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UNIQUE COLLEGE SUCCESS PROGRAM AIMS TO IMPROVE STATE'S DEGREE RATE

Portland, ME – According to experts, within the next few years, a majority of jobs in Maine will require post-secondary education. For the first time, Jobs for Maine's Graduates (JMG) has teamed up with the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System to provide students with the support they need to stay in school and earn a degree. JMG held a press conference at the University of Southern Maine, Monday, to formally announce the new College Success Program.

"We have to be innovative and student-focused to close the gap between our high school graduation and college degree attainment rates to keep Maine competitive in a global economy," said James H. Page, Chancellor of the University of Maine System. "Maine's universities are proud to partner with Jobs for Maine's Graduates and Maine's Community Colleges on the College Success Program to improve services to students who come from backgrounds and places where college was too rarely - if ever - a viable consideration."

JMG Specialists have been placed on campuses at the University of Southern Maine, Southern Maine Community College, University of Maine Augusta, Kennebec Valley Community College, University of Maine Machias, and Washington County Community College. Through the College Success Program JMG will work individually with JMG high school alumni, foster care youth, and others to ensure they stay in school and earn a degree.

"Maine's community colleges are committed to helping more of our students stay on track and achieve a college credential," said Dr. Janet Sortor, Chief Academic Officer for the Maine Community College system. "The JMG initiative closely aligns with this work. The more we can all work together—K through 12 through college—to build clear pathways to success, the more our students and our state will benefit."

JMG works with more than 5,500 students in grades 6-12. It has a 97% retention rate, and at least 90% of the students graduate within four years. This unique initiative will allow JMG to extend that success and the continuum of support through college. The Specialist assumes the roles of mentor and counselor, monitoring the students' progress including academic performance, and helps identify and address academic challenges such as poor study habits, time management issues, or difficulty taking tests.

The College Success Program is a public-private partnership, funded by the State, as well as private foundations, including the John T. Gorman Foundation and the Lloyd G. Balfour Foundation. Tony Cipollone, the President and CEO of the John T. Gorman Foundation said, "Research tells us that young people who have faced barriers can succeed in college, but they require more than just financial assistance: they need preparation that begins in high school, and support that extends well beyond their arrival on campus. That's why we at the John T. Gorman Foundation, along with many others from industry, government, and other sectors around the state, are proud to join together to expand JMG's program model to this statewide higher education bridging program, College Success."

JMG piloted its first college program last year at Thomas College in Waterville. Along with working with students on campus, two Specialists also work closely with JMG's high school programs, educating students about the benefits of a college degree.

Craig Larrabee, JMG's President and CEO, says, "Retention doesn't start on the first day of college. Because JMG is in high schools across the state, this partnership will provide Maine's colleges and universities a way to directly connect with these young people early on to engage them in their future and better prepare them for the college experience. "

The College Success Program intends to serve 250 students per year. One of those students is Justin Duchesne, a sophomore at Southern Maine Community College. "JMG changed my life in high school. It gave me the confidence to become a leader in my community, and the courage to enroll at Southern Maine Community College," Justin said. "I started out with a 3.0 GPA and was thrilled! But then last semester, a relative got sick and I was forced to leave school to take care of them. I knew there was a real chance I could be suspended. But my JMG Specialist went to the administration and advocated for me, and they let me stay in school! Now, I'm right on schedule to graduate. "

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JMG is a statewide, private nonprofit working with students who face barriers to education. JMG provides 5,500 students a year with the skills and experience they will need to succeed in high school, post- secondary education, and careers. JMG graduates become engaging members of their communities, productive adults in the workforce, and contributors to Maine's economy.