

Solano's college-bound rate lags

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A new study shows Solano County is lagging behind the rest of the Bay Area and the state in preparing high school students for higher education.

Just 55 percent of Solano County high school graduates go straight to college, including community colleges, according to report by the Institute of Higher Education and Policy at Sacramento State University.

The report puts the Bay Area rate at 66 percent. The state's is 58 percent.

Just 2,319 of 4,224 Solano County high school graduates went directly to a two-year or four-year college in 2007, the report adds.

The data, collected from the California Post Secondary Education Commission, does not take into account students who attended out-of-state colleges or private schools that don't report data.

One of the study's authors, Colleen Moore, said Solano County also ranks far below the state overall in the share of students completing college preparatory classes, including advanced math and science courses. Solano County students also are less likely to earn top scores on college entrance exams.

"It is not just that they are getting lower scores, but fewer students are taking the tests," Moore said.

Although the study identified trends, it did not cite causes.

Overall, the study found regions of the state experiencing the most rapid population growth -- such as the Inland Empire and the Central Valley -- are tending to fare worse in terms of higher-education access.

"We have a lot of heavy lifting to do to move more of our kids into college," said Vallejo City Unified School District spokesman Jason Hodge. "And that is going to take additional funding from the state. We just have a lot of kids who don't see college as an option for them ... because their parents didn't go to college."

A few years ago, Hogan High School in Vallejo began placing all students on a college prep track, science teacher Jeanne Hillyard said.

"This way, anyone who passes all of their classes with a 'C' or better will be eligible to apply to a (University of California) or a (California State University)," Hillyard said. "I think this should help our college admission numbers."

Another thing district high schools started recently are career tech academies. Hogan High offers a biotechnology academy. Next year, the school will launch a multimedia academy.

"With these programs, the students take their core classes together and learn all subjects with the theme of their academy," Hillyard explained. "This should give the students incentive to do well in high school, because they can see a tangible future ahead of them."

Educators also said parental involvement is the key to college access.

"One thing parents can do to ensure their children go to college is to get involved early with their education," Solano County Office of Education spokesman Sheldon Reber said. "Elementary school is not too early to be talking with children about going to college."

Hillyard added, "Of course we could use a lot more help from the community. Poor attendance and nutrition, and a home environment that isn't conducive to doing homework and studying, all contribute to the failure of a lot of our students."

The study was titled "The Grades Are In -- 2008: Is California Higher Education Measuring Up?"

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