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## Watsonville High awarded grant for college-bound kids

By TOM RAGAN

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Watsonville High School seniors will be able to apply for thousands of dollars in college scholarship money this year, the result of a \$100,000 grant awarded to the high school by The Educational Financing Foundation of California.

School officials said the grant will come in handy at the high school, where a lack of money often plays a part in a student's decision to attend a four-year university.

Only 71 out of 483 seniors from the high school's 2004 graduating class attended four-year universities, a number the high school would like to improve upon, school officials said.

Many Watsonville High School students go to community colleges in the area, and the grant money will be available to them as well.

Students will be able to apply for as little as \$2,000 and as much as \$10,000, depending on their financial situation, said Maria Rocha-Ruiz, assistant director of GEAR UP, a high school program aimed at preparing students for college by supporting and encouraging them to take the right types of classes required by four-year

universities.

A handful of seniors expressed an interest Wednesday in applying for the scholarship money while admitting they were going to need financial help if their dreams were to come true — whether it was becoming a doctor, a rocket scientist, a civil engineer or a registered nurse.

All of them are children of field-workers and will be the first generation to attend college.

And they were all grateful to Yesenia Cervantes and Ana Olazava, college facilitators at the high school who told them about the grant and have been there for them often, steering them in the right direction — the college-bound direction.

"They've motivated me, and they've taught me how to fight for what I want," said Monica Santana, 17, who would like to attend UCLA and some day become a doctor.

Cervantes and Olazava work for the UC Santa Cruz Educational Partnership Center, which provides academic preparation and education outreach services to students, families, teachers and school across the Monterey Bay and Silicon Valley.

Jaimie Vargas, director of development and communications for the Educational Partnership Center, wrote the grant proposal that garnered the \$100,000 grant.

"The majority of the school

population is from low-income backgrounds and many are English-language learners," said Vargas. "So this grant will help us provide them financial support."

As for Juan Montanez, Gilbert Villicana and Alejandra Eguiza, they're counting the days to graduation, hoping they'll be admitted to their colleges of choice — Yale and UC Berkeley, respectively.

"I'm hoping to play football as a walk-on at Yale," said Villicana, who's interested in aerospace.

Both Montanez and Eguiza, both of whom were born in Mexico and are relatively new to the United States, arriving in 1998 and 2001, respectively, are glad to have the opportunity of attending a U.S. university.

Montanez said he'd like to be a civil engineer, Eguiza a registered nurse.

Both have learned to speak English in a short time period, and now they're college-bound.

"It's going to be exciting," said Montanez, who was recently named Migrant Student of the Year in the Monterey Bay region.

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Kate Falconer/Sentinel  
Watsonville High School students Monica Santana, 17, Gilbert Villicana, 17, Juan Montanez, 17 and Alejandra Eguiza, 17, are applying for part of a \$100,000 college scholarship that was recently awarded to the high school.