Harbor College program to be state model

YOUTHS: Grants will expand pilot effort that gave at-risk teens a 'road map' for success.

By Melissa Pamer Staff Writer

During his senior year at Rancho High School, Robert Jones was balancing, from home to home, staying with friends of his mother across the south. But as his family struggled financially to get by, failing English, Jones didn't have enough credits to get a degree, and he was in trouble for skipping a few court dates for curfew violations.

He expected to drop out of school, just stay in Wilmington, aimless.

But by the end of the academic year, Jones was in the classroom from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., finishing high school requirements, attending night classes for his degree and taking four courses at Harbor College.

This fall, he'll enter his senior year at California State University, Dominguez Hills in Carson. Now 20, Jones plans to earn his teaching credential and return to Hampton High as a history instructor.

The key to his success, he said, was the Watt Arnold Schwarzenegger at his side at a Wednesday press conference, was an intensive after-school program based at Harbor College called the Urban Teacher Fellowship.

"IT'S has been the greatest thing that ever happened to me. I didn't even plan to graduate. I was just going to hang around here. It gave me a road map," Jones said before nearly 60 of his colleagues, teachers and government officials.

Saying it was a "fantastic" real-HARBOR A8

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led to stand next to Schwarzenegger - "I grew up watching his movies" - Jones was told he could be a leader in the community, and a college graduate.

"It was impossible for me not to be excited," Jones said.

Run by the nonprofit South Bay Center for Counseling with the Wilmington community college, the Urban Teacher Fellowship is for the model for a new $10.8 million investment in programs for at-risk youth in coordination with the governor's California Gang Reduction, Intervention and Prevention Initiative.

Along with a handful of local officials, including Sheriff Lee Baca and Harbor College President Linda Spink, Schwarzenegger announced the grant funding at the press conference at Harbor College.

"This pilot program has worked like a jewl," Schwarzenegger said. "Now these kids think about college..."