

Item 12

(Information Item)

Update on the College Affordability Summit

SUMMARY:

This item provides information on the upcoming California College Affordability Summit (Summit): Building Bridges and Breaking Barriers which is co-hosted by the California Student Aid Commission (Commission), the Riverside County Office of Education, and the Education Trust-West. The 4th Annual Summit will be held on November 7-8, 2023, at the Riverside Convention Center in Riverside, California.

Each year, the Summit has been designed to equip K-12 educators, higher education partners and policy advocates with tools, best practices, and training to prepare students and schools for the financial aid application season. The Summit gives K-12 and higher education administrators an opportunity to connect and learn about programs that help families and students become better prepared to maximize financial aid opportunities and successfully make the transition from high school to college.

Topics covered at this year's Summit will include updates on the Better Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and enhanced CA Dream Act Application (CADAA), best practices for increasing FAFSA/CADAA completion rates, effective ways to support Undocumented students, and strategies to address basic needs for students in higher education. The 2022-23 FAFSA/CADAA Race to Submit ceremony will also be included to celebrate the top winning schools for their high completion rates.

RECOMMENDATION:

This is an information item; no action is required.

BACKGROUND:

The California College Affordability Summit began in 2019 to provide educators, administrators, partners and policy advocates and leaders with information and resources on the importance of financial aid and its ability to increase college access, enrollment, and persistence. The in-person Summit provided tools and resources for practitioners to help students prepare for college. It also serves as a unique opportunity for educators and advocates to gather and share their expertise and best practices with other school leaders and administrators to increase college going rates for low to middle income students. After its first successful year, the Summit became an annual event that provided a forum for K-12 and higher education experts to maximize

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partnership efforts and work together to prepare students for educational opportunities beyond high school.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic years halted in-person events and raised additional concerns for schools across the nation as college enrollment and financial aid applications decreased. The inability to reach out directly to students brought new challenges for K-12 educators and higher education partners. California, along with many other states, developed strategies to address enrollment declines by removing admission requirements such as SAT and ACT scores, extending college and financial aid application deadlines and removing long standing requirements to provide emergency aid and online learning to students. While many of these one-time exceptions may have alleviated some stress for students and schools, there were still concerns as to whether students would be encouraged to apply for college and financial aid.

The annual Summits from 2020 through 2022 were held virtually. These platforms allowed participants to share the difficulties they were facing in reaching and connecting with students. This platform allowed them to network with other practitioners and experts who identified solutions to navigate through the challenges that COVID-19 presented. Despite the Summits being held virtually, many attendees found them to still be helpful and expressed interest for future Summits.

The 2023 Summit will be the first in-person Summit since the pandemic. The many sessions offered over the 2-day Summit will feature latest updates from higher education segments, community leaders, students and other experts in college opportunity and access. More importantly this year, the Summit will focus on the significant changes to the Better FAFSA and enhanced CADAA. Many high school counselors and financial aid administrators will need support and training to understand the new FAFSA and CADAA changes and the impact to their work and support to students in completing the applications.

As co-convenors, Riverside Office of Education, EdTrust West and Commission staff will be instrumental in organizing and leading workgroups. This Summit is being underwritten by the Riverside County Office of Education, EdTrust West, ECMC and many other generous supporters.

RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S):

Catalina Mistler, Chief Deputy Director
Executive Office