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Your Community College

Kevin G. Walthers: Hancock Promise shines amidst FAFSA frustrations

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Kevin Walthers
Contributed

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If you have a family member applying to college this year, you've probably come face-face with the frustrations caused by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, better known as FAFSA.

In 2020, Congress passed a bipartisan bill aimed at simplifying FAFSA, which is a complex and often confusing financial documentation of a family's capacity to pay for college.

However, the rollout of the new FAFSA is proving to be a challenge. Initial delays meant that students couldn't even start filling out the application until December, and when they finally could, the website was full of glitches.

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This might seem like a minor issue, but it's a big deal for families caught in the middle. The information on the FAFSA is used by the federal government, states, and colleges to determine eligibility for grants, scholarships, work-study programs, and federal student loans.

With millions of students unable to complete the form, colleges and universities were unable to process financial aid offers on time. As a result, high school seniors are still waiting for financial aid offers that won't come until April at the earliest.

Colleges and universities are now extending acceptance deadlines to June, putting pressure on families attempting to secure housing for an academic year that — by then — will be fewer than three months away.

Despite all of this, there's good news for local high school graduates: the FAFSA mess is not stopping students from getting the Hancock Promise.

At Allan Hancock College, we take pride in our role as the most accessible and affordable college option in the region, and our Promise program is a key component of that affordability.

While completing the FAFSA is a requirement of the Hancock Promise, we're offering a lot of flexibility. For the 2024-25 school year, students can register with the knowledge that their place at Hancock is secure, despite the FAFSA chaos.

Education is the single most important asset in today's economy. Post-secondary training is required for the more than 95 percent of jobs that allow a family to thrive on the Central Coast.

Students pursuing a traditional four-year degree, a professional degree, or a career-based certificate all share a common challenge: the price of education.

Six years ago, the Hancock Promise launched with a guarantee that all high school graduates would have access to Allan Hancock College for a full year without worrying about the cost of tuition.

The results have been nothing short of spectacular: more high school graduates are choosing Hancock than ever before, completion is up, and our recent graduating classes saw Latino students graduating in numbers that exceeded total graduation classes from just a few years ago.

That's Changing the Odds!

Families preparing their students for college should seriously look at what Hancock has to offer. Yes, tuition will be free, but it goes beyond that.

Students will have access to experienced professors rather than take classes from graduate students (a common practice at the university level). Staff across campus will recognize you and go the extra mile to ensure every student is exposed to ample opportunities for success.

Our campus life is thriving, with dozens of student clubs suited for a wide variety of interests (Anime? Cars? Chess? Hiking? Poetry? Robotics? We have a club for that!).

We provide various free perks like bus passes, mental wellness services, food, laptop lending, printing, and more. We have excellent childcare services at both our Santa Maria campus and Lompoc Valley Center – and the children of students get priority admission.

Most importantly, Hancock students will be well-prepared for further education or the workforce after graduation.

While millions of students across the United States grapple with the FAFSA debacle, students in northern Santa Barbara County can relax and enjoy the summer knowing that they will be getting a world class education this fall — thanks to the support our neighbors who give to the Allan Hancock College Foundation in support of the Hancock Promise.

Kevin G. Walthers, Ph.D., is the superintendent/president of Allan Hancock College.

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