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California Student Aid Commission Executive Director Marlene Garcia to retire at the end of June 2024

Director Garcia spent nearly 3 decades in public service, oversaw significant gains in student success and access, and led with a focus on equity

Sacramento, Calif., December 13, 2023 – Marlene Garcia, the California Student Aid Commission’s (Commission) Executive Director, announced today that she will be retiring at the end of June 2024. Garcia has served as the Executive Director of the Commission since May 2019. Under the leadership of Director Garcia, the Commission has advanced new initiatives and policies to help better meet student needs.

“Director Garcia joined the Commission at a critical time for California,” said **Charles Nies, Vice Chair of the Commission**. “Our students faced a mounting struggle in covering their total cost of attendance and meeting their basic needs, even before the additional challenges created by the pandemic. It is thanks to her leadership that the Commission has remained at the forefront in advocating for policy changes and engaging partners around creative solutions to address these concerns.”

Director Garcia has led the Commission’s implementation of new programs and creation of innovative means of bringing financial aid awareness to students and their families. Since 2019, the Commission has supported the creation of the Golden State Teacher Grant Program and Learning-Aligned Employment Program, while also overseeing major expansion of both the Cal Grant and Middle Class Scholarship. The total annual budget managed by the Commission has grown from \$2.4 billion in 2018-19 to over \$3.3 billion in 2023-24, reflecting a period of tremendous investment in California’s support for financial aid.

The Commission also played a central role in supporting a new, comprehensive approach to how California students access and understand financial aid. Enacted in 2021, AB 469 helps ensure every graduating student in California is aware of their financial aid options by requiring local educational agencies to verify that every high school senior completes a financial aid application. The Commission has

strengthened or created new outreach efforts, including creation of new social media platforms, stakeholder awareness campaigns, and launch of an AI chatbot pilot effort with Mainstay. In the first year of implementation, California saw an additional 24,000 more students complete financial aid applications relative to the prior year and led the nation in the growth of students applying for aid.

Under Director Garcia's leadership, the Commission has also convened stakeholders to develop proposals to reform and expand the Cal Grant program, improve student access to food support through the CalFresh program, and better address the unique needs of undocumented students. Each workgroup and resulting report identified pain-points for students accessing financial aid and food benefits, as well as actionable policy solutions to address the core issues. These recommendations have also been translated into action:

- As a first step toward implementing reform of the Cal Grant, historic investments and extension of aid to nearly [100,000 more community college students](#) starting in 2021. The Cal Grant Equity Framework was fully adopted into the 2022-23 State Budget Act and is awaiting full funding in the next Budget Agreement.
- State policies to make annual data available on college student access to CalFresh and to ensure that institutions of higher education inform students of their potential eligibility.
- Enhancements to the California Dream Act Application launching later this month that will make it easier and simpler for students and families to apply for aid and confirm their eligibility.

"The contributions Director Garcia has made to the Commission are invaluable and evergreen," said **Catalina Cifuentes, Chair of the Commission**. "It was with her strong leadership, focus, and expertise that the Commission was able to grow to serve over 400,000 students and administer over \$3 billion in state aid. Our goal was to always serve as many students as possible and we did just that thanks to Director Garcia."

"After nearly 30 years in public service in California, the last 5 at the California Student Aid Commission have been a full-circle experience," said **Executive Director Marlene Garcia**. "As a recipient of a Cal Grant and Pell Grant, I know firsthand how transformative postsecondary education can be and how financial aid makes that attainable. That is why it was my personal mission to do everything I can to make college affordable and equitable for all. It was an absolute privilege and honor to serve all of California's students."

As the Commission prepares to hire a new Executive Director, the Commission is committed to continue using a student-centered approach as it pursues all policy goals, programmatic changes, and financial aid initiatives.

The Commission will be partnering with a private search firm to help identify candidates to serve as the next Executive Director. The Commission and Director Garcia will work together to ensure a seamless transition in July 2024.

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The California Student Aid Commission currently serves over 400,000 students and administers the state's \$3 billion portfolio of student financial aid programs and services, including the Cal Grant, the Middle Class Scholarship, and the California Dream Act Application. The Commission serves as a resource for policymakers and the public on college affordability and financing issues, and advocates for policy changes to eliminate cost as a barrier to any qualified California student pursuing a higher education. Visit our website at www.csac.ca.gov or follow us on social media by clicking on our [Link Tree](#).