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PRESS RELEASE

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West-MEC's Project SEARCH Program Helps Students with Disabilities Prepare for Competitive Employment

Glendale, Ariz. (October 2022) – Western Maricopa Education Center's (West-MEC) Project SEARCH program serves adults ages 18-28 who have a disability that is a barrier to employment. West-MEC has two active Project SEARCH sites this school year, one at the Renaissance Hotel in Glendale and the other at SanMar distribution in Avondale.

Project SEARCH's mission is to prepare young people with significant disabilities for success in competitive integrated employment. Individuals with disabilities are disproportionately unemployed or underemployed as compared to non-disabled peers.

"Project SEARCH is an internationally recognized transition program that prepares youth and young adults with disabilities for the reality of competitive employment after high school," said Arizona Employment Initiatives Coordinator and Project SEARCH Arizona Coordinator, Heather Wolff. "Interns learn from Project SEARCH employability curriculum combined with a business led internship to acquire the hard and soft skills to succeed in getting employed and maintaining employment."

Annually, 10-15% of the total student enrollment at West-MEC is comprised of students with disabilities.

West-MEC's program provides a 9-month unpaid internship where students work directly with employers on the host site learning professional, technical, and transferable skills. The internship curriculum includes communication, self-advocacy, professionalism in the workplace, resume writing, and interview skills.

Of the 23 interns of West-MEC's Project SEARCH in 2021-22, 19 are already employed within the community. The employment settings include retail, food service, hospitality, grocery and more.

West-MEC Project SEARCH also operates on a Luke Air Force Base site that opened in 2018 but is on hiatus for the 2022-2023 year and will return next school year.

“West-MEC aims to empower all students to participate fully in the economy by providing superior Career and Technical Education,” said Shelly Thome, director of Project SEARCH at West-MEC. “Our Project SEARCH program matters because every person deserves to live a full life in their community, with the same opportunities for education and work as everybody else. Our program gives our students the tools to do so.”

About West-MEC:

West-MEC is a career technical education public school district focusing solely on innovative career and technical education (CTE) programs that prepare students to enter the workforce and pursue continuing education. West-MEC CTE programs provide students opportunities to earn college credit and industry credentials. West-MEC serves more than 37,000 students from 48 high schools across 3,800 square miles in the northern and western cities of the Phoenix Metropolitan area. West-MEC now also offers adult education programs. Visit www.west-mec.edu for more information about West-MEC’s career-driven education opportunities, or follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

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