

California Student Aid Commission
Data, Research and Strategic Planning Committee

Item 6

(Information Item)

Update on CalFresh studies and activities

SUMMARY:

In today's presentation, the California Policy Lab (CPL) will present its estimates of how many California Community College and University of California students are eligible for CalFresh benefits, and how many of those eligible participate (take-up). In particular, CPL will highlight the role that the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) data plays in these estimates.

RECOMMENDATION:

This is an information item; no action is required.

BACKGROUND:

Across California, many college students struggle to meet their basic needs while attending school. State agencies, colleges, and universities are well-situated to help connect students to safety-net benefits. However, data limitations have historically been a large obstacle to assessing eligibility and then encouraging eligible students to apply and enroll.

Since the release of the 2022 report on college students accessing SNAP/CalFresh, the California Student Aid Commission (Commission) has supported policy and programmatic efforts to pursue or implement recommendations from the report. The Commission supported legislation that required colleges to notify potentially eligible students that might qualify for CalFresh and how to apply, as well as legislation to create a student focused CalFresh dashboard hosted by the CA Department of Social Services with data on demographics, reasons for application denials, participant ethnicity and utilized exemptions to the student role. Commission staff have also presented to groups in California and nationwide on these issues, held webinars on the topic, and joined a nationwide coalition of organizations focused on basic needs for college students, including SNAP/CalFresh.

At the federal level, the Commission has presented information to U.S. Dept of Education Undersecretary James Kvaal on including a place on the FAFSA for students to op-in to all social service programs they may be eligible for, based on income

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reported on the form. This January, a team from the Commission met with the Government Accountability Office to assist in their study on how students access SNAP, outreach efforts and data that would improve outcomes for students.

The Commission has worked with multiple research groups to improve outreach to students on program eligibility and to mitigate data silos. One such research group has been the California Policy Lab (CPL). CPL generates research insights for government impact. Through hands-on partnerships with government agencies, CPL performs rigorous research across issue silos and builds the data infrastructure necessary to improve programs and policies that millions of Californians rely on every day.

For the past few years, CPL has been working with the Commission, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), the University of California Office of the President (UCOP), the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), and most recently the California Department of Education (CDE) to link data from these agencies and create the Student Supports database. To maintain student privacy, CPL developed a process to link individual-level data from multiple agencies without receiving personally identifiable information (PII), in which agencies first encrypt the PII using a hashing technique before transferring any data.

RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S):

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ATTACHMENT(S):

Prestation on Student CalFresh Eligibility and Take-Up Rates