WASHINGTON, DC—The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) announced a $4.19 million three-year grant from Walmart Foundation to support the Job Ready, Willing and Able (JRWA) initiative, including $2.67 million directly supporting 17 community colleges across the country. The JRWA initiative will provide middle-skill training, industry recognized credentials, and access to employment across varying industry sectors in each of the 17 communities. Students who have access to high-quality education and training programs, relevant and quality job opportunities, and public benefits and supports are more apt to persist and succeed.

The 17 participating colleges were selected through a highly competitive process. Four colleges will be mentor colleges, with support from AACC, the National Association of Workforce Boards, AACC Affiliate Councils and industry associations. Mentors were selected from AACC’s 2008–2010 Workforce Economic Opportunity Initiative funded by Walmart Foundation and will provide additional guidance to 13 mentee colleges. All 17 colleges address current and potential growth of jobs in their communities. Examples range from unemployed mineworkers in rural Kentucky learning electrical linemen skills to sector-strategies including industrial mechanics and manufacturing certificates in Utah, viticulture skills in Oregon, office assistant training in Pennsylvania and Certified Nurse Aide (CNA) programs in Colorado. All colleges will work closely with local businesses, economic development leaders and the area workforce systems to collaboratively address the needs of the unemployed. The initiative aims to provide more than 5,000 unemployed adults with new skills, credentials and jobs.

“We are proud to continue our work with Walmart Foundation at a time when the nation is focused on middle-skill careers and opportunities. This initiative is a model for how community colleges can connect students with specific, sustainable jobs in their communities and contribute to long-term economic growth,” said Walter Bumphus, AACC president and CEO.

The four selected mentor colleges are Arkansas Northeastern College (Ark.); Northeast Community College (Neb.); Umpqua Community College (Ore.); and Northern Virginia Community College (Va.).

The 13 mentee colleges selected for the JRWA initiative are Grossmont College (Calif.); Community College of Aurora (Colo.); St. Johns River State College (Fla.); Kirkwood Community College (Iowa); Ivy Tech Community College (Ind.); Hazard Community and Technical College (Ky.); Jamestown Community College (N.Y.); Cuyahoga Community College (Ohio); Montgomery County Community College (Penn.); Northeast State Community College (Tenn.); Tarrant County College District (Texas); Snow College (Utah); and West Virginia University at Parkersburg (W.Va.).

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About the American Association of Community Colleges
As the voice of the nation’s community colleges, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), delivers educational and economic opportunity for 13 million diverse students in search of the American Dream. Uniquely dedicated to access and success for all students, AACC’s nearly 1,200 member colleges provide an on-ramp to degree attainment, skilled careers and family-supporting wages. Located in Washington, D.C., AACC advocates for these not-for-profit, public-serving institutions to ensure they have the resources and support they need to deliver on the mission of increasing economic mobility for all.

About the Center for Workforce and Economic Development
AACC’s Center for Workforce and Economic Development (AACC CWED) is the division within AACC that specifically focuses on student engagement, persistence and completion of students in industry-recognized credentialed programs. AACC CWED connects national and local employers to the colleges, ensures alignment with industry affiliates and networks that can support sector-specific initiatives and supports the success of every student to employment, further education and training and/or the necessary credential to improve their current job status. AACC CWED has an extensive history of working with industry partners, foundations, workforce and economic development partners and colleges across the country with the goal of identifying best practices and making them common practices across the system of member colleges.