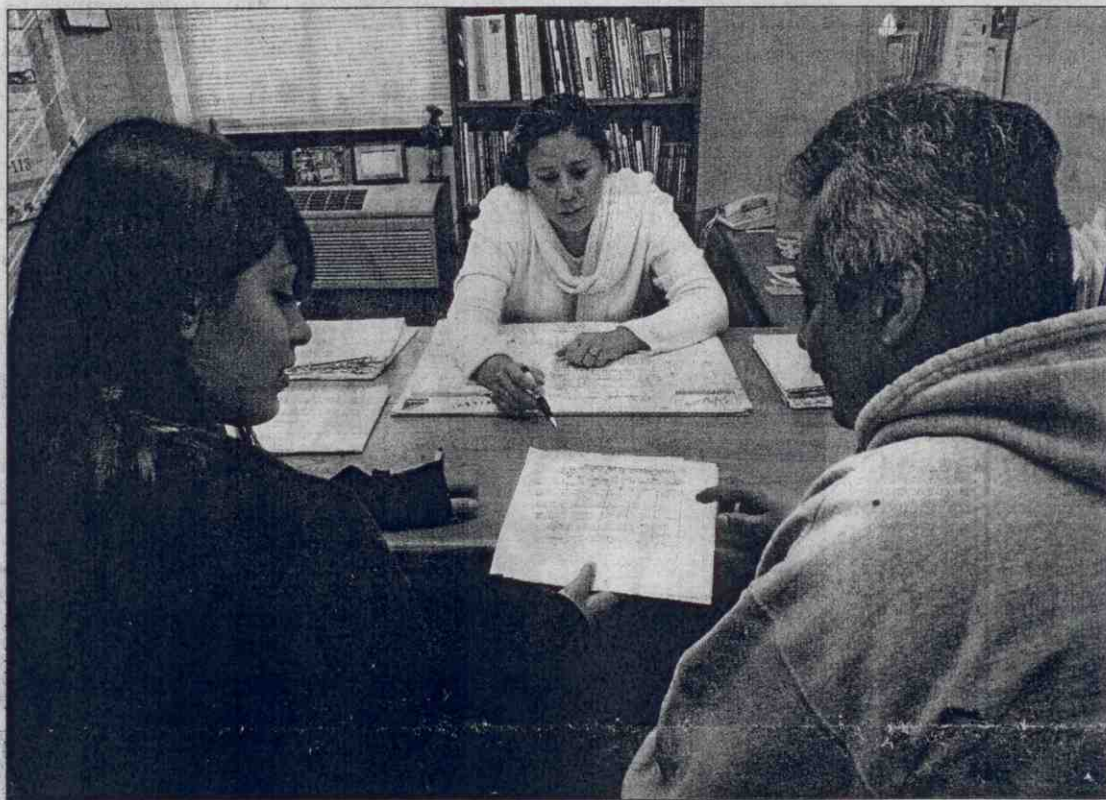


COLLEGE BOUND FACE DEADLINES



RICHARD GREEN/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

Greenfield High School junior Laura Mora, left, and her father, Moises Mora, right, meet Dec. 7 with school guidance counselor Juana Botello, center, to talk about Laura's college options.

Schools urge teens to consider options earlier

By ROBERT SALONGA
The Salinas Californian

For many high school seniors in the Salinas area, the coming winter holiday break is a last chance to crank out a flurry of applications for college next fall.

Some deadlines already have passed, while others are approaching quickly.

The pressure is palpable, but with good planning early on, it's also preventable.

Through an array of programs and partnerships — and a financial boost from the state this summer — educators are trying to get teens thinking about college early and often.

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The efforts come at a time when admissions requirements at four-year colleges have tightened in response to an increasing number of college-eligible students while colleges' ability to expand is minimal.

The rates at which Salinas-area students attend some form of post-secondary education after high school hover between 50 percent and 90 percent, depending on the school, according to self-reported estimates. All of the

schools surveyed said these figures are on the rise.

These estimates — most districts and schools cannot maintain hard and fast data because students' college intentions can change rapidly — include community colleges, four-year colleges, vocational and technical education, and military service.

Statewide, about 44 percent of public high school graduates attend some form of college after they graduate, according to data from the California Postsecondary Education Commission. According to the same data, Monterey County students attend at a 43 percent clip. But these figures did not include vocational and technical schools or military service.

To bolster the college-readiness among its students, Greenfield High School monitors students' progress beginning their freshman

year, an approach mirrored by many other county schools.

Juana Botello, a guidance counselor at Greenfield High, said advisers help devise a four-year plan mapping out the courses students will take toward graduation. Each year, they update the plan, based on students' progress and changing career interests.

"We get them aware of what they need for graduation requirements and the admission requirements for college," Botello said.

That way, she said, students don't have the pressures of imminent graduation pushing them into hasty decisions for life after high school.

"The goal is to have them figure out where they want to go, so that they already know by the beginning of their senior year," Botello said.

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COLLEGE/ Parents meet, too

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But the 30-minute sessions are not just for the sake of students: Parents are expected to be just as up-to-speed as their children.

This was the case on a weekday morning earlier this month when Botello met with Greenfield junior Laura Mora and her father, Moises Mora. Together they reviewed Laura's course progress, which was generally on track toward eligibility for California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, where she hopes to study psychology.

"It's good that my parents know where I'm at," said Laura, 16.

Moises Mora said in Spanish that the meetings give him a chance to understand how his daughter is doing, so that he can help her when he can.

"It's my job to be here and know," he said.

The sessions, which Botello said are held for each one of the school's roughly 1,000 students at some point during the year, are also an opportunity for counselors to address extracurricular requirements.

That early notice, Laura said, helped her prioritize résumé-building activities such as playing soccer for the school and joining the French and physics clubs.

For students at Everett Alvarez High School in Salinas, figuring out a post-grad plan isn't just a practical idea — you can't get your diploma without one.

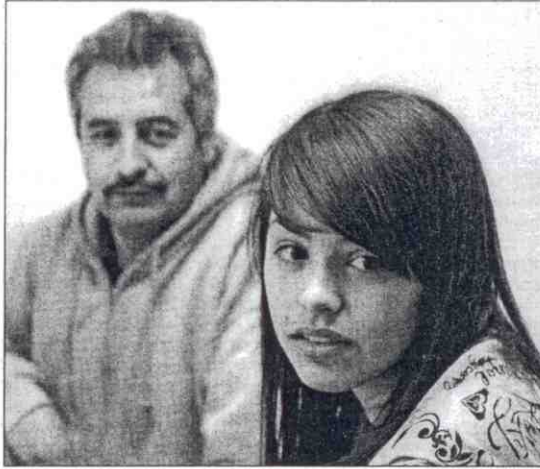
Graduating students must complete a senior project in which they research a career that interests them. Embedded in the project is the requirement that they spend 15 hours with an "expert source" in that career field. Once all the research is complete, they have to submit a college-style paper and give an oral presentation aided by technology to a panel of judges.

"It's one of the most memorable things they do while they're here," said Carol Caetano, a counselor at the school. "And all of it relates back to what they're going to do after they graduate."

Everett Alvarez High is the only school in the area with such a requirement, Caetano said.

Additional resources

As is the case with a lot of public school endeavors, finding the resources to maintain and expand these kinds of programs is a constant challenge. That pursuit



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Laura Mora, right, and her father, Moises Mora, are photographed Dec. 7 in the office of Greenfield High School guidance counselor Juana Botello.

has been partly alleviated by the passage of Assembly Bill 1802, which increased counseling resources at schools statewide.

The bill, signed by the governor in July, took effect for the current academic year, and for many schools, including Greenfield High, meant the addition of a counselor.

It was a welcome respite for Botello, who until gaining a colleague this past fall had worked alone for the past four years. When she joined the school eight years ago, two other counselors were in the department.

Nancie Gray, a counselor at North Salinas High School, which gained an additional counselor, said she's grateful for the help from AB1802.

"It has definitely lightened the load tremendously," Gray said.

But the legislation came with a caveat: Any new counseling personnel funded by the bill will have to focus almost entirely on assisting students at risk of failing to graduate. That restricted the school's flexibility in assigning, say, college-prep duties to a new counselor.

Gray said she hopes future legislation includes more input from actual school counselors before being brought to the statehouse floor.

"We love having more counselors," she said. "But so much of the funding is tied to a specific item, and needs might be seen differently at schools."

"I would like to see (counseling) funding available to be used as the site chooses. We're being told what we

have to do rather than asked how we can do things better."

She said she also would like to see more funds aimed at professional development. Requirements by the University of California, California State University and the state community college system change regularly, she said, so she welcomes more opportunities to attend conferences and workshops to keep up on the best methods to prepare students.

Colleges offer help

For just that reason, several Monterey County schools have outside help come straight to their campuses, often from the University of California, Santa Cruz, Educational Partnership Center. The center has counselors placed at Greenfield and North Monterey County high schools, as well as at their feeder middle schools.

In addition, the center helps coordinate a work force of 200 undergraduates hailing from the university, Cabrillo College in Aptos, Hartnell College in Salinas and Monterey Peninsula College in Monterey, who provide teaching assistance and face-to-face role models for college-aspiring kids. A counselor network maintained by the Monterey County Office of Education also helps this along, said Laurie Scolari, associate director of the UC Santa Cruz center.

Scolari, a Soledad native, said she wants to bring college aid services to areas of the county where the idea of attending college isn't pervasive, which, she said, was the case when she was a student

in the 1980s.

"We're getting people in the community to believe these kids are college material," Scolari said. "I didn't really feel that growing up. It's time to change the thinking."

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