

Socorro Gallegos 10th Grader at Compton’s Centennial High School wins \$1,000 college scholarship in “Save Me a Spot in College” Contest sponsored by the Campaign for College Opportunity



“Do you hear our pens and pencils writing fast and steady? Those are the only tools carving our paths to success and we know it,” writes this hard working 10th grader at Centennial High School in Compton, Los Angeles. Socorro Gallegos is striving to be the first in her family to attend college. She recently won a \$1,000 scholarship in the statewide “Save Me a Spot in College” youth scholarship contest for her written word essay, which awarded scholarships to 200 middle and high school students around the state. 12,000 students entered the contest this year.

Both of her parents emigrated from Mexico as young adults to pursue job opportunities and a better life – they have been working hard ever since. “I see how hard it is for my parents to work and I see how hard it to raise us on what they make and I want a better future” says this self motivated teen about why she wants to pursue a college degree.

While Socorro recognizes the importance of continued education, she also sees some of the obstacles that she and her peers are up against: “My dad makes less than \$28,000 a year. Why does this matter? If I went to [any] University this would cause my parents to be heavily in debt. When many of my peers have similar circumstances, who can afford college? My peers and I do not give up easily, but our pockets are empty.” And they are not alone.

Low income students are tremendously underrepresented on California’s college campuses and face significant challenges that they must overcome in order to reach college. These challenges contain both the pragmatic problem of figuring out how to get there and get financial aid and the equally critical issue – to believe that it is possible. Studies show that the growing majority of low income students both overestimate how much it will cost them to go to college and underestimate the amount of financial aid and resources that exist in California.

This is one reason why advocates and policymakers want lawmakers to pass SB 890 Early Commitment to College this year. The strategy of SB 890 is powerful and unique because it packages college and financial aid opportunities into one commitment made to students at an early age – starting in the 6th grade. This means students like Socorro Gallegos will learn early about their college opportunities. California already invests in an open-access community college system, excellent public universities, and many financial aid programs. This bill leverages these investments to motivate students.

Socorro knows the stress of all of these financial burdens, but she has not lost hope. She will continue to work hard and apply for scholarships and grants to help pay for college. She also knows it is important to share this hope with other students so that they too can realize their own ambitions. She says they need to recognize that college is in fact possible with determination and hard work, even with plenty of obstacles. “Don’t give up no matter what,” she says, “you can always stand up and fight!”

The “Save Me a Spot in College” Scholarship Contest is made possible in part because of the generosity of funders such as the College Access Foundation of California and the McConnell Foundation.