Getting students ready for college

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Santa Cruz County school districts have the good fortune to be in close proximity to institutes of higher learning including Cal State Monterey Bay, UC Santa Cruz and Cabrillo College. All of these schools offer excellent opportunities for Pajaro Valley Unified School District students to continue their education after high school graduation.

This past August, representatives from these institutions, county school board representatives and administrators from and the Santa Cruz County Office of Education formally announced the Santa Cruz County College Commitment, also known as S4C. The purpose of S4C is to get all county school districts to work together with leaders at the college level to better prepare students for the transition to college. The PVUSD school board passed a resolution formalizing the board's commitment to help prepare students for a college education by fostering a network of support to allow for the success of every student.

To meet this commitment, the PVUSD board of trustees and the Santa Cruz County Office of Education committed to partner on the following goals over the next 10 years:

- Increase the percentage of students from Santa Cruz County school districts who are prepared to attend college directly from high school.
- Increase the percentage of Santa Cruz County school district students who attend CSUMB, San Jose State, UCSC and other four-year colleges and universities.
- Increase the percentage of Cabrillo students who earn degrees and/or career and technical certificates.
- Increase the percentage of Cabrillo students who successfully transfer to CSUMB, SJSU or UCSC.
- Increase the percentage of CSUMB, SJSU and UCSC students who graduate with a bachelor's degree and/or advanced degrees.

By taking a long hard look at college readiness data, we have determined that one of the best ways to support our students is by focusing on matriculation and the transitions from elementary to middle school, from middle school to high school and from high school to college. In addition to increasing rates of matriculation to college for all students, all fourth graders from across the county will visit Cabrillo College beginning in this month to start learning about career choices and what it takes to get into college.

On Feb. 24, Cabrillo College hosted a Santa Cruz County-wide board meeting at the Horticulture Center. Representatives from county school districts, the County Office of Education and Cabrillo College received an update on S4C. Board members, district superintendents and Cabrillo College representatives had the opportunity to strategize on how we can support and encourage staff to work together to align curriculum, increase matriculation and collaboration.

This is my first step, talking about S4C and increasing communication about the college promise and the commitment. It's my hope that by bringing parents and the community into the conversation it will allow us to support each other in this effort. The entire community will reap the rewards with better-prepared students, more high school and college graduates and a stronger, better trained workforce. Better education means higher earnings and a healthier economy.

In the near future, S4C will come before the PVUSD board so the larger school community can take part in the discussion about our shared commitment to a college-bound culture for our students. I invite our school and business leaders to help us meet the challenge. Look on our website for upcoming board meetings and agendas at www.pvusd.net.

Leslie DeRose is the president of the Pajaro Valley Unified Board of Trustees.