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Mar Vista Elementary School fourth-grader Diego Hammana, 9, tells the crowd his aspirations for the future as part of the college readiness conference that included Cabrillo College President Brian King and CSU Monterey Bay Vice President of Student Affairs Ronnie Higgs.

Todd Guild
Register-Pajaronian



Santa Cruz County educators launch college readiness campaign

Majority of students entering college not doing college-level work

By TODD GUILD
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

If the group of educators who assembled at Cabrillo College Wednesday afternoon have their way, Santa Cruz County children will soon be better prepared for college, and many will attend and graduate.

The educators are part of Santa Cruz County College

Commitment, a first-of-its-kind partnership of K-12 and college officials from across the county who want to make sure students are ready for college.

The task may not be an easy one. According to Santa Cruz City Schools Superintendent Gary Bloom, many students entering college need remedial math and English courses.

Only 30 percent of county students who enter community college finish with a degree within six years, he said.

"A majority of students at Cabrillo and CSU are not doing college-level work," he said. "That's simply not acceptable and we can do better."

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As part of the initiative, educators will work with families, providing information and resources to help prepare their children for college.

In many cases, they will also tailor curriculum to better mesh with CSU and UC entry requirements, such as having three years of a foreign language, a 3.0 GPA and high test scores.

"We try to make sure that if these kids prepare themselves, there will be a place for them," said Dr. Ronnie Higgs, CSU Monterey Bay Vice President of Student Affairs.

Higgs said that CSUMB participates in a similar program in Monterey County, which has offered its resources to the

Santa Cruz County program.

Additionally, college leaders hope to embark on an ambitious fundraising campaign that would be used to pay for the first year of college for any high school graduate who needs it, Bloom said.

"We want to make sure that every kid has access to financial aid," Bloom said. "This is a really exciting initiative for us, and one that is going to make a big difference in the lives of Santa Cruz County kids."

Cabrillo College President Brian King said educators from throughout the county began meeting in April about forming the task force. By August, he said, the collaboration was ready to launch.

"It's a challenge at every level having students who are ready to succeed," King said. "It's exciting to have everyone at the table."

As part of the program, preparation starts as early as fourth grade, when county students are given a tour of Cabrillo College.

"And ideally, we'll start with the parents even sooner," Bloom said.

Students who participate in the program are encouraged to learn about college and careers and take challenging high school courses. They are also asked to study college and career options and apply for financial aid during their senior year of high school.

High school juniors will participate in Early Assessment Placement testing to ensure they are prepared for college.

The Santa Cruz County College Commitment is made up of all the county's K-12 school districts, Cabrillo College, CSU Monterey Bay, San Jose State University and UC Santa Cruz.