

Item 5

(Information Item)

Executive Director's Report



Executive Director's Report September 2022

Dear Commissioners,

Welcome to our September Commission meeting and welcome to our newest student Commissioner Alexis Takagi!

Fall is a busy time at the California Student Aid Commission (Commission). Commission staff are preparing for the opening of the upcoming financial aid application season on October 1. This year is especially important. The Commission is preparing for the new FAFSA/CA Dream Act completion requirement that goes into effect for the 2022-23 academic year. For the first time this year, all California high schools, districts and charter schools will be required to verify that their high school seniors have completed a FAFSA or a CA Dream Act Application, unless students formally opt out. California is only one of seven states in the country to adopt a FAFSA/CA Dream Act Application requirement. Several more states are considering adoption of some version of this requirement and are watching closely how California rolls out this initiative.

All In for FAFSA/CA Dream Act

In response to the new requirement, Commission staff have been working for months making preparations to prepare for the October 1 opening of the 2022-23 financial aid application season. Given the historic nature of the new law, the Commission has the opportunity to reach all students urging them to apply for financial aid. To reach students who may not be on the college preparation track and may not perceive themselves as "college bound," it is critical that the Commission, educators and

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community partners explain “why” completing the FAFSA or CA Dream Act Application is so important for their future. This will be a top priority for the Commission in the 2022-23 academic year and beyond.

Several in-house teams met earlier this year to initiate cross-departmental planning to leverage all resources and coordinate efforts behind the “All In for FAFSA/CA Dream Act” campaign. The Commission has started by developing a strategic plan for implementing this campaign.

The plan sets into motion several key strategies:

- Aggressively reach out to district superintendents to gain their support and commitment to implementing the All In for FAFSA/CA Dream Act Initiative (See attachment).
- Help districts leverage key community support in the “All In for FAFSA/CA Dream Act” by connecting them to key resources, such as Cal-SOAPs, Regional Coordinating Organizations, and local resources.
- Provide statewide social media and earned and paid media for local schools and districts to build upon.
- Target high schools with below 30 percent FAFSA/CA Dream Act Application completion rates to provide direct assistance in helping these students, parents and schools increase their financial aid application completion rates.

As part of the planning efforts, Commission staff have developed a set of resources available to high school educators and community partners.

- “Educator kits” that include numerous resources that help students complete their FAFSA or CA Dream Act Application.
- School personnel access to WebGrants FAFSA/CA Dream Act Application student-level completion data to target students who still need to complete their FAFSA or CA Dream Act Applications.
- “Train-the-Trainer” workshops for school-site officials or community groups to learn how to help students and families compete the FAFSA and CA Dream Act Application.
- Help setting up in-person Cash for College workshops or accessing virtual Cash for College workshops for students and their families.
- Branded social media kits and videos to help schools inform students about the importance of completing a FAFSA or a CA Dream Act Application.
- Showcase best practices used by other districts that have seen increases in their completion rates through webinars, workshops, and conferences.

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Commission staff are now in the process of making plans to host three October kick-off events to open the new financial aid application season. The three events will be held the first week in October in Los Angeles, Inland Empire and Oakland. The purpose of the events is to draw earned media attention to the launch of the new application season and to create excitement about the new All In Campaign. The goal is to create a culture change in high schools that all students have options for education beyond high school and there is financial aid to help them pay their costs.

Special thanks to all the staff who have been instrumental in this cross-divisional effort to buildout the All In for FAFSA/CA Dream Act Initiative and Campaign: Kristen Trimarche, Michael Lemus, Israel Flores, Jason Marti, Jenny Jang, Sal Villasenor, Synequeen Alasa-as, Jake Brymner, Judith Gutierrez, Jon Waldrop, Leslie Mathews, Yvonne Hollingsworth, Catalina Mistler, Tae Kang, Alessandra Morrison, and Victoria Viksne

President Biden's New Student Loan Relief Plan

As reported widely, President Joe Biden announced a [historic plan](#) that provides targeted student loan cancellation for borrowers most at risk of default. The plan cancels \$20,000 of federal student-loan debt for those who received a Pell Grant and \$10,000 for those earning less than \$125,000 a year. The plan also provides the final extension of the pause on federal student loan repayment until December 31, 2022. This provides time for borrowers to adjust to the new changes. These changes go into effect by Executive Order and do not require Congressional approval. Implementation details have yet to be released. We will keep you informed as we learn more.

Even though California is considered a low, student loan-debt state, the loan relief was happy news for many Californians. The Commission has used this as an opportunity to educate the public about the difference between grants and loans and how important it is to apply for a FAFSA or a CA Dream Act Application to take advantage of all grant aid before turning to loans. The Los Angeles Times ran a great [story](#) on the impact of the student loan cancellation action on Californians and nationally.

Golden State Education and Training Grant Program Goes Live!

The Commission launched full implementation of the Golden State Education and Training Grant Program late August. This program supports Californians who lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Eligible students may be awarded a one-time grant of \$2,500 for reskilling, up-skilling, and accessing educational programs to get back into the workforce.

This bold, new initiative provides grant aid to returning adult learners who can benefit from accessing education and training programs that provide new career skills without first formally applying for traditional financial aid. Governor Newsom and legislative leaders have been strong advocates of investing in adult learners interested in re-

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entering higher education to build a high-skilled workforce in California. Enabling more Californians to pursue higher education, re-skilling or upskilling helps address a critical gap in California's workforce talent pipeline.

The Student Aid Commission, in partnership with the Los Angeles Community College District and LA Southwest College, hosted a press event on Tuesday, August 30, celebrating the launch of the new initiative on the Southwest Community College campus.

Kudos to all the staff who were critical in helping launch this program, including Krishnee Shankar, Kat Kashcheeva, Tae Kang, Jake Brymner, Judith Gutierrez and Shelveen Ratnam.

Commission Leads CalFresh Panel at Annual SHEEO Conference

Executive Director Marlene Garcia and Policy and Public Affairs Director Jake Brymner recently lead a panel showcasing the Commission's CalFresh report at this year's Annual State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) Conference. The panel was moderated by HCM Associate Rachelle Sharpe and highlighted the Commission's state and federal policy recommendations regarding 1) how to better leverage data already collected in the FAFSA to streamline the application process for students, and 2) how to streamline CalFresh/SNAP requirements to help more college students access critically important federal nutrition benefits. The panel discussion also showcased best practices for other states to consider and the importance of coalescing around key solutions that can be adopted at the federal level. The Commission was also invited to present at the upcoming National Association of State Student Grant & Aid Programs (NASSGAP) Conference in October.

Undocumented Student Affordability Workgroup

The Commission will be convening its 4th Undocumented Student Affordability Workgroup facilitated by The Raben Group and Commission staff. The focus of this meeting is to discuss potential legislative vehicles for how California can help offset the lack of federal student aid available to undocumented students. It is also beginning the process of identifying policy recommendations to help make higher education more affordable for undocumented students to include in the final report to be released in early 2023, in time to introduce legislation in the 2023 legislative session.

Commission Staff Recognitions

The Commission recently held its annual Taco Fest for all staff to enjoy. The event drew close to 100 staff who came out to share in friendship, food and fun. Each division contributed a very generous, themed gift basket that was raffled off to the many lucky winners. This gathering also provided the opportunity to recognize outstanding CSAC employees who have gone well beyond their job descriptions to serve students. We were able to utilize a state program that recognizes outstanding staff performance and provides monetary gifts to the winners. Below are CSAC MVPs for 2022.

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FASD/IT Facility Move Team is our MVP winner for the \$250 per person Group Superior Accomplishment Award

Over the course of roughly 18 months, CSAC's Facility Move team worked daily across divisions to ensure the agency experienced a seamless transition into our new facility without major interference to CSAC programs and operations. There was very little interference and minimal impact on our programs. The team carried out this challenging work with patience, poise, and a proactive customer service approach all while juggling normal workload.

Winners include:

- Jennifer Donoho, Procurement & Facilities Analyst
- Lucas Lopez Gill, Procurement & Facilities Analyst
- Anthony Chavarria, System Administrator
- Arthur Herrawley, Network Administrator
- Nolan Jennings, IT Service Desk Lead
- Jose Montes, Telecommunication Engineer
- Jason Brown, IT Help Desk Associate
- Tony Gomez, IT Help Desk Associate

Jon Waldrep, Financial Aid Training Specialist is our MVP winner for the \$500 Individual Superior Accomplishment Award

Jon is one of the lead analysts on the Training team at the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC). Jon has been with CSAC for eight years and has always provided exemplary service in every area that he has worked. Jon's passion and wit when presenting these workshops has made them extremely popular. He works tirelessly on coordinating these workshops and establishing partnerships with other organizations all for the good of the students of California and all while mentoring new staff and assisting other units at CSAC without hesitation.

MVP Honorable Mentions

Commission staff are dedicated to their jobs and the mission of making college affordable for California students statewide. But some staff rise above what is expected in performing their work duties. The following staff have been nominated as outstanding contributors as they often go beyond the call of duty to perform their jobs in service to students. They all work hard, fast and smart in their daily jobs.

- Jeff Santos, Institutional Support Analyst
- Briana Antolini, Program Specialist

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- Carina Gillis, Program Specialist
- Amy Eberhardt, Institutional Support Specialist
- Libby Rafferty, School Support Services Analyst
- Synequeen Alasa-as, Legal Research Analyst
- Daniela Rodriguez, Assistant Legislative Analyst
- Ryan Fuller, Research Specialist

All winners, including honorable mentions, will be invited to lunch with the Executive Director and Chief Deputy Director in September to be honored for their outstanding service.

The following summarizes key updates from each division.

Program Administration and Services Division (PASD)

- Worked in partnership with members from the Financial Aid Advisory Board and school segment representatives to update the Cal Grant Institutional Participation Agreement (IPA) and presented the 2023-27 Cal Grant IPA draft for public comment on July 21, 2022, which received positive feedback.
- Reached a 100% paid rate for the 2021-22 Cal Grant Competitive program on August 5, 2022.
- Returned to in-person Annual Statewide Financial Aid Workshops throughout the state hosting 70+ free workshops, offered in partnership with the California Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (CASFAA) and the California Community Colleges Student Financial Aid Administrators Association (CCCSFAAA). Close to 3,500 participants had registered by August 12 after registration opened in early August.
- Expanded the Golden State Teacher Grant program (GSTG) to include students enrolled in Pupil Preparation Programs pursuant to AB 181, the Education omnibus trailer bill of 2022. This included making all the program adjustments, such as the GSTG online application, the GSTG Overview for Students website, the GSTG Overview for Institutions website, and the Service Agreement.
- Updated the Student Support and WebGrants 4 Students inserts in the Educator Financial Aid Toolkit for the All In FAFSA/CA Dream Act campaign.

Fiscal Administrative Services Division (FASD)

- Completed Fall budget drills with Department of Finance (DOF).
- Completed Budget Change Proposals (BCP) for September submission to DOF.

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- Finalized Yearend close!
- Processed LAEP claims for prior and current years, and processed Chafee reimbursements.
- Completing California Indian Nations College transfer/payment
- Processed numerous high-priority program contracts, such as Cash for College, Cal-SOAPS, Foundation for CA Community Colleges for Golden State Education and Training marketing/outreach
- Processed high-priority IT contracts for critical work so support roll-out of new programs and modifications.
- Procured freestanding furniture for open layout in headquarters office lobby.
- Completed updated Telework policy with concurrence from labor unions.
- Completed variety of mandatory HR trainings.
- Working on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) for December Commission Meeting

Information Technology Services Division (ITSD)

- Completed GSETGP long application and specialized application for students without a social security or CADAA application on file.
- Implemented a Cohort-based tuition model that assess varying system wide fees, dependent on the academic year when the student entered the UC system and as approved by the UC Board of Regents in July 2021.
- Completed the legislative mandates for MCS awards using a revised formula and will be based on the Cost of Attendance.
- Completed awarding of an additional \$1500 for Chafee students because of the increased Covid funding of \$6M during the academic year 2021-2022.
- Completed changes to include Foster Youth Access (FYA) or Students with Dependent (SWD) awards to students attending Private Non-Profit Institutions, as per the recently enacted 2022-23 State Budget.
- Completed the feature where the Institutions would be able to view student information that was used in Cal Grant awarding and able to make standard changes to student information in real-time, bypassing the need to submit a G-21 to the Commission.

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- Completed enhancements of the existing Foster Youth Challenge report, with features requested by the counties.
- Completed changes to the Golden State Teacher Grant features that were immediately needed due to legislative updates.
- Launched the new Ocelot Chat bot. In one month (7/26-8/26) the chat bot has taken 22,610 questions from users who have interacted with the bot!
- Completed AV set up in Board Room for Zoom, Teams, Live Broadcast, and PIP.
- Installed, tested, and made operational the CSAC Bright Sign Digital Media System.

Policy and Public Affairs Division (PPAD)

- The final 2022-23 State Budget was enacted, including the adoption of the Cal Grant Equity Framework with a “revenue trigger” along with other key priorities sought by the Commission, such as additional ongoing funding for additional staff positions and permanent funding for the Inland Empire Cal- SOAP project.
- The Governor signed the Commission’s sponsored bill (AB 2286) to authorize the Commission to receive and manage philanthropic funding
- Commission staff convened a strategic planning retreat in Rancho Cordova with the Cal-SOAP project directors and representatives from Regional Coordinating Organizations (RCOs). A major focus was to plan for the All In for FAFSA/CA Dream Act Campaign.
- Outreach and Marketing team has worked cross-divisionally to develop new materials and resources for K-12 partners as part of the “All In” campaign effort.
- Hosted a press event on Aug. 30 in LA at Southwest College to launch the Golden State Education & Training Grant Program
- Participated in numerous conferences and panels to discuss the Commission’s CalFresh report and policy recommendations at several state and national forums.
- Convened several Undocumented Student Affordability Work Group meetings. Commission staff, working with the Raben Group, also facilitated a student focus group and discussion with Cal-SOAP and RCO staff to help inform the ensuing report.
- Released the application for the next Marmaduke Award – nominations are being accepted until Oct. 1.

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Data, Analysis, and Research Team (DART)

- Completed Student Expenses and Resources Survey (SEARS) for the 21-22 cycle.
 - 24k survey responses were received this cycle compared to 18,600 in 2018-19.
- The Commission and California Department of Education (CDE) have recently completed two data sharing Memorandums of Understanding (MOU). The agreement includes sharing data at least once weekly starting this Fall. This will enable a much more frequently updated view of the status of FAFSA/CA Dream Act Completion for high school seniors, along with foster youth.
- The Commission and CDE are still working on finalizing a data sharing MOU that will populate Customer Relations Management (CRM) systems used by California Student Opportunity and Access Program (Cal-SOAP) grantees.
- The CA Policy Lab (CPL) at UC Berkeley, in partnership with the Commission, California Department of Social Services (CDSS), and the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), recently received a prestigious IES grant to study:
 - the extent to which college students access existing safety net benefits to meet their basic needs,
 - how those benefits affect their educational outcomes, and
 - how information about existing usage patterns can inform future efforts to increase take-up and improve student success.
 - CPL has developed the first database of linked, student-level data on social safety net program participation, higher education enrollment, and financial aid receipt in California.

Legal Division

- Two Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with California Department of Education (CDE) related data for the FAFSA Completion requirements have been agreed to. These MOUs will assist CDE in completing its obligations with respect to Foster Youth and the California Student Aid Commission's (Commission) obligations with respect to the broader requirement.
- The EdFund dissolution request has been approved by the Secretary of State's office. The last two boxes to be checked for this to be finalized are confirmation from the Attorney General's Office and the Franchise Tax Board.

Best Regards,

Marlene L. Garcia

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ATTACHMENT(S):

All In For FAFSA/CA Dream Act Completion Initiative

All In FAFSA/CA Dream Act Application Fact Sheet