



CLASS OF 2024

College Commitment



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Mar Vista Elementary School fourth-graders wearing T-shirts that read 'Future College Graduate' attend the Santa Cruz County College Commitment press conference on Wednesday at Cabrillo College in Aptos.

School districts, area colleges collaborate to improve graduation rates

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APTOS — The numbers speak for themselves.

Ninety percent of students entering Cabrillo College are unprepared for either college-level math or English, or both.

At Cabrillo, just 29 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 faculty."

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.

"There is a lot of complacency in our community around college-going," Santa Cruz City Schools Superintendent Gary Bloom 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 matriculate to a post-secondary program."

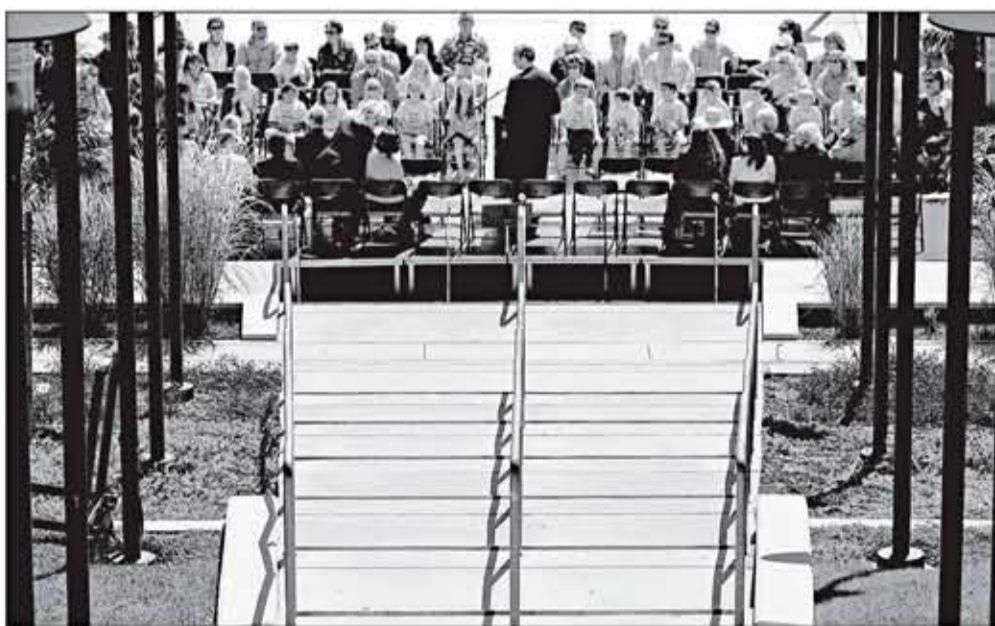
Santa Cruz County Office of Education Superintendent Michael Watkins said at the press conference the program will help prepare K-12 students for college and ensure their success once they leave area schools.

"This will produce more college graduates for the county workforce and economy," he said.

Some of the future and current initiatives under the program, nicknamed S4C:

- All 3,000 fourth-graders in the area will visit the Cabrillo College campus this year. In future years the hope is that all fifth-graders will visit Cal State Monterey Bay and all sixth-graders will visit UC Santa Cruz.

- At the high school level, there are plans to administer



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Cabrillo College President Brian King speaks at the Santa Cruz County College Commitment press conference on Wednesday to publicize the countywide partnership to increase college readiness and success of Santa Cruz County students.

an assessment test earlier so gaps in subject areas can be addressed in the student's senior year, before they reach college.

- K-12 schools and local colleges will work together to align curricula to ensure better prepared high school graduates.

- The Cabrillo College Foundation is raising money in hopes of being able to offer every Santa Cruz County high school graduate a scholarship to pursue post-secondary education.

In attendance on Wednesday were approximately 20 fourth-graders from Mar Vista Elementary School who shared their career aspirations — at least half wanted to be either

actors or veterinarians.

Cal State Monterey Bay Vice President for Student Affairs Ronnie Higgs spoke directly to the 9- and 10-year-olds, who were all wearing T-shirts that read "Future College Graduate Class of 2024."

"We want to see you nine years from now," he said. "You do your part, and we promise you the commitment, money and resources you'll need to succeed."

One of the speakers drove home the importance of programs that expose students to the possibilities of higher education at an early age. Jose Morelos, who attended Pajaro Valley schools, was one of 12 students chosen in 1991 to

participate in the first year of the Cabrillo Advancement Program, a scholarship and enrichment program designed to prevent the drop out of low-income students at the middle school and secondary level that has since expanded to include nine area middle schools.

"When they spoke to me as a sixth-grader, my parents didn't know about college and I didn't know anything about college. I couldn't spell college," he said to the fourth-graders. "I went to college and now I am a counselor for the Advancement Program. Take advantage of this program. I know it seems like a long way to college, but it's going to go pretty fast."