

# Item 14

(Information Item)

## Update on Undocumented Student Affordability Workgroup

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**SUMMARY:**

This item provides an update on the progress of the Undocumented Student Affordability Workgroup convened by the California Student Aid Commission (Commission).

**RECOMMENDATION:**

This is an information item; no action is required.

**BACKGROUND:**

Guided by its mission to make postsecondary education affordable for all Californians, the Commission has sought opportunities to address the financial aid needs of undocumented college students and build on California's historical commitment to expanding access to this student population. In July 2020, then-Executive Fellow, Teresita Martinez, presented to the Commission a detailed landscape of undocumented California college students' existing financial aid access and limitations. The alarming findings of this July 2020 presentation served as the catalyst for the Commission to call on staff to convene a workgroup for further exploration.

With support from the College Futures Foundation, the Commission retained The Raben Group, a national public affairs and strategic communications firm, to facilitate a workgroup of a diverse range of experts representing campus practitioners from each segment, higher education leaders, immigrant rights advocates, and student leaders. The workgroup was charged with undertaking a pipeline analysis to help identify solutions to enhance the California Dream Act Application (CADAA), administrative practices, and other affordability proposals so that more undocumented students can successfully access financial aid and achieve their higher educational goals.

The Raben Group and Commission staff facilitated six workgroup meetings between June and November. Throughout the meetings, the workgroup identified several financial aid and college affordability challenges among undocumented college students, especially in light of the growing undocumented student population excluded from the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. One key finding was that students at both the high school and college level continue to receive inaccurate information or guidance on the CADAA and the nonresident tuition exemption process, often referred to as the "AB 540 affidavit." There is also a lack of

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coordination among various campus departments, especially between admissions and the financial aid offices, causing undocumented students to be shuffled around while also putting strain on Dream Resource Centers. Additionally, undocumented students continue to be excluded from federal financial aid programs, like the Pell Grant. The inability for many undocumented students to access paid employment opportunities during and after college both compounds the challenges created by the limited financial aid available to them and can often prompt questions about the value of higher education itself.

In addition to supporting the workgroup process, the Raben Group staff have helped gather further background and supplemental information through the facilitation of undocumented student focus groups, discussion with the project directors from organizations funded through the California Student Opportunity and Access Program (Cal-SOAP) and Regional Coordinating Organizations (RCO's), as well as stakeholder interviews with the national experts on immigration and higher education issues.

With the assistance of The Raben Group, the Commission will release a report summarizing the workgroup's findings and policy recommendations in early 2023, in preparation for potential enhancements to the CADAA as it is adapted to reflect forthcoming changes to financial aid from the FAFSA Simplification Act, as well as to inform state policy discussions in the 2023-24 legislative session. The forthcoming report will include several policy recommendations at a campus, state, federal, and Commission administrative level.

**RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S):**

Jake Brymner, Deputy Director  
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The Raben Group