

Item 15

(Action Item)

District requests to postpone financial aid application deadline,
pursuant to Education Code Section 69513.2

SUMMARY:

California Education Code (CEC) Section 69513.2 authorizes the California Student Aid Commission (Commission) to grant an additional 30 calendar days beyond an application deadline for any financial aid program under its administration, if the Commission finds that a qualifying event meets the criteria specified in CEC Section 69513.2.

Sweetwater Union High School District is requesting postponement of the March 2nd financial aid application deadline due to a Cyber-attack on their network. The Cyber-attack occurred on February 12, 2023, and impacted internet, student information systems, transcripts, and learning platforms. Email and other systems were fully restored on February 26, 2023. The Commission was notified of these events in a letter dated March 3, 2023, which was after the California Student Aid Commission meeting agenda was posted on February 23, 2023.

Lake Tahoe Community College District is requesting postponement of the March 2nd financial aid application deadline on behalf of Lake Tahoe Community College (LTCC) and Lake Tahoe Unified School District (LTUSD) due to a severe blizzard beginning on February 26, 2023, and lasting through February 28, 2023. Both LTCC and LTUSD were forced to close both onsite and remote operations. The Commission was notified of these events in a letter dated March 3, 2023, which was after the California Student Aid Commission meeting agenda was posted on February 23, 2023.

California Government Code (Gov) Section 11125.3 permits a state body to take action on items of business not appearing on the posted agenda if by majority vote that an emergency situation exists, as defined in Gov Section 11125.5, or that there exists a need to take immediate action and that the need for action came to the attention of the state body subsequent to the agenda being posted as specified in Gov Section 11125.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Commission 1) determine there is a need to take immediate action on this item, brought to the attention of the Commission subsequent to the agenda being posted on February 23, 2023, 2) find that the Cyber-attack on the Sweetwater Union High School district is a qualifying event and that this event has severely impacted the

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ability of the students within the school district to successfully complete and submit their financial aid application by the March 2nd priority deadline, 3) find that the blizzard that impacted Lake Tahoe Community College and Lake Tahoe Unified School District is a qualifying event and that this event has severely impacted the ability of the students within the school district to successfully complete and submit their financial aid application by the March 2nd priority deadline, and 4) grant the request for a 30-day extension of the 2023-24 March 2nd state financial aid application deadline.

BACKGROUND:

Government Code Section 11125.3 allows the Commission to take action on an item of business not appearing on the posted agenda upon a determination by two-thirds of the state body, or if less than two-thirds of the members are present, a unanimous vote of those members present, that there is a need to take immediate action and the need for action came to the attention of the state body subsequent to the agenda being posted.

Current statute allows the Commission to grant up to an additional 30 calendar days beyond an application deadline for any financial aid program under its administration if both of the following conditions are met:

1. The Commission receives a formal request to postpone the application deadline from either the superintendent of a school district or community college district or from the president or chancellor of a California institution of higher education that is eligible to receive state funds for student financial assistance.
2. The Commission finds that a qualifying event, including but not limited to, natural disasters, state of emergency declared by the Governor or President of the United States, labor actions, or any event or extenuating circumstance outside of the students' control that, in the judgment of the Commission, has had an adverse effect on their ability to successfully complete and submit their financial aid applications by an established statutory deadline.

Late last week, Commission staff were notified that two school districts were requesting to postpone the March 2 financial aid application deadline pursuant to Education Code section 69513.2 due to qualifying events which severely impacted students and their ability to complete their financial aid applications.

Sweetwater Union High School District

In its letter dated March 3, 2023, the Sweetwater Union High School district details a Cyber-attack on their network which severely impacted students and their ability to access the FAFSA website before the March 2nd application deadline. Students could not use their District provided devices anywhere due to the settings requiring net filtering and authentication. Open labs for one-on-one assistance with Counselors were severely limited or could not be conducted during the outage. Students could not communicate with Counselors for guidance and assistance with their applications.

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Events to support FAFSA completion were canceled because of the outage. These include a FAFSA workshop for students and parents, a FAFSA/CADAA Spanish Language workshop, and planned FAFSA presentations during select Senior courses. Advisors from universities, Upward Bound, Talent Search and Cal-Soap were unable to meet with students and assist with completing the FAFSA.

The district was unable to access their database and had no access to student records including grade point averages and schedules. The district could not upload the appropriate information for its seniors to the Commission. Access to WebGrants and FAFSA reports were unavailable as well.

Due to the unprecedented and crippling effects of the Cyber-attack on the Sweetwater Union High School district and its students, Commission staff recommends granting the 30-day extension requests of the 2023-24 March 2 state financial aid application deadline.

Lake Tahoe School District

In its letter dated March 3, 2023, the Lake Tahoe Community College District details a severe blizzard beginning on February 26, 2023, and lasting through February 28, 2023, which severely impacted students and their ability to access the FAFSA website before the March 2nd application deadline. Both LTCC and LTUSD were forced to close both onsite and remote operations. Families in the area do not readily have access to the tools and technology that would allow students to complete their application. Cell phone service and internet access are not universally available, and many students rely on the ability to use technology on-site at their school. Even now, travel is still affected due to the volume of snow.

Students in the district were unable to obtain in-person or remote assistance to complete the FAFSA/CADAA application due to severe weather conditions. A financial aid workshop at LTCC was canceled due to inclement weather, one-to-one FAFSA/CADAA assistance at Mt. Tallac High School was canceled because of a blizzard warning, and lunchtime FAFSA assistance for TRiO at South Lake Tahoe High School was canceled due to unsafe driving conditions.

Due to the extreme weather events during the end of February 2023 and its severe impact on students, staff, and the larger community surrounding Lake Tahoe, Commission staff recommends granting the 30-day extension requests of the 2023-24 March 2 state financial aid application deadline.

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RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S):

Tae Kang, Deputy Director
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Terry Artica, Assistant Deputy Director
Program Administration and Service Division

Julia Blair, General Counsel
Executive Office

ATTACHMENT(S):

Sweetwater Union High School District Request for Extension
Lake Tahoe School District Request for Extension