


OPINION

INLAND VALLEY Daily Bulletin

A  MediaNews Group NEWSPAPER

POINT OF VIEW

Boosting our college-going rate

By James Hammond

Preparing young adults to compete in a knowledge-based global economy and contribute productively to the communities in which they live means they must complete high school and have access to post-secondary education opportunities.

When we think about our future, we need to consider how we can do more to prepare our region for the challenges that we'll be facing in the next decades.

The recent Lumina Foundation report "A Stronger Nation" stated the key to the nation's economic revival in the 21st century is building a workforce with the skills businesses need.

The 2011 San Bernardino County Community Indicators Report findings highlight the correlation between the educational level of residents and the quality of our labor pool as an important issue for businesses looking to locate or expand in the region.

Our challenge is that only 19 percent of San Bernardino County residents over age 25 have a bachelor's degree, compared to 28 percent for the nation and 30 percent for California. Regrettably, only 15.3 percent of Ontario and 13.2 percent of Montclair residents have a bachelor's degree.

Children need three things to increase the likelihood that they'll go to college: They must be encouraged

from an early age to have college as a goal, they must be academically prepared in schools that have a "college-going culture," and they must receive help to navigate the financial aid application and college admissions maze. Yet not all families have the information or resources to help their children aspire to and access college. To ensure that all students have a chance to attend college we need to coordinate the efforts between families, K-12 schools, higher education institutions, local government, businesses, and other community partners.

Even given the current fiscal challenges we can plan for the future by leveraging resources that already exist in our communities to achieve the common vision of increasing educational attainment for the region.

To address this need, the Ontario-Montclair School District has joined several key partners in an initiative to make sure children have access to college. The new Promise Scholars Initiative, based on the successful Online to College program that boosted the college-going rates for participating students by 50 percent, has begun the effort of getting our local kids to college.

Working to ensure that college or a postsecondary technical training program is a viable option for all our students, Promise Scholars when fully implemented will serve more than 30,000 students a year in grades 5 through 12.

Promise Scholars partners include Chaffey Joint Union High School District, Chaffey College, California State University San Bernardino, Inland Empire United Way, the city of Montclair, the city of Ontario, the County of San Bernardino, Alliance for Education, and The Community Foundation of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. Key business commitment in supporting this initiative includes Cardenas Markets, Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Soroptimist International of Montclair/Inland Valley, and Ontario-Montclair School Employees Federal Credit Union.

To create a high quality of life and economic security, the Promise Scholars partners believe we must have a collective aspiration for all our young people to attain some form of secondary education, whether a community college, specialized technical program, college or university. This initiative is committed to addressing our educational attainment challenge by helping students aspire to and achieve more. Promise Scholars invites you to be a part of this work.

For information about Promise Scholars, contact Leslie O'Hare Sorensen, resource development administrator, Ontario-Montclair School District, Learning & Teaching Division, at 909-418-6331.

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