

Cochise College, ALA announce new learning center

BY SUMMER HOM

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SIERRA VISTA — Cochise College announced its partnership with the American Leadership Academy Virtual in opening a learning center for ALA's high school students at the 600 building on the Sierra Vista Campus.

At a joint press conference on Monday, Cochise College President Dr. J.D. Rottweiler said the main goal in the college's partnership with ALA is to help high school students get a jump on earning a college degree or industry certificate.

"Forty-three percent of Cochise County residents hold an associates degree, a bachelors degree or an industry recognized certification," Rottweiler said. "Now, 43% sounds OK, but it's far from where we need to be. Most experts say that we should be in the 60% range."

ALA will be leasing the facility from Cochise College at about \$15 a square foot.

Dr. Wendy Davis, vice president for administration at Cochise College, said the 600 building's square footage is approximately 3,800.

If ALA determines a need to lease out the whole 600 building, the college will charge ALA about \$57,000.

"However, we are planning on scaling the leased space based on first year enrollment, so it could be less than that amount in FY23," Davis said in an email.

"The space that ALA leases will depend on their need due to their enrollments, which we do not know yet," said Cochise College Assistant Dean of Enrollment Management & Marketing Robyn Martin in an email. "It doesn't necessarily mean they are leasing the entire 600 building. We will be evaluating that as we get closer to fall."

A reason for the collaboration is addressing the number of "opportunity youth," as described by Education Forward Arizona as youth aged 16 to 24 who are not enrolled in school or working.

In 2019, 14.2% of individuals 16-24 were not enrolled in school or work-

ing in Cochise County, according to Education Forward Arizona's progress meter that was referenced in Rottweiler's presentation.

Members of the community were invited to ask questions about the partnership.

One of the questions related to the types of student services offered to ALA students.

"We have a partnership between Cochise and American Leadership Academy Virtual to ensure that while students are enrolling in their courses, they are meeting the high school graduation requirements," said Laura Richins, assistant director of Student Services at ALA. "Any courses that you are taking at Cochise also count towards high school graduation requirements."

Dr. Jeremi Brewer, director of ALA Virtual, said ALA will cover the full cost of classes ALA students take at Cochise College and pass.

A question related to assisting students with an Individualized Education Program or IEP.

"We do have a full special education team that evaluates those individually, so we can meet the disabled students where they are," said Richins.

Then, the focus went to campus security and supervision.

"The college has chosen this site specifically, recognizing that it is by the administration, easy drop-off," said Rottweiler. "Security will always be an issue. They are coming onto a college campus. This facility has a check-in place — I'm assuming ALA will utilize someone who will check students in ..."

"But I will also say that we've had 13- to 18-year-olds on this campus all the time. We have a very safe campus. You can go and look and find all those statistics."

"But we want parents to understand you are bringing your child to a college and with that comes some risks and we will do everything in our power to ensure that the individuals are safe and have a full security system on our campus — security guards. With a simple call to



security, we will have escorts, and all those things that we currently do will be available to each student.”

On a question about what resources will be available to ALA students in the learning center and the budget for these resources, Richins said “We will have a site coordinator here on this location as well as computers and tutors. As far as budget, I don’t know.”

ALA is establishing two learning centers in Sierra Vista.

Brewer said the K-12 main learning center location in Sierra Vista will be located on Enterprise Way, and students in grades 9-12 who are interested in taking dual credits at Cochise College will be attending class at the 600 building.

The 600 building used to be the location of the college’s campus fitness center, which housed exercise equipment and two studio spaces.

Rottweiler said Cochise College student usage of the fitness center declined due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the demand hasn’t returned to a sufficient amount following the return to in-person classes.

“Most of our students were going to our local fitness centers,” said



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ALA Director Jeremi Brewer, Ph.D, and Laura Richins, ALA assistant director of academics, spoke during the joint press conference with Cochise College administration on Monday.

Rottweiler. “Planet Fitness is literally a walking distance away. We know Buena Fitness, Summit Fitness — there’s lots of students that are utilizing those facilities.

“We think we’re better off not to compete against local fitness centers, so we’ll just encourage our students to utilize those other facilities.”

Rottweiler and Brewer said they’re hoping to have the facility open by the beginning of ALA’s school year on Aug. 8.