

Item 5

(Information Item)

Executive Director's Report



Executive Director's Report June 2022

Dear Commissioners,

Welcome to the California Student Aid Commission's (Commission) June 2022 meeting. This is a special meeting because it will be the first in-person meeting held since the onset of the pandemic. Many of our newer Commissioners have never met in person even though they have served for almost two years. We have also hit another Commission milestone; we have filled the 15th and final seat on the Commission with our newest Commission appointee. Please join me in welcoming Commissioner Audry Dow, Senior Vice President for the Campaign for College Opportunity. Commissioner Dow join us with extensive policy, political and communications expertise. She is knowledgeable about financial aid and higher education issues and will hit the ground running.

The Commission is quickly approaching its fiscal yearend. This entails significant work in closing out yearend fiscal activities, issuing final contracts and preparing for the beginning of the July 1 fiscal year. This is also the height of the Legislative and state budget season. Our team has been working tirelessly in the budget process to enact the Cal Grant Equity legislation and to advocate for new staff resources for the Commission to implement our many new responsibilities. Commission staff also have been hunkered down building many new and expanded programs.

New program development and implementation. As you recall in the 2021-22 State Budget Act, the Commission received more than a billion dollars in new resources to implement numerous new programs and program expansions. The Program

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Administration and Services Division and the Information Technology and Services Division, in particular, have been hard at work developing program details and building the technology backend components to these new and expanded programs, all within a short implementation period. I am pleased to announce that the staff have made major progress in implementing the following programs.

- **Middle Class Scholarship 2.0** – Under consideration in the current budget negotiations, is a proposed increase of \$515 million to \$632 million ongoing General Fund to support a modified version of the Middle Class Scholarship Program that will focus resources toward reducing a student's total cost of attendance for UC and CSU students. Commission Staff have been directed to develop this new program in anticipation that increased funding will be approved in the 2022-23 State Budget to fund the expansion. MCS 2.0 will be ready for full implementation this fall academic term.
- **UC Cohort-Based Tuition Model** – Beginning this fall, UC is converting to a [cohort-based](#) tuition model. Under this model, each incoming class of freshman and transfer students pays a greater amount than the class before. This requires the Commission to determine annual UC Cal Grant award amounts that will be different for each incoming class. Commission staff have convened regular meetings with UC and CSU staff and have reprogrammed the Cal Grant Delivery System to accommodate providing awards to cover this multi-year change in award levels for UC students.
- **Golden State Teacher Grant Program** – The Quick Start portion of this program was successfully launched in March of this year. To date, the Commission has received 3,990 applications, 2,400 students were deemed eligible and awarded (placed on campus rosters), and 321 certified by campuses for payments. Staff are working on phase 2 expansion of the program to serve a much broader universe of applicants by the beginning of the fall academic term. This effort involves: 1) developing the backend technology to support students currently not in the financial aid system, 2) launching an aggressive outreach effort to recruit candidates who lost their jobs and are not in the system; and 3) recruiting quality, non-higher education institutions on the Employment Training Panel List to participate in the program.
- **Learning-Aligned Employment Program** - Commission staff have completed the Institution Participation Agreement for colleges and universities to apply to participate in the learning aligned state work-study program. To date, 35 colleges and universities have applied. The program is scheduled to begin in the upcoming academic term. Colleges will be able to hire students for on-campus jobs that are research oriented, or off-campus jobs with employers that offer rich career experiences, particularly in technology and STEM-related fields. The Commission is working with higher education institutions and employers to help facilitate greater employer participation in this program.

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Universal FAFSA/CA Dream Act Application. Momentum is building to begin planning for full implementation of the new FAFSA/CA Dream Act Application completion requirement. The Commission convened a two, half-day College Affordability Summit in April that showcased the new law and uplifted best practices used by school districts and high schools to increase their completion rates. More than 1,000 participants registered for this event. We anticipate convening a follow-up version of the College Affordability Summit in the fall.

The Commission team is working hard to develop key resources that will help high schools meet this new requirement. We are hoping to receive new funds in the 2022-23 State Budget Act to expand educator training capacity and to increase the number of Cash for College in-person and virtual workshops. The team is engaged in an in-depth planning process to target our resources and support strategically throughout the state.

Cal Grant Equity Framework continues forward. After three years of hard work, funding for the Cal Grant Equity Framework is included in this year's Joint Legislative Budget package. The budget proposal, as reflected in AB 1746 (Medina, McCarty, Leyva), would eliminate equity barriers, streamline, and modernize the Cal Grant program. It would also provide predictability for students and families as they plan to finance their college educations. At the time of this writing, the Legislature and Governor are in the midst of budget negotiations, including the decision about whether to fund the Cal Grant Equity Framework.

The Commission and its co-sponsors – the Campaign for College Opportunity, the Student-organized Fix financial Aid Coalition and Unite-LA - have led a broad coalition of supporters generating significant supportive media coverage and elevating the issue as a top-tier priority in the Assembly. Adoption of this budget proposal would be historic for California and would lead the nation in demonstrating its commitment to invest in debt-free college and moving closer to achieving a 70 percent college attainment rate by the year 2030.

Thank you to the growing list of coalition supporters and to the legislative champions who have prioritized adoption of the Cal Grant Equity Framework in the 2022-23 budget.

Commission Undocumented Student Workgroup launched. The Commission convened its first workgroup to assess the challenges undocumented student face in applying for the California Dream Act Application and recommend solutions for increasing undocumented student participation in the Cal Grant Program. Three Commissioners are participating in the workgroup: Commissioners Charles Nies, Leonardo Rodriguez and Steve Ngo. The workgroup is being chaired by Jake Brymner, Commission Director of Policy and Public Affairs, and is being facilitated by the Raben Group based out of Los Angeles. There are 21 members of the workgroup representing a wide cross-section of lived experiences and policy and legal expertise.

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Budget Change Proposal. Commission staff have begun work on developing the 2023-24 Budget Change Proposal (BCP) requests. The priorities for the upcoming budget cycle include a request to seek up to 19 permanent positions to address critical needs, strengthening our cybersecurity protections, and enhancing our technology solutions. The full BCP proposal will be agendaized at the September Commission meeting.

Progress on CalFresh Reform. Earlier this year, the Commission released its CalFresh report – Proper Nutrition Equals Student Success: Making CalFresh Work for Students. This report offered several state and federal short and long-term policy solutions. As a result, the State Legislature is poised to publish data on access to CalFresh benefits. Over the fall, Commission staff will work with legislative budget staff and representatives from the County Welfare Directors Association to develop options and considerations for implementing a regional state pilot that provides a central portal for college students to apply and get approved for CalFresh benefits. There is also strong interest in looking at how the CA Dream Act Application can be utilized to help bring CalFresh access to undocumented students, as recommended in the report.

At the federal level, the Commission met with federal officials to brief them on the report and federal policy recommendations to improve student access to SNAP nutrition benefits. The U.S. Department of Education Under Secretary for Higher Education and representatives from the White House have expressed strong interest in working with the Commission to help move the agenda to increase college student access to CalFresh/SNAP benefits.

The following summarizes key updates from each division.

Program Administration and Services Division (PASD)

- Implemented the Chafee Grant Electronic Funds Transfer Project with the State Controller's Office is set to begin for the Fall 2022 term. This is a major break-through that will help foster youth receive their grants quickly.
- Will launch an improved Chatbot on the CSAC Homepage by the end of June in support of the Customer Assistance and Processing Unit.
- Gearing up to support high schools, school districts, and other educational agencies to implement the new requirement that high school seniors complete their financial aid application starting with the 2023-24 application season that opens October 1, 2022.
- Working with financial aid administrators to start the final reconciliation process for the 2021-22 Cal Grant and Middle Class Scholarship programs.
- Working with a subcommittee from the Financial Aid Advisory Board to update the 2023-27 Cal Grant Institutional Participation Agreement.

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Fiscal Administrative Services Division (FASD)

- Completed new facility move-in. Since the last update we've moved in, unpacked, got internet installed, cameras up, and badging is underway. Staff are now in the process of updating badges to begin hybrid work in the new office.
- Conducted Emergency Evacuation Training for all CSAC staff.
- Completing all yearend fiscal and contracting activities.
- Implemented new staff telework policy as approved by the Department of General Services and appropriate labor support.
- Overseeing development of Commission's 2023-24 Budget Change proposals.
- Undergoing triennial accreditation on contract authority with Department of General Services.
- Conducted final quarter presentation of budget forecast for FY 21-22 to CSAC.

Information Technology Services Division (ITSD)

- Completed transition of IT operations to our new location at 11120 International
- Completed Golden State Education and Training Grant quick start application – resulting in nearly 4K applications.
- Completed enhancement to the Middle-Class Scholarship program (2.0)
- Built-out Chaffee Award increase by \$1500 leveraging Federal COVID-19 funding
- Developed institutional support enhancement in GDS (MG21) to allow real-time data edit.
- Building-out California College Guidance Initiative (CCGI) Application Programming Interface (Rest API) to provide CaliforniaColleges.edu with real-time updates on student's financial aid application (full match only) expected for go live in June 2022.

Policy and Public Affairs Division (PPAD)

- Established the new Policy and Public Affairs division, bringing together the Government and External Relations team and the Outreach and Marketing team under one umbrella. This will improve coordination of communications and collaboration with external partners.
- Continue to engage in the State Budget process, leading to the inclusion of Cal Grant reform and other Commission priorities in the legislative version of the Budget, as well as several important trailer bill fixes in the May Revision.
- Released a [brief](#) that outlined the Cal Grant Equity Framework proposal and provided key data on its impact for students.

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- Advocated for Commission's sponsored and priority legislation, resulting in the unanimous approval by the Assembly of both CSAC sponsored bills, both on Cal Grant reform (AB 1746, Medina/McCarty/Leyva) and philanthropic funding authority (AB 2286, Irwin).
- Convened the first meeting of the Undocumented Student Affordability Work Group, bringing together financial aid and undocumented student support practitioners, with higher education and immigrant's rights advocates to identify key issues and opportunities to better serve undocumented students through the CA Dream Act Application and other efforts.
- Hosted by 2022 Marmaduke Award recognizing Norma Murillo from Orange Cove High School for her exemplary service to students
- Prepared new contracts for the Cal SOAP projects that will be considered at the Commission meeting.
- Transitioning outreach efforts toward the new September 2 deadline for CCC students and implementation of the new universal financial aid applications for high school students this October. Commission staff are partnering with the CCC Chancellor's Office to organize summer workshops targeting CCC students ahead of the Sept. 2 deadline.
- Traveled to Washington, DC to share findings and recommendations from the CSAC CalFresh Work Group report, including meetings with the Undersecretary of the US Department of Education and leadership at Federal Student Aid.

Data, Analysis, and Research Team (DART)

- Completed administration of the Student Expenses And Resources Survey (SEARS) to community college students in April. Currently contracting with Mathematica to perform response adjustments and calculation of Student Expense Budget 2023.
- California Student Opportunity and Access Program (Cal-SOAP) CRM system (Lacai) has been successfully uploaded with student unit records for students believed to be high school seniors in Fall 2022. This will be the first year that Cal-SOAP grantees will have this data uniformly and in a common CRM system.
- Completed three new 2021-22 reports that have been posted: Cal Grant program averages report, Cal Grant Offered Awardees Report, and Cal Grants by legislative district.

Legal Division

- Completed FAFSA/CADAA completion Opt-out form and acceptable use policy regulations approved by Office of Administrative Law (OAL) and will be effective July 1.
- Completed and submitted EdFund dissolution forms to Secretary of State. EdFund account closed, and monies transferred to CSAC per budget 2021-22 budget appropriation.

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- Continue to meet bi-weekly with PASD/Legal workgroup for ongoing rulemaking needs, including the permanent rulemaking for Golden State Teacher Grant Program and Community College Grade Point Average (GPA) verification regulations that will be agenda items in September, and meetings with OAL executive team to improve/clarify regulation approval process for CSAC regulations.
- Reviewed and approved CalSOAP contract extensions for Inland Empire projects.
- Developed student data and registration informed consent template language for Cash-for-college and text campaign to facilitate follow-up and outreach.

The Commission has been extremely busy ensuring that California college students have every opportunity to access financial aid resources that will help them succeed and graduate from college.

Best Regards,

Marlene L. Garcia