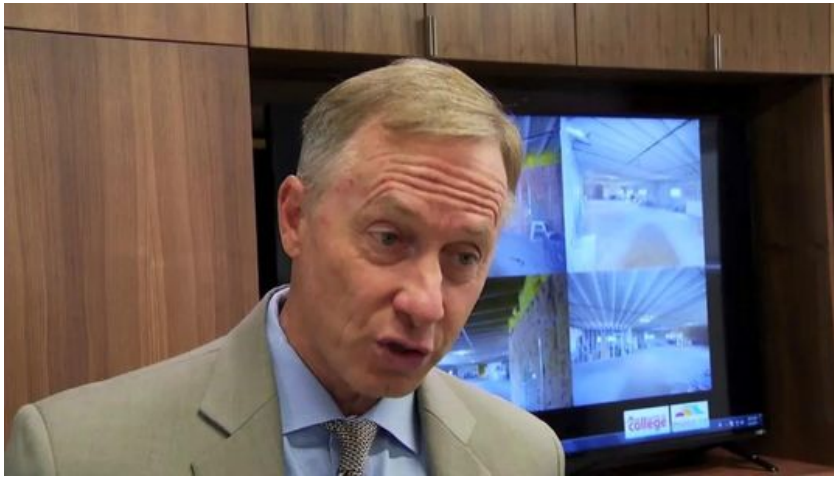


Officials: College should be option for all Mesa students



Maria Polletta, The Republic | azcentral.com 6:02 a.m. MST August 10, 2015



The Mesa Counts on College Access Center opens Aug. 10 at 635 E. Broadway Road.

The Mesa Counts on College Access Center will be a free one-stop shop for all things post-secondary education.



(Photo: Maria Polletta/The Republic)

Mesa is a “tale of two cities” when it comes to higher education, according to Mayor John Giles.

“We’ve got a lot of affluent areas and families that you can pretty much count on the kids going to college, but we also have a huge population where going to college is a big challenge for a family,” Giles said. “They’re immigrant families, or they’re low-income families, or they’re folks that just don’t have a history of how complicated and difficult it is to prepare kids to go to school after high school. So we have these gaps.”

On Monday, the city — in partnership with Mesa Public Schools and Mesa Community College — opened the Mesa Counts on College Access Center to help bridge that chasm. The center at 635 E. Broadway Road will be a free one-stop shop for all things post-secondary education.

Students of any age and their families will be able to visit Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. for assistance with choosing a college and college applications, test preparation and vouchers, one-on-one counseling sessions and financial-aid guidance. The center will also offer services such as GED classes, scholarship and internship help, and direction for students who have an interest in vocational training or another alternative to a four-year college.

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Housed in a building owned by non-profit A New Leaf, the facility has private advising offices, group seating and a computer area that’s more high-tech workspace than school computer lab.

“Our focus really is to take our junior-high and high-school students to the next level,” said Amy Trethaway, Mesa Counts on College executive director. “We really need to support our youth beyond high school and get them interested and accepting the concept that they are college-going material, that they can get into college, they can fund their college education, and we can support them.”

Only about a fourth of Mesa-area students go on to complete college after high school, Trethaway said, and the rate is lower among the city’s poorer, largely Latino populations. The center hopes to double those numbers.

A big part of that goal involves making sure those groups know the center is available to them at no cost. Trethaway said the center’s five-person staff in the coming weeks will work with Mesa Public Schools counselors to connect with students and parents, in addition to advertising in English and Spanish publications and visiting neighborhoods in person.

“So many of us have been afforded opportunities, and ... this access center will open many of those same doors to those who have been traditionally disconnected,” said Mesa Councilman David Luna, who worked as director of educational television at Mesa Public Schools for nearly three decades and has been a longtime advocate for Latino students. “They can come and not be in an intimidating environment.”

Though Mesa Counts on College has been around since 2010, it never had a designated space. The access center took about two years to bring to life.

An approximately \$700,000 Community Development Block Grant covered construction; a \$78,000 Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community grant paid for furnishings and some technology; and Mesa provided the remaining odds and ends, such as brochures and phone lines.

“We’ve had a vision to cultivate the opportunities for Mesa residents ... and have this culture of going on to college and receiving a degree,” City Manager Chris Brady said. “We’re hoping this becomes a great symbol and a great facility to provide that resource.”

Information: www.mesacountsoncollege.org (<http://www.mesacountsoncollege.org/>) or 480-644-3005.

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