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NEWS

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MDC Awarded \$1.8 Million Grant to Launch the *Partners for Postsecondary Success* Initiative; Announces Partner Sites in Texas and North Carolina

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. – Community partnerships in Charlotte and Raleigh, N.C., and Brownsville and Amarillo, Texas, have been chosen to participate in a three-year demonstration project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The initiative is focused on dramatically increasing the number of low-income young people who earn a postsecondary credential that gives them the opportunity to get a good job and earn a living wage.

MDC, a Chapel Hill-based nonprofit dedicated to improving educational and economic opportunities in communities across the nation, has received a \$1.8 million grant from the Gates Foundation to lead the *Partners for Postsecondary Success* (PPS) initiative. The community partnerships will examine the current and historic status of low-income young adults in their communities and identify data-driven strategies to help more young people earn degrees and get jobs with labor market value. 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.

“Each of our participating communities was selected for its potential to improve the education and employment prospects for their low-income youth and in so doing, to become role models for other communities working on these same issues,” said Bonnie Gordon, a senior program director at MDC and manager of the *Partners for Postsecondary Success* project. “For today’s workforce, training and

education beyond high school for a certificate or degree is necessary for entry into a living-wage career opportunity.”

Each selected site applied for and received a seven-month planning grant from the Gates Foundation. Sites that successfully complete the planning phase will be considered for up to an additional \$1.5 million in funding over approximately two years to help launch their local community PPS initiatives.

Lead organizations in each city will coordinate the work of the partnership through the planning phase of the initiative. The lead organizations are:

- Amarillo, TX—Amarillo Area Foundation
- Brownsville, TX—United Way of Southern Cameron County
- Charlotte, NC—Foundation for the Carolinas
- Raleigh, NC—North Carolina State University

Improving educational attainment among low-income young adults and equipping a new generation to be competitive in an increasingly global market place is essential to strengthening local and regional economies.

“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.

According to Census Bureau data, one in seven Americans now lives in poverty, including more than eight million families. Education is a key to ending intergenerational poverty. Research shows that as the level of educational attainment increases, so does earning potential. 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.

“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.

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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.