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## Aspire upping its game - more students, more support

by Michele Nelson roundup staff reporter Oct 13, 2017  0



A shot of the successful Aspire Arizona Foundation students from last year's class goofing off for the camera. AAF exposes students to college classes without paying the heavy tuition costs.

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While the number of students taking advantage of the Aspire Arizona Foundation scholarship remained the same from last year, the number of classes taken has increased in part due to a merit scholarship given by Aspire Arizona.

"This year, Aspire Arizona Foundation is paying for a second class for each student who earned an A in one or more classes for two consecutive semesters. Fifteen students are beneficiaries of this merit support," said Janet Vidnovic, treasurer for Aspire Arizona.

"For the current semester, there are 95 participants, which is roughly the same number as last fall, however, students are taking more classes on average so the number of 'seats' is up 18.5 percent from 135 last fall to 160 now."

Aspire Arizona did have more students participating in the spring of 2017, but a math class made the difference — and Vidnovic expects to see that difference again this year.

“The spring 2017 semester had higher numbers (105) because of the addition of 13 students taking Math 140 at a slower pace. These students earned college credit for one semester over the full year. We expect to see the same pattern this coming spring,” she said.

On top of that good news, Aspire Arizona saw a jump in the number of students from the junior year to senior year taking classes.

“Last year’s junior class had 19 percent participating in dual credit classes. As seniors that class has 28 percent enrolled in dual credit courses,” said Vidnovic.

In addition, this year’s junior class has more students taking dual credit courses than last year’s junior class.

“This year’s junior class has 24 percent enrolled,” she said.

The AAF program is unique to communities in Gila County.

While the Globe school district uses money given to them by the state/federal government to improve their district to pay for dual credit classes, Aspire Arizona works its magic through private donations.

“Since inception, AAF has paid \$48,500 of tuition for local high school students,” said Vidnovic. “The community was very generous last fall and donated over \$20,000 for the program. The MHA Black & White Ball silent auction raised \$5,000 and AAF received grants totaling \$6,200 from other foundations. In particular, the Holbrook Pyle fund (created by the will of Nan Pyle, a Payson pioneer) of the Arizona Community Foundation made a grant of \$5,000.”

The students have not wasted the community’s investment.

“The grades earned by students taking the dual credit courses were excellent,” said Vidnovic. “Over 74 percent of grades were As or Bs. Only six students withdrew or failed dual credit classes. Students earned 1,018 college credits through the AAF Dual Credit Initiative.”

All part of the reason Aspire Arizona started. The group was alarmed at the statistics showing Payson graduates didn’t attend college classes.

Whenever they can, AAF board members mention that the point of the dual credit program is to expose students to college classes, move them along a path to complete a four-year degree, as well as help them save money if they do decide to attend college. Some Payson students can complete an associate degree before leaving high school. That way, they only pay for two years of college expenses in order to finish their four-year degrees.

AAF hopes to continue to tap into the generosity of the community by pushing for tax credit donations before the end of the year.

“AAF will be reaching out to the community again in November requesting tax deductible contributions so that we can continue to support the educational aspirations of Payson High School students,” said Vidnovic.

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