

Nurturing college-going culture a big task

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Fostering a college-going culture should begin before a child ever steps into the classroom.

It means being proactive in children's education, exposing them to books at an early age, being choosy about what they watch on television, the activities they participate in outside the home, and helping them with homework.

It all sounds so simple. But for some families working hard to just place food on the table and cover the rent, the task can be monumental.

College may not be for everyone, but a high school diploma is no longer enough. Students need some type of post-high school training for success in the workforce, and they need to know that before they cross the stage for a diploma.

Hopefully, the message will soon be heard all over the state loud and clear.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board earlier this week announced plans for a \$3 million grass-roots marketing campaign to help create a college-going culture throughout Texas.

San Antonio and Fort Worth are sites for the pilot launch of the Generation TX campaign in the fall. The program is being funded by a federal College Access Challenge Grant.

Milkshake Media in Austin will be working with regional P-16 councils, including the one in Bexar County headed by businessman Bartell Zachry, to spread the message and help raise students' academic preparation for life after high school.

The success of the campaign will require improving the high school graduation rates and making sure students graduate high school ready for the rigors of college academics.

Only 22 percent of Texas high school graduates are college ready, the coordinating board reported. That has improved from the 18-percent level of four years ago, but it is still pitiful.

Texas' two-year colleges are going all out to help students overcome their deficits by offering remedial classes, but it should not have to be that way. Students should be graduating high school ready for college work and not stuck wasting their time and money taking developmental courses that do not count toward their degrees.

Getting students on campus is a major step, but keeping them enrolled through graduation poses additional problems. College graduation rates in this state need improvement.

The problem is not new, and many colleges are working to address it.

Locally, San Antonio College is offering Senior Summer for the 11th year. It is a program aimed at allowing recent high school graduates to get acquainted with college life by taking a couple of courses and offering counseling and insight into how college life works.

For first-generation college students, embarking on a college career with little family support can be daunting. Many students starting their careers at four-year universities are often offered at least a weeklong orientation session so they will not be so traumatized come fall.

It is not the same for students who began their higher education at a community college. Those students are usually pretty much on their own to navigate their way through the system.

Texas could use more programs like that. Perhaps they will appear as the college-going culture campaign develops and focuses attention on preparing students for the rigors of college and the need to keep them enrolled once they get there.