

# Item 12

## (Information Item)

### Update on 2020-21 FAFSA CADAA application award cycle

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#### **SUMMARY:**

This report provides an update on the 2020-21 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the California Dream Act Application (CADAA) application period for Cal Grant award consideration from October 1, 2019 to March 2, 2020. Following the opening of the FAFSA and the CADAA on October 1, 2019, the Commission began processing students for Cal Grant High School Entitlement award consideration on December 20, 2019 and has offered more than 155,034 new 2020-21 high school entitlement awards as of April 20, 2020.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

This is an information item; no action is required.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

Beginning with the 2017-18 academic year, the FAFSA application period began on October 1 of each year and runs through June 30 of the following year (in prior years, the FAFSA opened on January 1). This timeframe allows students more time to evaluate their potential financial aid resources while applying to college.

Students report income information from an earlier tax year, minimizing the need for students to estimate and correct tax information. This also facilitates the utilization of the Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) Data Retrieval Tool to automatically import the tax information into the FAFSA.

The CADAA was launched during the 2013-14 Cal Grant application period following the passage of the California Dream Act in 2011, to allow undocumented students the ability to apply for state financial aid. The CADAA is administered by the California Student Aid Commission and follows the same filing timeline as the FAFSA for Cal Grants and other state financial aid programs. Over the last few years, legislation has expanded student eligibility, from early graduation at a California high school to California Community College attendance and the attainment of an associate degree among others as specified in California Education Code section 68130.5.

Commission staff continues to collaborate with campus financial aid administrators, segmental offices, high school counselors and other advocates to assist and support Dream Act students in applying for state financial aid through the CADAA.

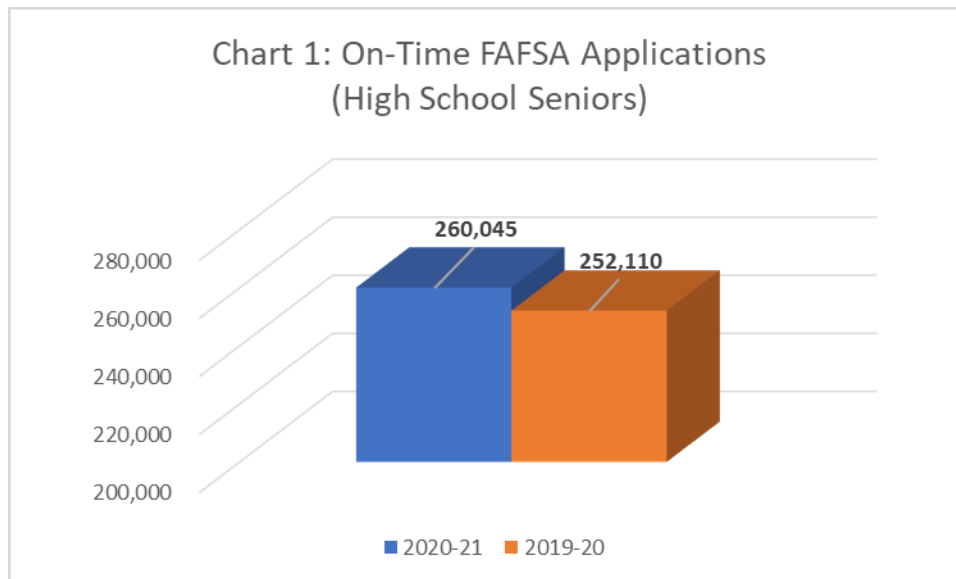
#### **ANALYSIS:**

##### **2020-21 Financial Aid Applications**

FAFSA applications increased year-over-year for first-time high school students graduating in 2020. Chart 1 shows the number of completed FAFSA applications as of the first week of March for the 2020-21 and 2019-20 application years. The FAFSA submission rate for graduating high school

## California Student Aid Commission

seniors increased by three percent or about 8,000 applications when compared to the prior application season. Completed applications are those that have generated a valid Expected Family Contribution and can be processed for Cal Grant award consideration.



This is a significant trend. California increased its 2020 FAFSA completion for high school seniors, while during the same period the national trend was down by 2 percent. Moreover, California high school enrollment declined by one percent during this time period, another indicator that could suggest a decrease in FAFSA completions for high school students.

This increase may be attributed to the Commission's ongoing commitment to increase outreach to schools in communities with high percentages of low-income students and low college participation rates. The Commission has also leveraged key partnerships to increase awareness of the financial aid opportunities available to students in California, such as hosting Cash for College workshops for students and their families and statewide financial aid workshops for counselors, school administrators and student advocates. In addition, the Commission's Race to Submit Dashboard encourages all California public high schools and districts to view, track and increase their FAFSA/CADAA applications and Cal Grant award counts each year. The Commission and other partners celebrate and recognize the success of schools that make significant strides in increasing FAFSA/CADAA completion by the March 2 deadline.

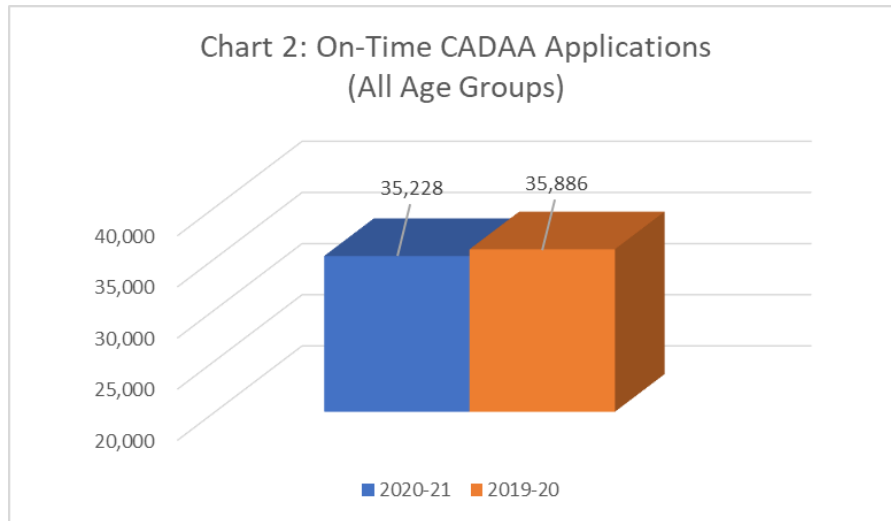
In contrast, CADAA applications decreased by two percentage points when compared to 2019-20. This could be in part explained by the one percent decrease in senior enrollment for the 2020-21 academic year as well as the uncertainty amidst the current political climate that make Dream Act students and their families hesitant to complete the financial aid application.

Some of the unique financial aid challenges that have been identified for Dream Act students include: understanding their eligibility and making preparations to cover any financial gap remaining from their total Cost of Attendance, since they do not qualify for federal financial aid. Students must also distinguish between the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy and the CADAA, and manage the uncertainty of providing parent or personal information for fear that the information could be used to compromise their immigration status.

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Commission staff are working with dreamer resource personnel and immigrant rights groups to help provide a safe environment for undocumented students to complete their CADAA applications during the next cycle.

Chart 2 compares the number of CADAA applications received by the March 2, 2020 Cal Grant and Middle-Class Scholarship deadline against the applications received from the previous year at this same point in time.

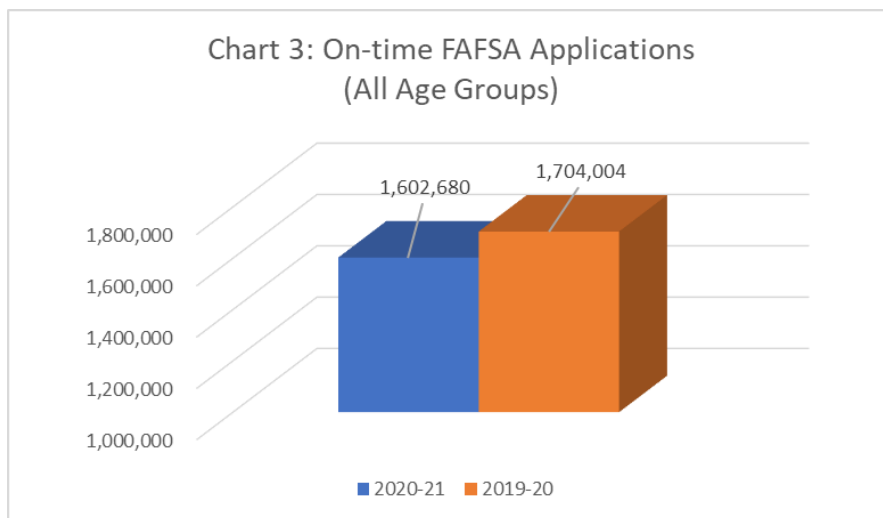


The overall number of FAFSAs completed from all age groups is down by six percent when compared to the 2019-20 application year. These figures encompass FAFSA filers from all age groups, not just high school seniors.

This is a more challenging group of students to target. They are typically older/non-traditional students who may not be affiliated with an education institution and, therefore, hard to reach. Many of these students have until the September 2<sup>nd</sup> FAFSA/CADAA application deadline, if they are planning on attending a California Community College or are renewal students are not tied to the March 2 submission deadline. Commission staff will continue to analyze trends in FAFSA/CADAA application submissions and develop more strategic outreach to this older/nontraditional population in an attempt to increase participation.

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As shown in Chart 3, the Commission received 1,602,680 FAFSAs by the March 2, 2020 Cal Grant and Middle-Class Scholarship deadline. This is a six percent decrease when compared to the same period in 2019-20.



### Grade Point Average (GPA) Data

The Commission has received approximately 99 percent of expected GPAs for public schools and over 70 percent from private schools for class of 2020. There are approximately 4,400 remaining high school seniors who still need to submit GPAs to complete their application. They have until May 18 to submit their GPAs. These GPA submission numbers are consistent with the prior application year with a slight increase in GPA submissions from private schools.

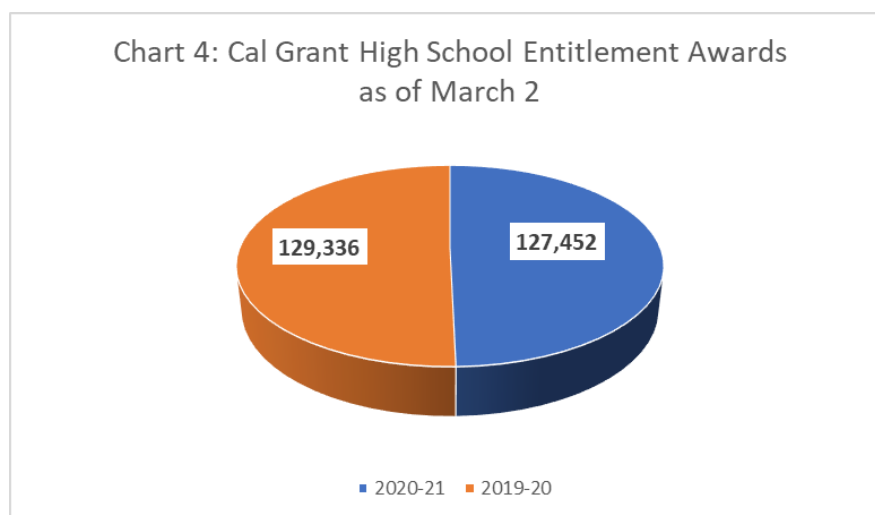
Although private high schools are not mandated by law to submit senior GPAs, the Commission continues to encourage them to submit and communicate the benefits of receiving consideration for the Cal Grant and other state financial aid programs. Efforts to increase timely GPA submissions throughout the 2020-21 application period included, but were not limited to:

- Customer support to high schools, school districts and counties through phone and email.
- Training through live and recorded webinars, as well as in-person training.
- Statewide Financial Aid Workshops in partnership with the California Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (CASFAA) and the California Community College Financial Aid Administrators Association (CCCSFAAA).
- Communications through the Commission's List-Serv. Several Grant Operations Memos and Grant Special Alerts were released throughout the 2020-21 application season. These communications included reminders of high school deadlines per California Education Code section 69432.9 related to GPA electronic submissions, opt-out provisions for students, high school graduation verifications, as well as available trainings.

# California Student Aid Commission

## Cal Grant High School Entitlement Awards

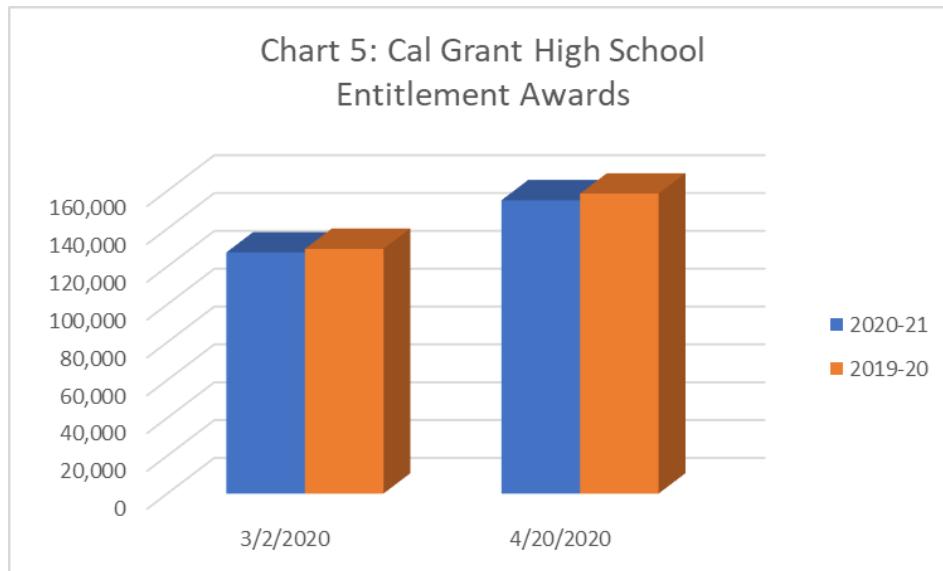
The Commission ran its initial High School Entitlement award cycle on December 20, 2019. As of April 20, 2020, new high school entitlement awards have been offered to **155,034 students**. Chart 4 provides an overview of the number of 2020-21 and 2019-20 high school entitlement award offers to FAFSA and CADAA applicants by the **March 2 deadline**. Year-over-year there was a nominal 0.7 percent decline Cal Grant Entitlement offers.



**Chart 5** provides a comparison of the number of additional award offers made between **March 2 and April 20** for both academic years. During this period, there was a 22 percent increase for award offers for 2020-21 awards compared to a 23 percent increase for 2019-20 awards. Even though there was a flurry of new awards offered, this is still slight decline in Cal Grant Entitlement offers year-over-year.

Cal Grant awards offered after the March 2 deadline typically come from students who completed their applications on-time, but were missing a parent signature or needed corrections in order to generate a valid expected family contribution. Students also have the opportunity to appeal to receive Cal Grant award consideration, if circumstances beyond their control prevented them from completing their Cal Grant application (FAFSA/CADAA and GPA) by the March 2 deadline.

## California Student Aid Commission



### Cash for College Workshops

Cash for College (CFC) workshops provide hands-on assistance to low-income and first-generation students and parents to complete the FAFSA, CADAA, and Chafee Grant applications through partnerships with local and regional organizations. Cash for College Regional Coordinating Organizations and Commission staff conducted 1,095 workshops between October 1, 2019 and March 2, 2020. Students attending CFC workshops are asked to complete an electronic survey to summarize their workshop experience. More than 24,000 CFC surveys were completed during the 2020-21 application season and over 33,000 students were served through CFC workshops. The workshops are evaluated with a 5-star rating system, with one star for the lowest rating, and five stars for the highest score. The 2020-21 CFC workshops received an overall 4.74 rating with many positive comments from its participants.

### RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S):

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