Making college more accessible: University offers hand to disadvantaged students; Hoover High freshman eligible for SDSU pact

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Hoover High freshmen resuming classes this week have a pact with San Diego State University that guarantees them admission.

To grab that opportunity, the freshmen must earn a B average, complete necessary college-preparatory classes, take the SAT or ACT college entrance tests, and graduate from Hoover ready for college-level math and English course work.

The College Avenue Compact, which ensures admission for Hoover High graduates who meet certain academic benchmarks beginning with the class of 2011, is modeled after SDSU’s Compact for Success with the Sweetwater Union High School District.

That program boosted freshman enrollment of South County public high school students at SDSU by about 72 percent in one year to 628 last fall, when the first compact students entered college.

The newest compact will include a university outreach effort at Hoover, Clark Middle School and Rosa Parks Elementary. The three schools are part of the San Diego Unified School District but have been managed by SDSU for nearly a decade.

SDSU officials say the compact makes a college education more accessible to local minorities and disadvantaged students.

Nearly 97 percent of Hoover's student body is nonwhite, and nearly every student qualifies for free or reduced-price meals because of low income. More than a third are non-native English speakers.

SDSU President Stephen Weber said the three schools serve a large immigrant population.

"Many of these families came a great distance under difficult circumstances because they wanted their children to get a good education," Weber said.

"But they often don't have the skills to help them do that," he said. "The reality is that a lot of these children need to interpret the world for their parents."

College isn't always viewed by parents as a realistic option, Weber said.

A great opportunity

Hoover freshman Martha Araujo, who emigrated from Mexico at age 2, lives in a two-bedroom apartment with her father and three siblings. Her father didn't attend college and sets up patio rentals for work, she said.
Martha said she wants a university education so money doesn't have to be a lifelong struggle. But she was uncertain if a college would want her, so the partnership with SDSU seems like a great opportunity.

"I want to go and make a career and a life," she said. "I want to have money to travel to places."

Through the compact, San Diego State is seeking to prepare more local students for college and increase diversity on campus.

SDSU's student body last year was 22.7 percent Latino, compared with 43.4 percent in San Diego County's K-12 schools. Many Latino high school graduates were not eligible to attend a California State University campus because they didn't have the required grades or course work or failed to meet other entrance criteria. The compact would seek to change that.

In South County, the Sweetwater Education Foundation raised scholarship money for compact students. College Avenue compact organizers are looking at adding a scholarship component for the Hoover graduates.

Compact outreach efforts will involve student visits to SDSU beginning in elementary school; parent education about the necessary course work for college admission; and mentoring and tutoring by SDSU students and alumni.

A college-going culture

"The compact provides all the information they need to know about preparing for college -- what courses they need to take, when they need to take them," said Tim Allen, executive director of the City Heights Educational Collaborative.

"(The compact) also gets them to visit the college campus," Allen said. "The outreach efforts are huge."

Through the collaborative, SDSU runs the three schools under an agreement with the school district, the teachers union and the nonprofit Price Charities.

Work begins in kindergarten, where students will be exposed to a college-going culture.

At Hoover, SDSU students will act as compact advisers, who work with students to maintain university eligibility. SDSU faculty will work with Hoover teachers to make sure the curriculum is adequately preparing students for college.

One-quarter of SDSU's new freshman class required remedial help in math last fall, and nearly one-third were unprepared for college-level English. As part of the compact, students must show proficiency in math and English.

Cal State San Marcos has a similar pact with ninth-graders at Valley Center High School this fall, starting with the class of 2011. They're guaranteed admission in exchange for meeting certain academic benchmarks.

Cal State San Marcos also offers this deal to students in the San Marcos Unified School District;
the Escondido Union High School District and its elementary districts; the Santa Ysabel Indian tribe; and San Pasqual Academy, a residential school for foster youths.

HOOVER HIGH ENROLLMENT

BY THE NUMBERS

96.7%

Nonwhite

67.3%

Latino

96.7%

Qualify for free or reduced-price lunch

35.4%

English learners

Source: Hoover High School

Caption: 2 PICS 1 CHART
1. Hoover High students walked in the campus quad between classes. The College Avenue Compact ensures admission to SDSU for graduates who meet certain academic benchmarks beginning with the class of 2011. 2. Freshman Martha Araujo (center) said, "I want to go (to college) and make a career and a life." 3. HOOVER HIGH ENROLLMENT - BY THE NUMBERS 1,2. John Gastaldo / Union-Tribune photos 3. Source: Hoover High School

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