



November 2006 Newsletter

## **ACE WINS AWARD, PARTNERS WITH PETSMART**

The Maricopa Community Colleges' ACE (Achieving a College Education) program is setting new standards of excellence as it helps students in danger of dropping out of high school.

The program has been selected as the 2006 associate level winner of the Examples of *Excelencia* award, which honors and promotes the awareness of working models, programs and departments that boost Latino enrollment and graduation in higher education.

The Examples of *Excelencia* award announcement was made by officials from *Excelencia* in Education, the Washington-D.C.-based nonprofit organization that administers the awards program and works to accelerate higher education success for Latino students. Of 42 total associate level nominations for the awards, 15 semifinalists and one winner was chosen.

Supported by Sallie Mae Inc., UNIVISION, and the Lumina Foundation, Examples of *Excelencia* is one of a number of programs offered by *Excelencia* in Education designed to link research, policy and practice to serve Latino students and institutions and programs where they participate. The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) received the baccalaureate level award.

"This award validates that our program helps students who just need a nudge or an open door to higher education," said Stella Torres, Director of Maricopa ACE programs.

"The ACE program is one of our most important endeavors because it has such tangible benefits to the communities we serve," said Dr. Rufus Glasper, Chancellor of the Maricopa Community Colleges. "We're extremely proud of this award from *Excelencia* in Education, but we're even more proud of the thousands of high school students who have participated and succeeded, and of our role in helping our communities battle high school dropout rates."

A partnership between ACE and PetSmart is giving nine high school students the chance to succeed, and ACE students were among those honored at a Maricopa Community Colleges'

Foundation reception held at Molina's Fine Jewelers in Phoenix (see related story in this issue of *District Dialogue*).

A year ago, PetSmart and Maricopa Community Colleges' staff discussed an internship with a scholarship component that could be tied to the ACE program. A year later, the nine high school juniors who started in the special internship are still in the program, and PetSmart recently hosted a dinner where the students, enrolled in ACE programs at Phoenix College and Glendale Community College, were recognized for their achievements. PetSmart CEO Phil Francis and other corporate and store officials, along with Maricopa Community Colleges' Dr. Steve Helfgot, Vice Chancellor for Student and Community Affairs, and other MCCCCD staff, were in attendance, as well as the students' parents.

"This program is a wonderful collaboration between the Maricopa Community Colleges and the private sector," said Helfgot, "and it exemplifies so much of the best that we do to be engaged with our community, meet the needs of local business, and most importantly, provide exceptional opportunities for our students. We are thrilled to be in this great partnership with Phil Francis and PetSmart."

Isabel LeRoy, Director of Outreach and Community Relations for the ACE program, said PetSmart has accommodated the students' academic schedules. "The students are working with a company that is sensitive to them and their needs and the importance of academics," LeRoy said. "Their priority is the academics of these interns rather than their work schedules. Both PetSmart and the Maricopa Community Colleges monitor the students' academic progress, so it's a true partnership."

The Maricopa Community Colleges' ACE program was created in 1987 at South Mountain Community College. In 1988, 113 local high school students who were considered at risk of dropping out of high school entered the program. Two years later, the program was replicated at Glendale Community College.

A federal grant in 2001 from the Office of Housing and Urban Development allowed the program to expand to all 10 Maricopa Community Colleges, including an adult ACE program at Rio Salado College that works as a transition program for students enrolled in Rio's Adult Basic Education (ABE) program. At the other nine Maricopa Community Colleges, ACE now

serves approximately 1,600 high school students at 63 high schools in Maricopa County. Since its inception, ACE has served more than 6,100 high school students.

ACE was designed as a concurrent high school/college enrollment program that relies on the Maricopa Community Colleges' Foundation, Dougherty Foundation and the Maricopa Community Colleges for scholarship support. Students who are considered at risk of dropping out of high school are recruited for ACE during their sophomore year in high school for participation during their junior and senior high school years.

Students at risk of dropping out of high school are defined by ACE primarily as those with little or no family history of high school or college graduation; under-represented groups; those from single parent homes; those with economic hardships that require students to work evenings or weekends to help support the family; and environmental issues such as homelessness and foster care.

Once admitted, ACE students must stay in high school, attend college courses on Saturdays and during summer sessions, and maintain an acceptable grade point average. In return they receive scholarship funding for their college courses and can earn up to 24 college credits by the time they graduate from high school. Parent involvement is also a key component of the program.

The ACE program has grown in part because of the dramatic success of students enrolled in the program: since the program's inception in 1987, ACE students have consistently graduated high school at rates above 80 percent—and sometimes as high as 96 percent. ACE students earn an average GPA of 3.05, and 83 percent of ACE graduates enroll in college. Subsequently, ACE graduates outperform the general Maricopa Community Colleges student population with a 3.1 GPA compared to the general Maricopa student population average of 2.81.