

Alexandrea Sanchez 9th Grader at North Salinas High School wins \$1,000 college scholarship in “Save Me a Spot in College” Contest; goes to the State Capitol

Since a young age, fifteen year old Alexandria Sanchez had dreams of becoming a doctor. While most children played dress up with band-aids and plastic stethoscopes, Alexandria spent time in hospitals and doctor’s offices. It was there that she first learned about a rare type of tumor called AVM (Arteriovenous Malformation) – the subject of her prize winning essay in the 2008 “Save Me a Spot in College” scholarship contest. The contest, which received over 12,000 entries, awarded scholarships to 200 middle and high school students around the state.

This rare disorder can cause seizures and other physical maladies in the brain. In fact, Alexandria is personally affected by this condition, as three of her five family members were diagnosed with AVM. This condition is still somewhat of a medical mystery but instead of losing hope Alexandria used this fact as her inspiration.

As an incoming freshman at North Salinas High, she plans to become very active in her school and community. She currently enjoys her AVID college preparation classes, continues her cheerleading activities and awaits all the new experiences high school has to offer.

AVID is an academic enrichment programs that helps prepare educationally disadvantaged students for college. AVID students are typically the first in their families to attend college and many are from low-income families.

An ever increasing number of California’s young people come from school districts that see high dropout rates and low college-going rates – they 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.

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 Alexandria will learn early about their college opportunities. California already invests in an open-access community college system, excellent public universities, and generous many financial aid programs. This bill leverages these investments to motivate students.

What Alexandria is most excited about however is a high school medical internship. At the local hospital, teens can earn credits in a real world medical environment. “I want to be a neurosurgeon!” she says, “My sister goes to UC Davis, and I hope to get a degree there as well”. Alexandria looks forward to a day when her work can help cure conditions like AVM.

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.