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UCLA Study Reveals Significant Challenges Facing Oxnard's Young Adults

Oxnard City Council to Review and Discuss Findings during Special City Council Meeting

OXNARD, Calif. – A significant study commissioned by the Oxnard City Council and conducted by the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC) that highlights the challenges and barriers facing young adults in Oxnard will be presented to the City Council during a special meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2024, from 6 - 8 p.m.

Utilizing federal funding from the American Rescue Plan, the City Council commissioned the UCLA CSRC to study the widening gap that was exacerbated by the pandemic between high- and low-income families, and the impacts to young people from lower-income and working-class backgrounds. Led by the UCLA CSRC Director, Professor Veronica Terriquez, the research draws on extensive data from the 2023–24 Thriving Youth Study (TYS), a youth-led initiative involving over 3,000 local residents aged 18 to 34.

“We know the majority of Oxnard’s working adults have little or no training and/or education beyond high school, which leads to many of our hard working families being in lower paying jobs without medical benefits, and our many employers without qualified local residents to fill their vacancies,” said City Manager Alexander Nguyen. “What we didn’t truly know is the underlying ‘why.’ This study provides current, objective data to help us understand.”

During the special City Council meeting, Dr. Terriquez will review key findings including:

- **Health and Education Disparities:** Young adults in Oxnard report poorer health outcomes and lower levels of educational attainment compared to their peers throughout California.
- **Career Aspirations vs. Reality:** While many young people in Oxnard aspire to higher education degrees and better jobs, they often lack the preparation and guidance needed to achieve these goals.

With nearly half of Oxnard’s population under the age of 35, the success of the community’s young people has major implications for the City’s future. The research found that 83% of young adults in Oxnard come from immigrant families, with many serving as translators and caregivers within their households. The time required to care for family responsibilities can limit their educational and professional opportunities.

Many young adults consider seeking higher education and better jobs, yet they often lack the preparation. Only 22% of Oxnard’s young adults have obtained a bachelor’s degree, compared to 41% statewide. The study notes that students from the Oxnard Union High School District (OUHSD) attend community college at higher rates than the state average (41% vs. 25%), but face low transfer rates to four-year institutions, with Oxnard College reporting the lowest transfer rate in Ventura County at 6.2% in 2022.

Employment rates for young adults in Oxnard are slightly above the state average (76% vs. 72%), but many are employed in low-wage industries with limited career growth, such as retail and agriculture.

Because 23% of study respondents identified as Indigenous from Mexico or Central America, the research also provides important insights into a segment of the Oxnard community that often faces significant economic hardships. Findings underscore the need to attend to the hopes, dreams, and needs of this linguistically diverse population.

While there are many barriers impacting the well-being of Oxnard's young adults, the study notes that civic, educational and health institutions have the opportunity to address the inequalities facing young adults. "Coordinated efforts by Oxnard's community stakeholders can counteract the broad systemic inequalities that constrain Oxnard's young population from thriving," says UCLA Professor Terriquez, lead author on the study.

Community members are encouraged to attend the special City Council meeting either in-person or virtually on Tuesday, October 8, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. Meeting details are available at www.oxnard.gov/citymeetings.

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