

# Valley behind in preparing students

## Key Points

- Report notes many issues that negatively affect success of Central Valley youths.
- Report advises finding a balance between college aims and vocational school.
- Valley's agricultural industry depends on educated young people.



By **LEN RICHARDSON**

**A**CCORDING to a recent report, youths in the Central Valley are less likely to be enrolled in preschool, less likely to take classes required for California State University or University of California enrollment, less likely to take college entrance exams, and more likely to live in poverty than the rest of the state.

Central Valley counties produce more than a billion dollars in agricultural income and depend on educated youths. Yet these youth indicators don't bode well for ag's future, according to the Great Valley Center, Modesto, in the second edition of its latest report, "The State of the Great Central Valley: Education and Youth Preparedness."

## Some progress

Positive findings of the report include a decline in the juvenile drug- and alcohol-related arrest rates, fewer births to teen mothers, and a decline in substantiated reports of child abuse or neglect. Despite an overall pattern of decline with these indicators, the Valley continues to have higher overall rates on these indicators than the state average.

"This report shows we are making some progress in improving the lives of children in the Valley, but there are still many issues that reflect negatively on the potential success of children in our region, and this should concern our community," says David Hosley, president of the Great Valley Center. "We hope this report will be used as a tool to discuss

**LESS PREPARED:** Central Valley youths are less likely to have completed classes required for UC/CSU admission compared to the rest of the state.

barriers to success for our youth and to tell fundraisers and policymakers that the region remains disadvantaged when compared to the rest of the state."

The report's findings cover the 19-county region stretching from Redding to Bakersfield. The findings are based on state data from sources such as the California Department of Justice, the California Department of Public Health and the most recently available findings from the California Department of Education. Data from the Department of Education include the newly released dropout data, which shows that more than one in five students in California are dropping out of school, and nine out of 19 counties in the Valley have more dropouts than the state average.

## Recommendations

The report recommends investing in early childhood education and creating links from preschool through postsecondary education, focusing on the importance of investment in children while they are young to prevent students from

falling behind in school later and engaging in high-risk behavior.

"High-quality preschool gives kids a strong, early start that prepares them for success in school and in life," says Preschool California president Catherine Atkin. "California must find ways to increase our investment in high-quality preschool for the children who need it most, in the Central Valley and across the state."

Additional recommendations include reducing poverty through increased col-

laboration between the business community and the educational system to develop a skilled workforce. The report suggests capitalizing on the momentum surrounding the high school dropout issue to focus community leaders and educators on finding the right balance between building college aspirations and providing vocational training.

"I want to commend the Great Valley Center for creating a comprehensive analysis of the issues facing children in the Central Valley. The Great Valley Center has appropriately identified the need for a continuum of strategies to address the education and preparation of these children for the more global, economically challenging jobs of the future," says State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell. "The report's set of five recommendations linking support for children from birth to postsecondary education are much like the tasks I have set forth in my Superintendent's California P-16 Council. The recommendations go to the heart of our efforts to close the achievement gap and move our children forward."

The report also features a centerpiece essay, "The State of Education for Latinos in the Central Valley" by Kenneth R. Magdaleno, that suggests the adoption of an "asset-rich learning culture," where differences between students are celebrated rather than seen as a deficit.

Full report is at [www.greatvalley.org](http://www.greatvalley.org).

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