



NEWS

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Brownsville Selected as One of Four Sites for *Partners for Postsecondary Success* Initiative

Brownsville, TX – The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and MDC, a nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding opportunity and reducing poverty, today announced that Brownsville has been selected as one of four cities to participate in the *Partners for Postsecondary Success* initiative as part of a Gates-funded national effort to improve postsecondary completion rates among low-income young adults.

Led by MDC, *Partners for Postsecondary Success* (PPS) is a three-year demonstration project to work with community partnerships focused on increasing the number of low-income young adults who earn a postsecondary certificate or degree and go on to get jobs that pay a living wage. Brownsville is one of four community partnerships in Texas and North Carolina – two in each state – that will receive coaching and funding to examine the current and historic status of low-income young adults in their communities and identify data-driven strategies to advance postsecondary and employment outcomes. PPS is expected to help communities improve the performance of their postsecondary institutions, deepen collaboration between education and industry to forge student pathways to good jobs, and align and leverage resources to sustain the partnership effort beyond the demonstration period.

The four selected sites are receiving Gates Foundation planning grants for seven months to develop a specific plan to improve postsecondary and employment outcomes for low-income young adults. Sites that successfully complete the planning phase and submit an implementation proposal will be considered for up to \$1.5 million in additional Gates Foundation funding over approximately two years to launch their local community initiatives.

By improving educational attainment among low-income young adults and equipping a new generation with the skills necessary to be competitive in an increasingly global market place, communities will improve the lives of their youth and strengthen their local economies.

Recent data from the Census Bureau indicate that one in seven Americans now live in poverty, a stunning figure that also includes more than eight million families. Education is the key to reversing this disturbing trend and helping the nation move successfully into a more stable and productive economic future, particularly for young adults.

“Too often low-income young adults are unable to see a clear path to a meaningful career, in part due to misconceptions about the full range of postsecondary options available to them,” said David Dodson, president of MDC. “It is imperative for disadvantaged communities across the South, and the nation, to create avenues of opportunity for these young adults. The global competitiveness of our nation is dependent upon it.”

A recent report by the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University estimates that 63 percent of all job openings over the next eight years will require postsecondary education or training. However, only 38 percent of Americans between the ages of 25 and 64 hold an Associate Degree or higher and only 27 percent of students who enroll in community colleges actually complete their degrees within three years of enrolling. Locally the University of Texas at Brownsville/Texas Southmost College (UTB/TSC) loses approximately 50 percent of the freshman class each year.

Not only does education strengthen our national workforce, it is also the key to ending intergenerational poverty. Research shows that even one year of college-level study can improve lifetime earning potential, and as the level of educational attainment increases, the difference in earning potential between high school and college graduates becomes even more pronounced. Earning an Associate Degree means a difference of more than \$16,000 in average annual family income compared to families led by high school graduates; a Bachelor’s degree can boost average annual family income by more than \$43,000. However, low-income young adults who can benefit most from educational attainment are also the ones least likely to enroll in and complete a postsecondary program.

United Way of Southern Cameron County received \$99,935 to lead a seven month planning process involving a wide range of community stakeholders, including UTB/TSC, the Brownsville Independent School District, Workforce Solutions Cameron, the Brownsville Economic Development Council, the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce, United Brownsville and other local workforce and education experts. The leadership team will develop a local plan to increase postsecondary success for young adults with coaching and technical assistance from MDC. The local implementation plan will be submitted to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for consideration in spring 2011.

“The Brownsville Chamber of Commerce definitely supports strategies that advance educational attainment in our community,” said Angela R. Burton, President/CEO of the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce. “The board has set this initiative as a chamber priority.”

“United Way of Southern Cameron County is excited to serve as the lead agency for the *Partners for Postsecondary Success* work in Brownsville,” said Traci Wickett, President and CEO of United Way of Southern Cameron County. “This grant will help us recruit the people and organizations that can bring the passion, expertise and resources needed to plan a better future for our young people.”

UTB/TSC President Dr. Juliet Garcia remarked, “We are delighted to be a part of a community collaboration aimed at enhancing opportunities for students and ensuring their success from access to completion to careers.”

“Our sincere thanks to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and MDC for making this tremendous investment in our community,” said Brett Springston, BISD Superintendent of Schools. “Their support will help us strengthen our existing partnerships with the community and university to improve the overall quality of life in Brownsville.”

“We were impressed by the clear commitment and sense of urgency that community partners in our four cities showed for improving postsecondary success rates and to better equip their low-income young adults with job-ready skills,” said Bonnie Gordon, a senior program director at MDC and *Partners for Postsecondary Success* project leader. “Brownsville has deep experience with issues of poverty and is also a tight-knit community where partners know each other well and are comfortable discussing tough issues together. It can serve as a role model for others wrestling with these issues in their own communities.”

“As our economy is demanding increasing skills, the economic viability of cities is directly tied to the education of their citizens,” said Hilary Pennington, director of Education, Postsecondary Success, and Special Initiatives for the Gates Foundation. “The lessons learned through the *Partners for Postsecondary Success* project will provide valuable insight into what communities can do to make college completion happen.”

Texas and North Carolina are two of several states where the Gates Foundation is focusing its Postsecondary Success work, due to the high numbers of low-income young people who reside in those states.

The other cities selected to participate in the initiative include Amarillo, TX; Charlotte, NC; and Raleigh, NC.

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United Way of Southern Cameron County

United Way of Southern Cameron County works to advance the common good by creating opportunities for a better life for all. Founded by Ruben Edelstein, Gladys Porter and others in 1955, United Way of Southern Cameron County focuses its work on education, income and health—the building blocks for a good quality of life. United Way recruits people and organizations who bring the passion, expertise and resources needed to get things done. www.liveunitedrgv.org

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people’s health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

MDC

MDC is a nonprofit organization headquartered in Chapel Hill, N.C., that has been publishing research and developing programs focused on expanding opportunity, reducing poverty, and addressing structural inequity for more than 40 years. MDC’s focus is on: defining gaps and mobilizing leaders to create a will for change; demonstrating sustainable solutions and developing them into effective models; and then incubating them so they can be replicated at scale for maximum impact. For more information, go to www.mdcinc.org.