



News Brief - 6/20/06

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American Express Aids Rural Title I Utah School District with Western Governors University Scholarships

SALT LAKE CITY -- American Express, through its American Express Center for Community Development, has donated \$20,000 to Western Governors University, earmarked specifically to help San Juan County (Utah) School District teachers get advanced degrees in the high-need areas of math and science through scholarships.

San Juan County schools are located in one of the largest school districts in the United States, encompassing 8,000 square miles. Population density is less than two people per square mile, which makes it isolated and distant from major population centers where higher education is readily available. In addition, 60 percent of the student population in the San Juan District is Native-American. The poverty rate is 72 percent, which qualifies all San Juan Schools as Title I. With newer federal regulations in place, rural school districts have challenges trying to meet the highly qualified teacher expectations of the No Child Left Behind Act.

San Juan School District Superintendent Doug Wright is extremely grateful for the donation by American Express. He says teachers won't have the cost of travel and housing, or disruption to family life while studying online. Wright believes students will ultimately benefit.

"Teachers with advanced degrees tend to be more effective in the classroom. The additional knowledge has proven to be very useful in increasing student performance in the classroom and San Juan School District is committed to providing the best education possible," says Wright. Blanding Mayor Toni Turk, also works for the district as Federal Programs Administrator. He stresses, "The remoteness of our schools is more clearly understood when you consider that in our entire 8,000 square miles there are no Wal-Marts, no McDonalds, no Burger Kings and only one stop and go traffic light. These dynamics are such that the best solution for our district is a program like that offered through Western Governors University."

Four scholarships totaling \$5,000 each will be awarded with up to \$1,000 credited for each six-month term up to five terms at WGU. The San Juan School District will match the scholarship money, making the WGU tuition very nominal for the scholarship recipients. Detailed information is available at www.wgu.edu/sanjuan, including applications.

About Western Governors University (WGU)

WGU is the only accredited university in the U.S. offering online competency-based degree programs. The private non-profit university was founded and is supported by 19 governors, as well as over 20 leading corporations and foundations. WGU offers bachelor's and master's degrees in business, information technology, and teacher education. More information is available at www.wgu.edu.