A Reader Writes: I.V. University Partnership: Access and equity for students
By ANNE JOHNSON MALLORY
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As the county Superintendent of Schools, I am passionate about equity and access for all our students.

For years the Imperial County Office of Education has worked diligently with our partners in higher education and the business community in a collaborative effort called the P-16 Council. The focus of the council is to increase educational opportunities for students after high school graduation. The way it does this is by working closely with students and their families to ensure that they undertake appropriate coursework, complete college applications and explore financial aid options.

San Diego State University-Imperial Valley campus currently operates a small, four-year Freshman Program. Originally called the Freshman Scholars Program, it has been a source of local pride since its inception in the fall of 2003. Throughout this time there has been a fear or perception that the program might be eliminated at some point — not unreasonably, since it was explicitly established as a pilot program.

On March 27 this newspaper featured an article on the proposed Imperial Valley University Partnership, a collaborative effort undertaken by SDSU-IV, Imperial Valley College and the Imperial County Office of Education. The IVUP is a venue to ensure that local students continue to have access to a four-year degree locally at a reasonable cost. The initiative has the support of top administrators at SDSU-IV, IVC and ICOE, as well as the full support of the SDSU president and the chancellor of the California State University system. The IVUP will bring genuine, high-quality, four-year university education to the Imperial Valley on a permanent basis.

The IVUP offers students a large number of benefits beyond the existing Freshman Program. It will allow them to be part of a larger cohort of students, whereas the current cohort has only 37 students, the number eligible under the new model will start at 100 students with the possibility of expansion. Furthermore, the possibility exists for an increase in the number of majors offered.

This is extraordinary in difficult economic times when many public universities are reducing the number of student admissions. The IVUP guarantees that more local students will have the opportunity to be accepted into SDSU with lower tuition fees than is the case with the current Freshman Program,
something that equates to access and equity. Other IVUP benefits include guaranteed enrollment into courses as long as students follow the academic plan for their proposed majors and increased student life opportunities such as athletic facilities, cafeteria, on-campus health services and access to the academic and cultural resources on both campuses.

Education is vital to improving the quality of life in Imperial County. What we have in hand is an extraordinary opportunity to increase the number of our citizens with a baccalaureate degree from its current 11 percent to a number more comparable to the national average of almost 30 percent.

The Imperial Valley University Partnership is the best chance we have to do that. It is the best way for us to advance higher education here in Imperial County. What we need now is for each of you to get involved in making this amazing opportunity a reality. Our future depends on it. Our students deserve it.

ANNE JOHNSON MALLORY is the Imperial County Superintendent of Schools, El Centro.

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