



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Gov. Hickenlooper announces the “Colorado Challenge,” a partnership to improve college completion rates

DENVER — Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2013 — Gov. John Hickenlooper today announced the Colorado Challenge, a partnership that brings together top state education leaders in an all-out effort to improve college completion rates for students traditionally underrepresented at campus commencement ceremonies.

Three public and private initiatives to increase college access – Colorado GEAR UP, Daniels Fund and the Denver Scholarship Foundation – will partner with the innovative leaders at Adams State University in Alamosa, Colorado State University in Fort Collins and Pueblo, and Metropolitan State University in Denver.

Together, through pooled expertise and resources, the partners in the Colorado Challenge will wrap students in services from high school diploma to college degree in a pilot that strives for four-year degree completion. The goal is to create an effective and cost-efficient model that can be replicated across the state.

“We wouldn’t call it a challenge if it were easy,” Hickenlooper said. “We are creating a college completion pilot program that will serve as a model for others and help to build our state’s highly-skilled workforce. We thank these educational leaders for working together to improve students’ lives and the future of Colorado.”

Lt. Gov. Joe Garcia, who oversees Colorado GEAR UP in his capacity as Executive Director of the Department of Higher Education, will supervise the pilot, which kicks off in January. He was in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday to address the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO).

“We know our students of color and our low-income students have made gains in access to college,” Garcia said. “But they lag significantly in college completion. We must do better by these students, and realize their potential, for the good of Colorado.”

The \$5 million pilot will serve two cohorts of students, for a total of 2,500 students, and follow each group through four years of college. While the pilot will vary some to fit each unique campus location, elements will include one-on-one advising and a summer transition program between high school and college.

In addition, college leaders are encouraged to provide options such as block scheduling for working students,

grouping pilot students in one or more courses and offering whole programs of study, which ensure required courses are available when needed.

Bernadette Marquez, co-founder of the Denver Scholarship Foundation, said she is eager to participate in an initiative that will help DSF expand its successful college completion programming.

“Our mission is college completion, and we’re absolutely committed to supporting our scholarship recipients all the way through college until they graduate,” Marquez said. “We’ve seen tremendous success with our pilot programs to support students on campus, and this investment from the state will help us expand those programs.”

Linda Childears, president and CEO of the Daniels Fund, said the goal of completion within four years is an important part of the pilot. Daniels Fund Scholars receive four-year scholarships.

“Some of our students have struggled with earning their degrees in four years, largely because they haven’t had access to strong academic advising,” Childears said. “We’re excited that this partnership will address that need.”

The Colorado Challenge will explore use of online advising tools that students can easily access to ensure they’re taking classes that fit within their degree requirements.

Nationally, only 34 percent of full-time students pursuing a four-year degree graduate on time; about half of such students will earn a bachelor’s degree in six years. Yet, national research shows the average bachelor’s degree holder has earned more than 136 credits when 120 credits are usually enough.

In Colorado, only 30 percent of students pursuing four-year degrees at public colleges and universities graduate within four years, according to data collected by the Department of Higher Education.

Most students served by Colorado GEAR UP, the Daniels Fund and the Denver Scholarship Foundation are low-income and minority; many are the first in their families to go to college. DHE data shows such students are less likely to return after their first year of college and only 32 percent graduate from four-year institutions within six years.

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DENVER SCHOLARSHIP FOUNDATION: www.denverscholarship.org

Founded in 2006 by Gov. John Hickenlooper and Timothy and Bernadette Marquez, DSF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a mission to inspire and empower Denver Public Schools graduates to enroll in and graduate from college or technical school. DSF provides college advice inside DPS high schools, scholarships that are renewable for five years, and support services on college campuses to help students graduate. Since 2007, DSF has helped increase the number of DPS graduates who enroll in college by 30 percent, and it has awarded \$19 million in scholarships to 3,900 students. Nearly 80 percent of DSF Scholars have completed their degree or remain enrolled in college. DSF recently received a \$262,000 grant from Texas Guaranteed to expand support services for its scholars attending the University of Northern Colorado.

DANIELS FUND: www.danielsfund.org

Bill Daniels was a visionary business leader whose sincere compassion for people and unwavering commitment to ethics and integrity earned him respect throughout his life. He grew up during the Great Depression, served his nation as a decorated fighter pilot in two wars, and returned home to become a driving force in establishing the cable television industry. Bill's passion for helping others inspired him to create the Daniels Fund to extend his legacy of generosity far beyond his lifetime. Honoring his direction, the Daniels Fund operates the Daniels Fund Grants Program and the Daniels Fund Scholarship Program in Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming.

COLORADO GEAR UP - www.coloradogearup.org

Colorado GEAR UP is a federally-funded program serving mostly minority, largely low-income students who typically are the first in their families to go to college. The program is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and managed by the Colorado Department of Higher Education. GEAR UP stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs. We focus on intense advising, with more than two dozen advisors working full-time in middle and high schools from Alamosa to Greeley. Our work begins with eighth-graders and follows them into college. Another emphasis is placing our high school students in college courses, where they gain confidence by experiencing success. The typical GEAR UP student graduates high school having already earned 17 college credits.