

Update on California Student Loan Debt Relief Workgroup

Background

Recognizing the need to address growing student loan debt burdens in the state, the Budget Act of 2020 established the California Student Loan and Debt Service Review Workgroup with an expressed charge of researching “implementable strategies and concepts that are focused on better ensuring that borrowers are able to access the most financially beneficial loan programs, most affordable repayment plans, and any available debt service forgiveness programs.” The Workgroup is tasked with preparing a report with recommendations for the California State Legislature and Department of Finance, due September 1, 2021.

Workgroup Membership

Consistent with SEC. 87. Item 6980-001-0001 of Section 2.00 of the Budget Act of 2020, the California Student Loan and Debt Service Review Workgroup consists of representatives from the California Department of Finance, the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC), and the Scholarshare Investment Board, along with three members of the public selected by CSAC based on their expertise in private, state and public loan programs. Members include:

- Dr. Lande Ajose, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom
- Dr. Sandy Baum, Urban Institute (Member of the Public Representative)
- Catalina Cifuentes, California Student Aid Commission Representative
- Chris Ferguson, California Department of Finance Representative
- Hal Geiogoue, Scholarshare Investment Board Representative
- Dr. Jamillah Moore, Cañada College (Member of the Public Representative)
- Bob Shireman, The Century Foundation (Member of the Public Representative)

Workgroup Activities to Date

The Workgroup first convened on October 28, 2020 to familiarize itself with its legislative charge and preview background information on student loan debt in California. CSAC staff, with the support of HCM Strategists, provides meeting facilitation and policy research support for the Workgroup. In its first meeting, the Workgroup established a set of norms to structure its work, including a regular meeting schedule.

The Workgroup is now meeting every six weeks to familiarize itself with the available research on various student loan debt issues, identify and vet recommendations for state action, and develop its culminating report. Each Workgroup meeting is conducted virtually via teleconference, following applicable California’s public meeting rules and COVID-19 related modifications established under the Governor’s Executive Order N-29-20. For each meeting, notice is issued to members of the public and meeting agendas and materials are publicly posted on the CSAC webpage:

www.csac.ca.gov/california-student-loan-and-debt-service-review-workgroup

To date, the Workgroup has met four times, including its first meeting on October 28, 2020. Meeting objectives and agenda highlights are detailed below:

Meeting #1: October 28, 2020 from 8:00 am - 10:00 am

Meeting Objectives

- Build shared understanding of the workgroup’s legislative charge, including deliverables and timeline
- Assess the landscape of student loan debt research and trends
- Determine which policy issue areas have most salience to workgroup charge and identify what additional information is needed for workgroup to fulfill its charge
- Establish workgroup norms and processes to inform workgroup planning

Agenda Highlights

- Workgroup introduction provided by Patrick Perry, CSAC
- Environmental research scan presented by Elizabeth Salinas, HCM Strategists
- Workgroup planning facilitated by Juana H. Sanchez, HCM Strategists and Patrick Perry

Meeting #2: December 10, 2020 from 8:00 am - 11:00 am

Meeting Objectives

- Build shared understanding of the existing body of research on student loan debt, including the available data disaggregated by student and institutional characteristics
- Establish evaluative criteria for workgroup to use in assessing possible policy recommendations

Agenda Highlights

- Research presentations provided by: Sandy Baum, Urban Institute; Debbie Cochrane, The Institute for College Access and Success; Hans Johnson, Public Policy Institute of California; and Bonnie Latreille and Kat Welbeck, Student Borrower Protection Center

Meeting #3: January 21, 2021 from 11:00 am - 2:00 pm

Meeting Objectives

- Understand the available research on early outreach and education practices that empower students and families in making informed borrowing decisions
- Begin to identify possible policy recommendations and ideas for state intervention and discuss those recommendations against the Workgroup’s established evaluative criteria

Agenda Highlights

- Expert panel on Early Outreach and Education with: Dr. Christiana Stoddard, Montana State University; ara Adan, Education Research Expert; Jaclyn Piñero, uAspire; and Jacob DuMez, City and County of San Francisco Office of Financial Empowerment
- Presentation on CSAC Early Outreach Programs provided by Catalina Mistler, CSAC

Meeting #4: March 5, 2021 from 8:00 am - 11:00 am

Meeting Objectives

- Understand the available research on student persistence and borrower protection
- Begin to identify possible policy recommendations and ideas for state intervention and discuss those recommendations against the Workgroup's established evaluative criteria

Agenda Highlights

- Expert panelists pending, as of February 5, 2021

Upcoming Workgroup Activities

The Workgroup will continue to meet virtually on a regular basis, approximately every six weeks through summer 2021 to develop its recommendations and final report. Sample meeting topics and objectives are outlined below but are subject to change, as the Workgroup refines areas of interest and priority.

Meeting Date	Topic	Meeting Objectives
Meeting #5 April 15, 2021 8:00 am – 11:00 am	Issue Area #3: Loan repayment and debt forgiveness	– Analyze existing evidence and identify possible policy recommendations of interest
Meeting #6 May 24, 2021 10:00 am – 1:00 pm	Issue Area #4: Private sector strategies, employer repayment assistance	– Analyze existing evidence and identify possible policy recommendations of interest
Meeting #7 July 7, 2021 10:00 am – 1:00 pm	Identify Final Recommendations	– Review policy recommendations against evaluative criteria – Approve final recommendations and report outline
Meeting #8 August 25, 2021 10:00 am – 1:00 pm	Report Review and Approval	– Approve final report and prepare for its submittal to the legislature

As it continues its important work, the Workgroup will continue to seek out opportunities to learn from content experts, hear from local stakeholder groups and engage with members of the public. Members of the public will continue to have opportunities to engage during regular meetings, as well as through structured public review and written comment periods to weigh in on the final set of recommendations and final report draft.