

## SAN JOSE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL REFORMS

Beginning in the early 1990's, San Jose Unified School District embarked upon a series of high school reform initiatives focused on raising standards for all students and assuring that minority, poor, and immigrant students are prepared for college and post-secondary careers. Today the district has the highest graduation requirements in the state, with all students completing the University of California system's entrance requirements (commonly called the A-G requirements) in order to earn a high school diploma. Among other prescribed coursework, this includes three years of college preparatory math through Algebra II, three years of college preparatory science, including two lab sciences, and two years of a foreign language. In June 2004, San Jose Unified graduated its third class under these rigorous standards with no drop off in graduation rates for any of the three classes.

Early reforms included requiring Algebra for all as the entry level math course in ninth grade and aggressive policy reforms to deal with equity and access for Hispanic students, who were, by and large, vastly underrepresented in rigorous high school coursework. The district eliminated all remedial and advanced classes through the ninth grade, so that all students received the same foundation in the core curriculum. All forms of tracking students by ability were banned K-12, and the district committed to monitor Hispanic student access to upper level rigorous high school courses, requiring that all classes, including A.P. classes be desegregated and maintain a policy of open access.

In 1996, the district was ready to consider taking the boldest step of all - making it a policy that every high school student graduate prepared for college. At the same time, district leadership realized that a comprehensive public engagement strategy would be required to test the waters and ask the question of all district stakeholders, "How good is good enough in San Jose Unified School District?" Through focus groups, community forums and formal surveys the district engaged stakeholder groups over the next year and it became very clear that San Jose stakeholders wanted for a common set of standards for all high school students that would prepare them for college. With this mandate, the Board of Education passed its policy in 1997 to become effective with the entering freshmen class of 1998.

Over the first four years, the district and its high schools implemented intensive professional development for teachers and a broad array of safety net support systems for students in order to ensure their success. The Human Resources division embarked on an aggressive recruitment program to bring needed math, science and foreign language teachers to the district. A bond measure was passed and allowed the district to upgrade and add science labs necessary for the new requirements. Teacher driven curriculum committees developed diversified instructional materials and technology resources. Business partners brought resources into the high schools to support student success and the district aggressively sought added financial support from foundations and grants.

District success in implementing this major reform is clear. Three years of data show that graduation rates have not declined and the grade point averages of graduating seniors are

actually on the rise. Sixty-five percent of the graduates have passed every one of the required courses for entrance to the state's university system with a C or better and are therefore eligible to enter directly out of high school - statewide 33 percent are prepared for university. Even more dramatic, 45 percent of Hispanic graduates are university eligible right out of college compared to 21 percent state wide. And enrollment of Hispanic students in Advanced Placement courses has more than doubled in recent years. Higher standards and expectations did not lead to more dropouts but to greater achievement. Test scores on state examinations and the national SAT's have been steadily increasing each year since this reform was put in place. Perhaps most importantly, the focus on high school graduation has driven higher standards and expectations all the way down to kindergarten. The most powerful trickle-down outcome is the district's steady progress in closing the achievement gap at the elementary and middle school levels.

In summary, San Jose Unified School District's high school reform work to date has clearly demonstrated that high school can be a gateway, rather than a gatekeeper, to college for students from all backgrounds. Yet the district has found that it is not enough to prepare students to stand at the college doorstep - strategies need to be developed to get more of them to walk through that door. In the years to come, district leaders have committed to making sure that all students and their families know and believe from the very beginning of their formal schooling that the promise of a college education is truly open to them.