CALEXICO — Although he may not have understood the words at the time, Joshua Hurtado said he vividly remembers the images from the biology books that his father used to share with him as a child.

The 18-year-old Calexico resident said he believes the drawings in those books are what primed his interest in science. With time, and after having witnessed how mental illness affected a family member, Hurtado would decide a career in neuroengineering was his calling.

“I’m interested in research that tries to understand the brain,” the Calexico High School senior said.

To that end, he said he will be spending this summer as an intern at the Lieber Institute for Brain Development in Baltimore, Md., which specializes in understanding the neurodevelopment of schizophrenia, a condition his grandmother suffered from, he said.

And as a future Johns Hopkins University student, Hurtado was in good company at the 11th annual College Going Initiative University Admittance Reception on Tuesday. Nearly 500 local high school seniors who had been accepted to four-year universities packed Rodney Auditorium at San Diego State University-Imperial Valley campus along with family members for the reception.

A lot of legwork and personal initiative also landed Calexico High School senior Hector Coronado a summer internship that will ease him into the world of environmental engineering. The future University of California, Berkeley student said he was looking to move to the Bay Area in the summer and the notoriously high rents of San Francisco compelled him to look for a paid internship.

The 17-year-old senior said his wage is yet to be determined, but he “can’t wait” to get out of the Valley. He credits a campus visit by representatives of a nearby university with fueling his desire to attend college.

“I’m looking forward to meeting some of the leading (environmental engineering) professionals in the world,” Coronado said.
Indeed, Imperial County Office of Education Superintendent Anne Mallory told the audience that college presented the perfect opportunity to “learn a lot from other people you meet.”

Although there is a lot Central Union High School senior Melanie Moreno said she will miss about high school, she is looking forward to attending University of California, Riverside and “being more independent.”

As someone who frequently volunteered with The Salvation Army and the American Red Cross, Moreno said she applied to UCR specifically because of its emphasis on community service.

“I like feeling like I’m making a difference,” Moreno said.

A member of various high school clubs and academic programs, the undeclared major said she will be spending her summer at the university campus taking part in a program that helps freshman transition into college life.

“You would think that after five years of hearing about college I would be fully prepared,” Moreno, an Achievement Via Individual Determination student, said, “but I’m more frightened than ever.”

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