

https://santamariatimes.com/opinion/columnists/the-hancock-promise-a-community-investment-not-a-corporate-gimmick-kevin-g-walthers/article_9eacc4f9-ca6e-4345-b305-3319b9b313c2.html

Your Community College

The Hancock Promise: A community investment, not a corporate gimmick | Kevin G. Walthers

May 3, 2025



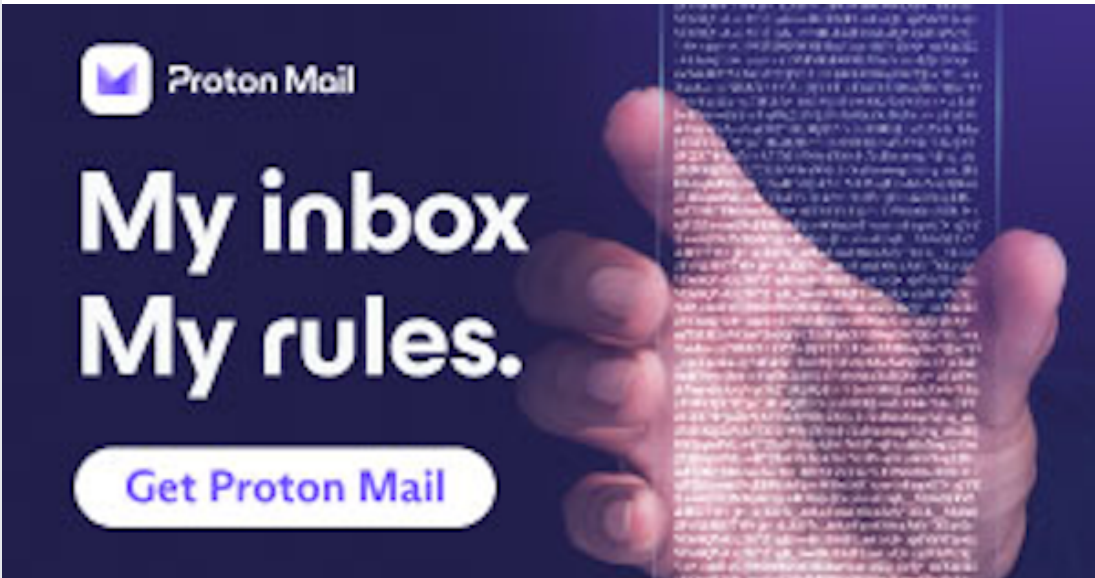
Kevin Walthers
Contributed

When a student from northern Santa Barbara County walks across their high school graduation stage and steps into their future, we want them to know this: college is within reach, and their community believes in them.

That belief is what launched the Hancock Promise six years ago — a bold commitment to build a college-going culture here at home. We knew that cost was one of the biggest barriers for local families, even when the dream of a college degree was strong. So, we made a promise to the community: that

Hancock will cover one year of tuition for every local high school graduate.

ADVERTISING



The advertisement for Proton Mail features a dark blue background. On the left, the Proton Mail logo is displayed above the text "My inbox My rules." in a large, white, sans-serif font. Below this text is a white button with the text "Get Proton Mail" in blue. On the right side of the ad, a hand is shown holding a transparent, rectangular block that contains a dense, illegible mass of text, symbolizing privacy and control over one's inbox. At the bottom of the ad, the text "Encrypted Freemium Email Account" is written in bold, with "Proton Mail - Sponsored" below it. A "Learn More" link is positioned on the right side of the bottom section.

Encrypted Freemium Email Account
Proton Mail - Sponsored [Learn More](#)

Last year, thanks to the overwhelming financial support of our community, we doubled our promise — guaranteeing that eligible high school graduates receive two years of tuition-free college.

But let's be clear — this isn't a one-way street. It's an investment in our students, our workforce, and our shared future. In return, students agree to attend Hancock full-time, take math and English, and complete at least 24 units in their first year.

And it's working: students who hit that milestone transfer to four-year universities at nearly twice the rate of those who don't. Those who complete four semesters? Nearly two-thirds transfer successfully to a four-year university.

That kind of momentum changes lives — and entire communities.

The impact is only growing. With new partnerships in place, at least five bachelor's degrees from Cal Poly and CSU Channel Islands will soon be available right here at home.

Unfortunately, success draws attention from places we wish it wouldn't. We've recently seen for-profit institutions mimicking the Promise with misleading offers like a "zero tuition discount" for the Central Coast.

But read the fine print: their students must still fill out the FAFSA, and any Pell Grants they qualify for are still collected by the organization to apply to "institutional fees," which can reach \$14,000 per year.

Their "discount" simply repackages the students' financial aid — and puts more of your tax dollars onto their corporate balance sheet.

Hancock's model does the opposite: we apply Promise funds first, so students keep their financial aid to cover the actual costs of college, like books, food, housing, and more. We also loan out free laptops, provide robust tutoring, and offer entire degree pathways that utilize zero-cost textbooks.

Our programs support parents, veterans, and students facing financial hardship.

We don't exist to profit off our students. We exist to serve them.

And our promise doesn't start at enrollment. It begins in elementary school, when Bulldog Bound brings kids to campus to imagine what's possible. It grows in high school, where more than 10,000 local students next year will earn free, transferable college credit through dual enrollment.

We're proud to be your community's college. Our faculty and staff live here, shop here, raise families here. We don't just educate our neighbors, we are your neighbors.

Together, we are Changing the Odds for northern Santa Barbara County.

Kevin G. Walthers, Ph.D., is the Superintendent/President of Allan Hancock College.

MORE INFORMATION

Three community champions named 2025 Hancock Honors recipients

'This moment is yours': Allan Hancock College graduates 1,287 students, holds 104th commencement

Tags

- Opinion
- Commentary
- Kevin Walthers
- Student Debt
- Allan Hancock College
- Ahc
- Hancock
- Guest Commentary
- Bachelor's Degree
- Education
- Cognition
- Branches Of Science
- Santa Maria, California
- Health Care
- Health
- Public Services
- Assistance
- California State University
- California Community Colleges
- Return On Investment
- Economy
- California State University, Monterey Bay
- Social Issues
- United States
- California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
- Politics
- Educational Stages
- Higher Education
- Finance
- Student Financial Aid In The United States
- Tertiary Education