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NEWS RELEASE

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**SFCC Moves Forward in Plans for Higher Learning Center**

**Santa Fe, NM, Friday, Aug. 28** – As enrollment at Santa Fe Community College climbs to a record high, the school’s Governing Board last night took preliminary steps to develop a Higher Learning Center that would offer local students state-supported degree programs on the College of Santa Fe campus.

The Board approved three key components of the plan, including the possible pursuit of a \$35 million bond initiative, of which \$18.9 million would go toward the Higher Learning Center. The balance of the bond issue would fund needed improvements on SFCC’s Richards Ave. campus. College officials stressed that the bond issue would not raise taxes.

SFCC President Sheila Ortego first proposed the concept of a Higher Learning Center during meetings of the Governor’s Task Force on the future of the College of Santa Fe. “It’s exciting to see the proposal move forward,” she said. “I am especially gratified to hear all of the statements of support coming from state and local government officials and education partners. With last night’s action by the Board, we are one step closer to bringing accessible, affordable higher education to more Santa Fe students.”

Speaking in favor of the proposal during yesterday’s earlier Board work session, Governor Bill Richardson’s Education Policy Advisor Peter Winograd reiterated the Governor’s desire to see the Higher Learning Center become a reality for Santa Fe. Reading from a letter signed by the Governor, Winograd said, “Thanks to (SFCC’s) leadership and vision we have an opportunity to take an historic institution and turn it into a crown jewel of higher education in this state. Your vision for a Higher Learning Center located on the College of Santa Fe campus is a critical step in providing educational opportunities to students in Santa Fe and the region.”

Also in attendance at the board meeting were Peter White, Secretary of the New Mexico Higher Education Department; David Coss, Mayor of Santa Fe; and Arturo Jaramillo, Secretary of the General Services Department.

The Higher Learning Center would bring several colleges and universities under one roof to provide students in the region with post-secondary education. While a final location has not yet been determined, SFCC is most interested in land on the southern edge of the College of Santa Fe campus. (See attached FAQ for more details.)

The Governing Board passed three resolutions directing college staff to perform further work on the higher learning center proposal:

- 1) Directing the President and SFCC staff to study and bring recommendations to the Board for a possible \$35 million bond issue. If approved by the Board by November, Santa Fe County residents could vote on the issue in February, 2010;
- 2) Creating a Higher Learning Center District, which would function under the Higher Learning Center Act; and
- 3) Directing the President and staff to develop a detailed plan and survey for the Higher Learning Center to be submitted to the state's Higher Education Department.

The Higher Learning Center proposal has received letters of support from the City of Santa Fe, Santa Fe County, Laureate Education, Inc., the New Mexico General Services Department, New Mexico Highlands University, New Mexico State University, Northern New Mexico Community College, Santa Fe Public Schools, and the University of New Mexico, among others.

Initial surveys suggest that the Higher Learning Center could serve as many as 500 students in its first year, and reach upwards of 1,000 students by 2016. If all approvals are attained, the Higher Learning Center could open as early as 2011.

### **About Santa Fe Community College**

For more than 25 years, Santa Fe Community College has been the gateway to success for individuals and the community by providing affordable, high quality educational programs that serve the social, cultural, technological and economic needs of a diverse community. The college serves more than 14,500 students per year in its credit, noncredit and adult basic education programs. For further information, visit [www.sfccnm.edu](http://www.sfccnm.edu) or call (505) 428-1000.

## **Questions and Answers from SFCC Regarding the Higher Learning Center**

### **What is a Higher Learning Center?**

A Higher Learning Center is a post-secondary education facility where classes are offered by several colleges and universities under one roof or in a cluster of buildings. Regionally accredited institutions contract with the learning center to deliver programs typically leading to associates, bachelor's and master's degrees in a number of diverse areas.

### **Why does SFCC want to build a Higher Learning Center?**

Santa Fe Community College is a successful, growing two-year institution. Our students have long asked for two improvements: 1) a second location closer to the center of Santa Fe, and 2) programs that will allow students to earn a bachelor's degree at an affordable rate without leaving Santa Fe.

### **How can SFCC establish this new facility? Doesn't the college have to get approval from the state before it starts awarding bachelor's degrees?**

It is important to know that bachelor's degrees will not be awarded by SFCC. A law already on the books, Learning Center Act [21-16A NMSA 1978], allows learning centers to exist in the state to offer an efficient option for providing access to higher education. By contracting with four-year institutions to provide services rather than offering those services directly, learning centers are able to respond to rapidly changing educational needs in a community efficiently and effectively. The learning center would contract with regionally accredited institutions to provide needed educational programs for a limited period of time. At the end of the contract, the Learning Center District Board would reassess the contract to determine whether the services are still needed, and if so, whether those services are being provided in an efficient and effective manner.

### **Since it is not awarding bachelor's degrees, what is the role of SFCC in the HLC?**

Santa Fe Community College envisions itself to have two roles: 1) to provide lower division classes at the same affordable tuition rates it charges at its campus on south Richards Ave., and 2) to be the "landlord" and operator of the HLC. As the operator of the HLC, SFCC will be the organizing entity and the coordinator of the HLC governance structure.

### **What is the "Governance Structure" of the HLC?**

SFCC submitted its preliminary higher learning center plan to the state's Higher Education Department, and earlier this month the agency granted written approval of the plan. A required detailed plan and survey will be submitted for consideration in the fall. At its August 27 meeting, the SFCC Governing Board passed a resolution to establish a Learning Center District. Under the District, the five-member publically elected SFCC Governing Board serves as the Learning Center District Board. The Board will appoint an advisory committee consisting of business representatives and citizens from the area to advise and assist the Board in determining the most appropriate educational and training programs and services to be offered by the HLC.

**Where will the HLC be located?**

A final location has not been selected. SFCC is most interested in land that has been identified for possible use by the state of New Mexico on the former campus of College of Santa Fe. If the state acquires the identified parcel of land on the southern edge of the CSF campus, SFCC would like to collaborate with state officials to develop a joint use higher learning complex there.

**How much will it cost SFCC to build the HLC? How will SFCC finance it?**

The cost of constructing the center is estimated at \$18.9 million. SFCC is planning to ask voters to say yes or no to a \$35 million bond issue in February, 2010. The bond issue would fund needed improvements at the college's Richards Ave. campus and also construct the Higher Learning Center.

**Will passage of this bond issue on February 9 increase my taxes?**

No. The \$35 million initiative will renew existing bonds and not raise the tax rate. This is possible because the college has paid down principal on previous bonds and now has the capacity to issue new bonds.

**If the bond issue that SFCC is proposing is approved by the voters, when will the HLC open?**

We believe if all the approvals go through, the HLC could open as early as 2011.

**Will Laureate Education, Inc. be a partner with SFCC? In what way will the two schools work together?**

Laureate Education has been in talks with SFCC about collaboration. Both sides are interested in coordinating programs and sharing resources, but no firm agreements have yet been made.

**Will the tuition charged at the HLC be the same tuition charged at SFCC? Will the other schools set their own tuition rates?**

The tuition for SFCC classes at the HLC will be the same rate charged for SFCC classes at the Richards Ave. campus. Other schools will set their own rates.

**Why not just offer more classes on the SFCC main campus? Can't the college just contract with UNM, Highlands and other schools there?**

Our enrollment has increased significantly. Over the last two years alone, the college's full time equivalent enrollment (FTE) has increased more than 25%. (Every 15 credit hours taken represents one FTE.) Our classrooms, laboratories and facilities are at maximum capacity. We also believe a facility in a central part of town will better serve students who do not wish to commute to our Richards Ave. campus.

Both UNM and Highlands offer limited classes on the SFCC Richards Ave. campus. However, both institutions have expressed an interest in growing their programs and further partnering with SFCC for the delivery of lower-division classes.

**How many students are expected to be served by the HLC?**

We estimate as many as 500 in the first year, growing to 1,000 or more by 2016.

**Will there be student support services at the HLC, such as a bookstore and cafeteria?**

In the first year of operation, we expect to provide essential services such as registration, financial aid, cashier, and texts required for the classes being run at the Center. There are no plans for a food service operation to be run by SFCC, but we are open to possibilities, including inviting bids from vendors.

**Who currently supports the HLC plan?**

We have received letters of support and interest from Governor Bill Richardson, the City of Santa Fe, Santa Fe County, Laureate Education, Inc., the NM General Services Department, NM Highlands University, NM State University, Northern NM College, Santa Fe Public Schools, and the University of New Mexico, among others.

**Has any opposition to the HLC surfaced? Is there a “down side” to the HLC?**

We have fielded many questions from community organizations, educational partners and individuals, and all of the feedback has been positive. We believe a Higher Learning Center would be good for students and good for Santa Fe, and we look forward to addressing any concerns from any voter or group.

**Where can I get more information?**

Dr. Tina Ludutsky-Taylor is the SFCC contact: 428-1182, or [tina.ludutskytaylor@sfccnm.edu](mailto:tina.ludutskytaylor@sfccnm.edu). Inquiries can also be made to Dr. Sheila Ortego, SFCC President: 428-1201, [sortego@sfccnm.edu](mailto:sortego@sfccnm.edu)

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