

## EDITORIAL: Graduation rates are up — that's good for the Valley



It is encouraging that many Valley high school districts are out-performing the statewide graduation rate, which inched up from 80.4% for the 2012-13 school year to 80.8% for the last school year.

ERIC PAUL ZAMORA — Fresno Bee Staff Photo [Buy Photo](#)

It appears there is growing buy-in to the belief that the best way to improve the Valley's economy and quality of life is by putting more emphasis on education.

We say this because many of the Valley's largest school districts are showing improved high school graduation rates, according to figures released Tuesday by the California Department of Education.

Better graduation rates mean that more students will go on to college or enter the work force. Higher graduation rates also mean that fewer teens and young adults will end up on the streets or wind up behind bars.

According to the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University:

- High school dropouts are four times as likely to be unemployed as those who have completed four or more years of college.
- High school graduates earn \$143 more per week than high school dropouts, and college graduates earn \$336 more per week than high school graduates.
- And about 75% of U.S. state prison inmates, almost 59% of federal inmates and 69% of local jail inmates did not

complete high school.

It is encouraging that many Valley high school districts are out-performing the statewide graduation rate, which inched up from 80.4% for the 2012-13 school year to 80.8% for the last school year.

Visalia Unified, for example, graduated 92% of its students — an increase of 3.7 percentage points, which is difficult to accomplish. Madera Unified improved from 83.4% to 86.9%.

Fresno Unified, which is the Valley's largest school district, is continuing a turnaround that is vital to the city and the region. Its graduation rate of 79.3% is finally nearing the state average after a leap of 3.1 percentage points in 2013-14.

What is triggering these success stories?

More state funding, passage of bond measures by local voters, classroom innovation, growing parental involvement, more district alliances with their communities, a focus on identifying challenges that cause students to quit school, and using online courses to stay on track or make up ground.

There's also this: Committed teachers bringing their best to the classroom every day and then bringing out the best in their students.

"The overriding theme is, we're developing this sense that we don't give up on kids," Visalia Unified Superintendent Craig Wheaton told The Bee's Hannah Furfaro.

The latest graduation numbers offer optimism for the Valley's future. Our best path to success is developing human capital. By investing in and nurturing our young ones, we are making the Valley more competitive in what has become a worldwide economy.

Today, we toast the accomplishments of Valley educators and students — and we anticipate a time when the Valley is America's leading educational region.

Comment by going to [fresnobee.com](http://fresnobee.com) and clicking on the editorial.