

Editorial: Oxnard boosts access to college

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(Photo: Juan Carlo)

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With its high school commencements only a month away, Oxnard received a double dose of good news this week about ongoing efforts to help more of its graduates attend college.

The Oxnard Union High School District deserves praise for taking the lead on promoting college readiness among students, and Oxnard College for leading the way on making higher education more affordable.

Only about a third of high school graduates in our county have taken all the classes they need to get into a public university in California, state Department of Education data shows. They're called the A-G requirements, and you must complete them to apply to a University of California or California State University campus.

Completing the A-G should be doable for most students: three years of math, four years of English, two years of history and social science, two years of laboratory science, two years of a foreign language, a year of visual or performing arts and a year of a college-preparatory elective.

Yet in Oxnard Union's 2016-17 school year, only 34.2 percent of graduates achieved that. While that number is similar to the Ventura County average and a marked improvement over the district's 27.1 percent figure the previous school year, it wasn't good enough for a group of students called Future Leaders of America Master Achievers and their supporters, including Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy and the League of United Latin American Citizens.

They've long been lobbying the Oxnard Union board to align its graduation requirements with the A-G classes, and to its credit, the board listened. It endorsed the change last week and is expected to give final approval Wednesday night. The policy would begin with the Class of 2024, currently sixth-graders.

At the Legislature's request, the California State Auditor explored the A-G issue and issued a report last year. It looked at the San Francisco Unified School District, where 70 percent of students fulfill the A-G, and several other districts and found "students attending school districts that establish higher student expectations, coupled with relevant tools and student support, are more likely to meet those expectations."

The Los Angeles Unified School District aligned its graduation requirements with the A-G courses in 2006, and 10 years later, almost 55 percent of students were completing them, [The Star reported Sunday](#).

We noted a year ago that not every high school student wants to or should attend college. But the A-G requirements are not just about college — they are about establishing standards, expectations and a commitment to a well-rounded high school education. "This is such a big deal," Oxnard Union Superintendent Penelope DeLeon said at last week's board meeting, and we strongly agree.

And for graduates taking the community college path, we learned [Tuesday in The Star](#) that many will be able to attend Oxnard College and not pay any tuition their first two years.

Ventura College was the first locally to launch a so-called Promise program, using private donations to its foundation to offer one year of free tuition to about 1,000 high school graduates from throughout the county. Oxnard College followed suit last year, with its foundation granting a year's tuition for graduates from Oxnard, Camarillo and Port Hueneme.

Now, beginning this fall, Oxnard College will offer a second year of free tuition as well, thanks in part to a new grant program approved by the state last year. About 700 students at the college stand to benefit.

We applaud Oxnard Union and Oxnard College for trying to eliminate academic and financial barriers to higher education, and we encourage other educational institutions to do the same.