

# Editorial: Pressure is on Valley schools to prepare students for college

By The Editorial Board

The state-administered assessments that gauge a California high school junior's readiness for college are tough.

We know this because in 2011 – the last year for which statewide results are available – a small minority of students in the acclaimed Clovis Unified School District were deemed “college ready” in 11th grade. Just 23 percent of Clovis Unified students met this bar in math and 33 percent in English.

And with the introduction of the challenging Common Core standards, the reality is that college readiness will slip in California.

Still, the 2014-15 assessment numbers for Fresno Unified are a reminder of the work ahead to fulfill the district's goal of graduating college- and career-ready students.

In the district's words, the number of college-ready juniors in English and math was “very low” – 2.36 percent.

This percentage is sobering because the district has spent considerable effort and money on encouraging more students to attend college. Moreover, that percentage doesn't mesh with that fact that nearly half of recent Fresno Unified graduates completed A-G requirements – courses students need to pass before entering college.

Fresno Unified leaders and teachers have a tough assignment. Ours is one of the most impoverished communities in the country, and the research shows that children of middle-class and upper-class families are more likely to excel in school.

But among Fresno Unified graduates every year are hundreds of students who overcome huge challenges to get their diplomas and enroll in college. Some of them are valedictorians and have taken a full plate of advanced placement classes.

Perhaps, instead of relying on outside consultants or trying the latest flavor of educational reform, we should ask these students the hows and whys of their academic success.

Were they read to at home when they were young?

Was there a place set aside at home to do schoolwork?

Was there one teacher in particular who inspired them to be the best they could be?

Were they ever recruited to join a street gang? How did they stay out of the gang?

How did they handle taunts and bullying from students who looked down on them for studying hard?

When they had difficulty with an assignment, whom did they turn to for help?

What would they change about school?

Variations of these questions should be asked of students struggling in school, too.

It's unfair to expect a school district to fix Fresno's problems. But we can make things better for more people by

vowing as a community to help more high school graduates be college and career ready.