Bilingual Scholars Initiative Meets Challenges of Latinos in NWA

Support to fund scholarships and outreach programs

BENTONVILLE, Ark. (May 18, 2012) – The Bilingual Scholars Initiative, a collaborative five-year effort of the Hispanic Scholarship Fund (HSF), the University of Arkansas, Northwest Arkansas Community College and the Springdale School District, aims to meet the unique challenges — many through the education system — of the growing Hispanic population in Northwest Arkansas. The initiative, which focuses on scholarship support for future teachers, college prep programs and campus-based scholar chapters, will begin during the 2012-2013 academic year.

“We think bringing together the educational players and the local Latino community in this four-way collaboration is right for mutual Northwest Arkansas community gain,” said Frank D. Alvarez, president and CEO of HSF. “Helping inform and engage Latino parents in the education of their children is an important competency, and HSF is pleased to have been selected to play our role.” The initiative is funded in part by a $775,000 grant from the Walton Family Foundation.
The majority of the grant, $615,000, is designated to scholarship support. Much will go to “fast track” students currently attending NWACC and the University of Arkansas who have identified themselves as education majors with the intent of teaching at the secondary level. Some scholarship support will also go to juniors and seniors from Springdale schools who have the intention of returning as K-12 teachers. The ultimate goal is to produce nearly 90 teachers over the next five years who will become bilingual teachers in Springdale schools.

Part of the grant will help support the initiative’s Steps for Success Program. Each half-day program offers a range of college preparation workshops for middle and high school students and their parents. This unique approach utilizes community volunteers as college prep coaches and has a customized track of concurrent workshops for students in each grade level with separate parent workshops in Spanish and English. The curriculum covers intensive how-to instruction on taking the SAT or ACT; information on the financial aid process; assistance writing a personal statement/essay for college applications and scholarships; and guidance finding a college well-suited to the student’s educational background and interests.

The Bilingual Scholars Initiative will also support two HSF Scholar Chapters — one at NWACC and one at the university — which are critical components of the initiative’s retention efforts. Scholar Chapters have been in existence since 2001, and they are geared toward the needs of Latino college students. Student coordinators at each campus work closely with Hispanic Scholarship Fund staff to customize programming — academic and outreach — to meet the needs of their respective campus and local community. The two Northwest Arkansas chapters will join the 37 existing chapters at colleges and universities around the United States.

“NorthWest Arkansas Community College is excited about the partnership with Hispanic Scholarship Fund, Springdale Schools, and the University of Arkansas,” said Diana Johnson, Executive Director for High School Relations, NWACC. “This partnership will allow bilingual students to enter and succeed in teacher preparation programs and positively impact our community through our school systems.”

**About the Hispanic Scholarship Fund**
Founded in 1975, the Hispanic Scholarship Fund believes that the country prospers when all Americans have access to the opportunities a college education can afford. As the nation’s leading
Hispanic higher education fund, HSF works to address the barriers that keep many Latinos from earning a college degree. To date, HSF has awarded over $360 million in scholarships and has supported a broad range of outreach and education programs to help students and their families navigate collegiate life, from gaining admission and securing financial aid to finding employment after graduation. HSF envisions a future where every Latino household will have at least one college graduate, creating an enduring impact on the college outlook of Latino families nationwide, and strengthening the American economy for generations to come. For more information about the Hispanic Scholarship Fund please visit www.HSF.net.

NorthWest Arkansas Community College is a comprehensive, public two-year college that serves and strengthens the community through learning for living. NWACC’s service area is defined by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education as Benton and Washington counties in extreme northwest Arkansas. The commitment of NWACC to life-long learning can be seen in the quality of instruction it offers, and the variety of programs it has designed to move students into the job market in a minimum amount of time, enrich people's lives, and prepare them to further their education. For more information, visit www.nwacc.edu.