College Commitment

School districts, area colleges collaborate to improve graduation rates

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APRIL 5 — The numbers speak for themselves.

Ninety percent of students entering Cabrillo College are unprepared for either college level math or Englishtalk, or both. At Cabrillo, just 19 percent of students complete a degree or certificate program in six years.

Faced with these stark figures, county educators have taken action. At a press conference Wednesday on the Cabrillo campus, a collaborative effort christened the Santa Cruz County College Commitment was launched to not only get more area students into college, but ensure they succeed once there.

“The numbers are even worse for some groups,” Cabrillo President Brian King said in an interview before the press conference. “For students who test two levels below college math or English, the odds of completion are in the single digits. It has been a real eye-opener for us.”

Every K-12 school district in the county and UC Santa Cruz and Cal State Monterey Bay have signed on.

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to the initiative. Representatives from all of the partners attended the press conference.

The collaboration is based on a similar program established in Long Beach eight years ago. “This is a lot of complacency in our community around college-going,” Santa Cruz City Schools Superintendents Gary Bloch said in an interview Tuesday. “A lot of families assume their kids are going to college, and a high percentage fail to graduate. A high percentage of low-income students never even get into a post-secondary program.”

Santa Cruz County Office of Education Superintendent Michael Watkins said at the press conference the program will help prepare K-12 students for college and ensure their success once they leave area schools.

“This will produce more college graduates for the county’s workforce and economy,” he said.

Some of the future and current initiatives under the program, nicknamed S3:

- All K-12 fourth graders in the area will visit the Cabrillo College campus this year. In future years the hope is that all fifth graders, and visit Cal State Monterey Bay and all sixth graders will visit UC Santa Cruz.
- At the high school level, there are plans to administer an assessment test earlier as a way to identify students who might want to focus on science or math courses, which might be better suited for them.
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In attendance on Wednesday were approximately 300 fourth graders from five sites in the county, who shared their career aspirations at least half wanted to be either actors or veterinarians.

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