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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Wednesday, March 9, 2016

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Gov. Daugaard Announces Closure Of STAR Academy

PIERRE, S.D. – Gov. Dennis Daugaard announced today the state will close STAR Academy, the state-run juvenile corrections facility near Custer, on April 8, 2016.

“Over the last ten years, the average daily population of juveniles under DOC jurisdiction has been cut in half. The juvenile justice reforms passed by the Legislature last year are expected to further reduce the number of juvenile commitments,” said Gov. Dennis Daugaard. “I thank the staff at STAR Academy for the service they have given to our state. They have done their jobs selflessly by placing the needs of the youth ahead of their own.”

Since Fiscal Year 2007, the average daily population of youth in the STAR Academy programs has declined from 166 to 51.

There are currently five juveniles in the Brady Academy, Youth Challenge Center and QUEST programs at STAR (State Treatment and Rehabilitation) Academy. The Department of Corrections anticipates only three juveniles will remain in the programs by the closing date. Those juveniles will return to their community or transfer to another placement.

Under the Juvenile Justice Public Safety Improvement Act, \$6 million will be allocated to juvenile community-based programs throughout the state each year. The programs allow juvenile offenders to stay within their communities and address substance abuse, antisocial tendencies and family challenges.

The 64 employees working at STAR Academy were notified today of the decision to close the programs and provided with layoff notices. A one-time payment incentive plan equal to the staff member’s last two months of employment has been approved for staff members willing to stay on until their last day.

Impacted employees have been provided summary information of benefits and rights, including health, life and unemployment insurance, and conditions for reemployment preference. Reemployment preference guarantees the employee an interview for each

career service position for which they apply for one year.

STAR Academy staff members were briefed last November on planned budget reductions at STAR Academy for Fiscal Year 2017. Informal layoff notifications were also given at that time.

Some STAR Academy staff members and facility maintenance staff will remain until June 8 to complete administrative and security tasks to close the campus.

“I thank the staff of STAR Academy for their dedicated service to the youth of the state of South Dakota over the years,” said Corrections Secretary Denny Kaemingk. “Although this is a difficult time, we celebrate their success in building STAR Academy into a nationally recognized facility.”