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Sections tackle going to college, mixing in the arts

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UC Merced graduates enter the South Bowl during commencement for the school of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts on May 14, 2016. Saturday's Eye on Education special section looks at going to, getting into and paying for college. **Andrew Kuhn** akuhn@mercedsunstar.com

This Saturday, look for the latest Eye on Education special section. “[Aiming Higher](#)” looks at area choices in the three state systems and private schools, advice on getting in, and the basics of getting help in paying for it.

The printed section pulls it all together with another great cover by artist Laurie McAdam; however, the articles are already posted [online](#). The Dollars and Sense story is particularly useful in the electronic version as it is packed with embedded links for every parent resource I could find – and there are lots out there.

One good general one is the Federal Student Aid site at <https://studentaid.ed.gov>. The best I found on all types of student loans and repayment options is <http://www2.ed.gov/fund/grants-college.html>. According to a [compilation](#) by [Lendedu.com](#), just over half of California college students graduate with debt, an average of \$22,724, or roughly the cost of a new car.

Since the articles were written, more on colleges has poured in, including an update on the federal College Scorecard: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov>. It lets families search colleges (for free) by location, degrees offered, size, name, religious affiliation and other topics.

Several firms have sent info on finding cheaper textbooks. Testing company The College Board suggests families budget [\\$1,298 a year](#) for textbooks. The company hosts a free Big Futures college information website, <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org>.

Textbooks can cost hundreds of dollars apiece new, but now there are options. Books can be rented, including electronically, and used books can also be found if the same edition is being used for a second or third year. Google “textbook price comparisons” to find a raft of sellers that specialize in this category, and there’s always Amazon.

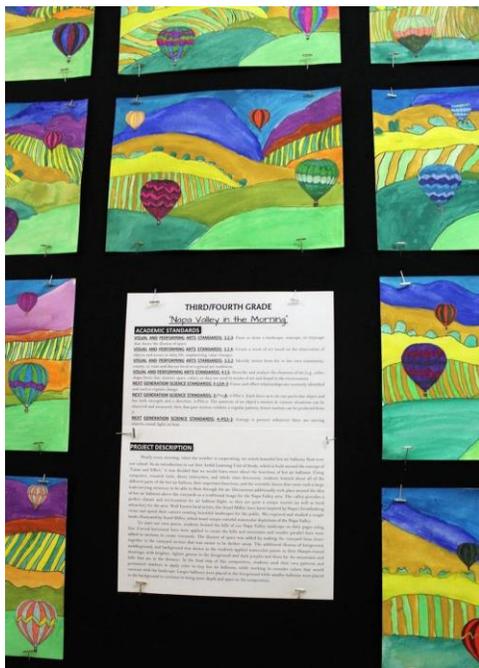
A [study](#) published this summer addresses a different higher ed hot topic: what to do with incoming college students without college-level math skills. The study appears in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, a peer-reviewed journal of the [American Educational Research Association](#).

For perspective, 77 percent of Stanislaus County high school juniors did not pass state math testing in 2016 and will likely fall in that group. Too many of them will waste precious time and money taking catch-up courses that do not count toward a degree, and statistically about 80 percent will give up and drop out before qualifying to take a college-level math course.

This study suggests a different path: Skip remedial algebra – the math brick wall for so many – and take a course like statistics instead. Using a randomized, controlled trial, researchers found 56 percent of remedial students enrolled in college-level statistics passed, compared with 39 percent of those who took remedial algebra. In addition, the statistics students went on to do better in college overall than the remedial algebra group.

“Our findings provide the first causal evidence that placing students assessed as needing remedial math courses directly in college-level courses, such as statistics, with additional support, can lead to better student outcomes,” said Alexandra Logue, a study author and research professor at The City University of New York.

Arts education



Third- and fourth-grade artists used paintings of hot air balloons traveling over the Napa Valley to study science standards of cause and effect, force and energy, while fulfilling arts standards of drawing a landscape and learning color values at Salvador Elementary in Napa, Calif., an arts magnet school that infuses Common Core lessons with color, movement and sequential instruction in the arts. **Nan Austin** naustin@modbee.com

The next special section – with the working title Arts Sparks – will be on great ideas and examples of the arts in schools and will arrive tucked into a Saturday paper mid-December.

To get a look at what others are doing around the state, I went to the [Arts Now Napa Summit](#) on Friday.

One of the highlights was getting to see high school students perform, including a stage packed by a men's choir – top singers among 330 students active in seven vocal ensembles – and a multilevel performance of female dancers.

Key attribute: confidence. These kids had less than two weeks in school to practice, but pulled it off with aplomb.

Beyond sheer numbers of strong performers at high school, Napa Unified has set a goal of getting arts into all grades at all its schools. The key to making arts count, all speakers said, was making sure every student in every grade got sequential instruction.

Much like mastering algebra takes mastering numbers, addition, fractions and other skills, performing in a high school musical takes knowing musical notes, dance steps and how to keep in time with a group.

Salvador Elementary School in Napa is an elementary magnet for the arts, where every part of schoolwork and play day dovetails to an artistic theme. Second-graders, for example, were studying relationships this trimester. Math lessons focused on the interdependence of numbers in equations. Science spoke to families of animals. Dance in PE linked people in a literal sense. Music instruction used drums “talking” to each other in rhythms.

Each grade’s teachers picked a theme and tailored lessons around it – regular lessons – teaching all the state standards but using art projects, drama and movement as hands-on learning tools. Napa Unified hopes the arts will bring all its students to a higher level – in academics and in life.

To afford the changes, Napa charities pitch in and the district qualified for grants. The arts magnet is part of a larger plan to have a better mix of students at each school, Savlador Principal Pam Perkins said. “We’re using magnets as a desegregation tool,” she said.

Take a moment to digest that: Napa is creating magnet schools as a conscious strategy to mix rich and poor students at their schools. Using a carrot instead of a stick – a peaceful, practical restructuring to give all its students a more robust education.

Now that warrants a standing ovation.

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