

# Center Schools aiming high with ASCENT

## Opportunities rise with new academic program

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Photo by Teresa Benns ASCENT students currently enrolled in the program are (Front Row): Angel Archuleta, Christie Martinez, Justin Gonzales, Marina Ruybal, Kathleen Hintz (Back Row): Megan Gonzalez, Steven Velasquez, Omar Villagomez, AJ Garcia, Michael Boccock, Arnolando Hernandez, Nick Arellano, Laura Duran, Mariela Alvarez, Karina Vasquez, Fidel Fransisco. Not pictured are: Christina Burch and Olivia Rios, Coral Escalon, Justin Gonzales, Noella Guadiana, Damaris Hernandez, and Elisha Sanchez.

BY TERESA L. BENNS

CENTER Center High School students are taking advantage of a jump-start on their college education by enrolling in a new program made possible by legislation passed in the Colorado State Legislature in 2009.

A recent statement made during a Colorado Dept. of Education (CDE) meeting attended by Center school administrators indicates that currently Center High School is the only Valley school participating in the program. CDE supervises and helps coordinate the program, and CDE representatives serve on the Concurrent Enrollment Advisory Board.

ASCENT, or Accelerating Students through Concurrent Enrollment was passed last year as the Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act. The legislation was enacted to create pathways between high schools and institutions of higher learning, CDE fact sheet says, in order to fulfill the Colorado Promise of doubling the number of post-secondary degrees earned by Coloradoans. By offering the incentive to succeed, the program hopes to cut the current high school dropout rate in half.

The program basically enrolls qualified high school students in either college-level courses offered by the high schools or area colleges/ community colleges. This includes career and technical education courses and certificate programs. So far 22 Center High School students have signed up to take the classes following an aggressive recruiting campaign on the part of administrators at the school, including Center High School Principal Kevin Jones, Counselor Adele Alfson and Response to Intervention Coordinator Susan Banning.

Jones, who is openly enthusiastic about the opportunities ASCENT affords students, noted that Center pays for the first year of tuition through a CDE-sponsored program. The school will even arrange for transportation to the different community colleges on the list, he said.

Tuition costs also are paid for high school students, and the program also funds first two semesters of actual college tuition following graduation.

To date, the school has concurrent enrollment agreements with Trinidad State Junior College, Adams State College and Colorado State University, with contracts pending for Pueblo Community College and Mesa Community College. Jones also is excited about the college level courses students can access right in their own school. "What a great opportunity," he said. The following college-level courses currently are available at Center High School, either through Center teachers, online or by correspondence: TSJC related credit classes: Graphic Art Design Concepts in Graphic Design for Publishing and Marketing Video Productions and Editing Web Design I Web Motion Graphic Design Foundations in Construction Construction Technology I Construction Technology II Cosmetology ASC classes at High School (taught by Center teachers): English 101 English 102 Art Appreciation 103 Other ASC Concurrent Courses. Major Themes in Literature (ENG 203) Finite Mathematics (Math 104) Introduction to Psychology (PSY 101) \* American History 1865 to Present (HIST 203) Principles of Economics (ECON 255)\* The Sociological Imagination (SOC 201) Development of Civilization (HGP 110)\* Development of Civilization (HGP 111) Environmental Science (ENV 101)\* Physical Geology (GEOL 111) Jones is puzzled by the fact that few Valley schools seem to be making use of ASCENT to give students a leg up in the difficult job market today and help them further their education. Colorado Dept. of Education commissioner Dwight D. Jones, who recently paid a visit to the school commended Center for its participation in the program.

"Even if this falls on its face, how can we go wrong?" Jones asked. "An ASCENT diploma means you are going to college."

Counselor Adele Alfson said she "wants more students to pursue their post-secondary education," adding that by the time students finish the program, they will accrue a minimum of 36 credit hours, but could accumulate even more if they chose to do so.

She urges students interested in signing up for ASCENT to contact her at the school. Who qualifies

Students in grades nine through 12 are eligible for ASCENT provided that they have received approval for their academic plan of study, have met concurrent enrollment deadlines and have met the minimum prerequisites for the course, (with some exceptions). Those who have not met minimum high school graduation requirements may not concurrently enroll in more than nine credit hours.

Students participating in ASCENT graduate and get their diplomas but are still counted as high school students for the following year for school funding purposes, Jones said. This way the program benefits both the school and students.

Schools partnering in the program must be properly accredited, offer bachelors and graduate degrees, maintain a physical campus and meet other federal requirements.