

Yvette Lopez, 11th Grader at Rancho Buena Vista High School wins \$500 college scholarship in “Save Me a Spot in College” Contest sponsored by the Campaign for College Opportunity



Yvette Lopez knows how to argue. Not with her parents like many teenagers – she is an award winning debater for Rancho Buena Vista High School’s Speech and Debate club where she is an 11th grader. She attributes much of her success in high school and motivation for college to the club alongside the driving force of her family.

“My father came from a large family, he and his siblings, had to drop out of school after junior high. He has always told me he wants better for me – so do I. Both my parent suffered hard challenges coming to America.” Yvette’s parents look to her to set an example for her younger brother – to be the first in the family to earn a college degree.

Yvette also sees herself as a role model for other Latinas/os as well: “Hispanic culture is underrepresented in our universities. If the state of California saves a place for us ... the representation would change immensely.” Yvette hopes that a college education will help in having a stable life, a feeling of accomplishment, and more job opportunities.

“I see how my parents struggle and I see them working harder than most people – and they don’t get as much money for it,” she says. Her father earns \$12 an hour and her mom earns \$10 an hour. “Paying for college seems next to impossible right now.” And while she’s trying to challenge herself in high school to prepare for college and to qualify for scholarships, the financial burden is still an overwhelming obstacle.

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 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 Yvette Lopez 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 and give hope to students.

Despite these concerns about paying for college, Yvette’s enthusiasm and positive outlook encourage her to work hard and continue to stay focused on her road to college. She is often encouraged by her teachers who go above and beyond to help push her in the right direction. Someday she would like to be a teacher to give back and pave the way to help others reach their goals “and keep them motivated every step of the way.”

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.