



# News Release

Timothy Jeffries, Director

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## **Arizona Opportunities Industrialization Center Celebrates Completion of the 1<sup>st</sup> "GAP" Youth Project**

*"GAP" Youth Project STEM Program Encourages At-Risk Students to Think Big*

**PHOENIX** – Today at the Arizona Opportunities Industrialization Center, teens from underrepresented communities throughout the Phoenix Metropolitan area celebrated their completion of a series of workshops designed to introduce them to education in a variety of careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Alongside their parents, teachers, counselors, and friends, these twenty-four students celebrated their accomplishments as the first graduating class of the "GAP" Youth Project.

Led by Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) Chief Executive Officer and President Dr. Gene C. Blue, the day of celebration included an address to the students by City of Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton; a business presentation by the "GAP" summer youth; congratulatory remarks by funders, employers and parents; Certificate Awards of Completion for each student; and a lunch.

The "GAP" Youth Project, funded in part by the Department of Economic Security (DES) through its Division of Employment and Rehabilitation Services (DERS), seeks to increase individualized attention and academic enrichment for youth and their families. In keeping with the notion that today's students are tomorrow's future, the "GAP" Youth Project is just one of the ways DES strives to help Arizonans attain economic sustainability through access to jobs and training.

"It is imperative that we provide Arizona's youth with opportunities such as the STEM program early in their educational journey," explained Director Timothy Jeffries at the onset of the program. "DES is honored to be a part of the start of this journey in helping to provide a path to an excellent future."

The twenty-four students honored at this celebration specifically participated in the Workforce Readiness program, which had three key objectives: 1) prepare youth with soft and hard skills needed for workforce success; 2) increase life skills training for the entire family and enhancement in students' academic skills in math and technology; and 3) introduce the "GAP" youth to future careers in math, science and technology.

In this program, youth ages 13 through 15 met in all-day programming, starting with the enhancement of math and science academic skills necessary for success in the classroom and on-the-job soft skills like resume writing, dressing for success, office communication techniques, emotional intelligence, workplace survival and interviewing skills. "GAP" students also attended classroom work-related training in the morning, which was then followed by work site placements in the afternoon. In addition, the future workforce participants were each provided with an Individual Employment Plan (IEP).

Above all, the "GAP" Youth Project set out to combat under-education in low-income communities. According to the United States Census Bureau, many schools in underrepresented communities are under-performing and less than 40 percent of adults in these areas have a high school diploma or GED (Census 2000). The twenty-four accomplished graduates of the first "GAP" Youth Project prove that such statistics do not define the educational capacity and willingness to learn of a community's young people.

To learn more about DES services and the ways it supports Arizona families, visit the [DES website](#). For more information about the "GAP" Youth Project, visit the [Arizona OIC website](#), or contact them at (602) 513-8311.

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