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## Program helps students with college transition More than 5,000 students currently in Bridge Program

By RACHEL BYRD Staff Writer / DAILY PRESS

At Serrano High School's graduation ceremony last spring, the students were asked to stand up if they had applied to or had enrolled in a college or trade school.

Every graduating student stood up, amid applause.

When the same question is asked at Silverado High School's graduation this spring, there will likely be the same response.

Serrano and Silverado seniors are among the more than 5,000 high school seniors in the High Desert participating in the K-12 Bridge Program, which aims to increase the number of teens going to college after high school.

"Our goal is to try to make the transition as easy from 12th grade to 13th grade as it is from eighth grade to ninth grade," said Chris Piercy, director of the program.

"If the kids know more about college and what they want to be, and have access to it at an earlier age, they may stay excited about school for a longer time."

While it is mainly seniors currently taking advantage of the program, about 5,000 juniors will be using the program as of March 1, Piercy said.

All local high school students will be enrolled in the next year, and all students in fourth grade through high school will be enrolled in the next two years, Piercy said. With more community colleges expected to join as well, Piercy estimates that there will be around 40,000 users in the next few years.

One component of the program is a Web site called My Mentor. Students can log on, create a profile, and take a personality test that suggests possible careers. The Web site then offers links to related degree programs and colleges that offer the degree.

The site contains links to financial aid applications, an engine to search for scholarships, and students can go directly to a college Web site to apply.

Teuana Montgomery, a senior at Silverado, said the site was helpful because she got more accurate and direct results for her searches, as opposed to searching through Google.

"This is one link that is everything that you need," Montgomery said.

Eriq Truitt, also a senior at Silverado, said that he has known for years that he wants to go in to law, but doubts that he would have made it through the entire application process without the program.

All seniors in the program apply to Victor Valley College before they graduate, Piercy said, and assessments are done on the high school campuses.

“This is all part of the vehicle to their future,” said Georgette Phillips, the Small Learning Community coordinator at Silverado. “Our whole goal is to make the coursework relevant to the students, and this program helps them understand why they need high school and why they need college.”

California ranks 48th nationally in terms of the percentage of public high school students going to college, Piercy said, and San Bernardino County is third to the last in the state.

The High Desert will benefit from a better-educated workforce as a result of this program, he said.

School districts across the state have become interested in the program, and Piercy hopes that all community colleges will adopt the program in the next couple of years.



**Renah Agha / Staff Photographer** Silverado High School senior Eriq Truitt uses a Web site called My Mentor, where students can take a personality test that suggests possible careers. Helping him is Vicki Archer of the career center at Silverado High School.

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