

# College prep chief endorses A-G standards

*Disclosure: I am a donor to the Foundation for College Education, so I had access to its executive director for this column. They are not the only local organization that helps students get into college — the East Palo Alto College Network has at least 10 organizations in it, from the Stanford charter school to the Cleo Eulau Center.*



**PREEVA  
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Raising high school graduation requirements was the topic of a heated debate at a Palo Alto Unified School District board meeting on May 24.

The change was proposed to help close the achievement gap between students of color and others in the district.

Many parents opposed the change, and Palo Alto High School's math department wrote a letter to the board, asking trustees not to raise graduation requirements.

PTA Council President Louise Valente said she is concerned about the achievement gap and wonders why it exists.

"What fascinates me are the cultural differences among families, and how they affect

children's schooling," she said.

"Palo Alto is a two-tiered system," said Anna Waring, executive director of the Foundation for a College Education in East Palo Alto. "We have a system where educational privilege gets reproduced."

Waring sent the board a letter urging that the district adopt the A-G courses mandated by CSU and UC systems as minimum graduation requirements so that all students graduate with the proper coursework.

"What is set as the floor, too often becomes the ceiling," she wrote.

Parents outside the city assume that enrolling their children in the high-performing school district through its voluntary transfer program will put them on the path to higher education, according to Waring.

"Most are surprised and disappointed to discover that a school system like (Palo Alto Unified) could graduate students who are ineligible to enroll in a California public college or university," she wrote.

In an interview with School Matters, Waring noted that knowledgeable parents would rather get help for students struggling with a course that is key to getting into a state school than let

them drop it. Parents unfamiliar with the system often see a teacher or counselor's signature on a drop form, trust the professional's opinion and let their child drop the class.

"This year alone, (Foundation for a College Education) advocated on behalf of seven students whose (Palo Alto Unified) teachers and counselors were pressuring them to take less demanding classes and encouraging their parents to approve such changes," Waring said.

The foundation's goal is to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds get into and graduate college. Students come into the East Palo Alto office several times a week for homework help and tutoring, as well as assistance choosing a college and finding scholarship money. Between eight to 20 students graduate from the program each year.

The foundation is now looking for eighth graders who can start the program in September. To get into the program, students must answer essay questions, submit a letter of recommendation from a teacher and bring a parent for an interview.

A parent or a caring adult must come into the office with the student at least once a month.

For more information about the foundation, visit [www.collegefoundation.org](http://www.collegefoundation.org).