

FAST BLAST



OUR MISSION: "Make education beyond high school financially accessible to all Californians."

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From the Desk of the Executive Director: 2008-09 Proposed Budget Update

The Governor's January Budget proposes major state program reductions for fiscal year 2008-09 for our students. The State faces a deficit which is projected to exceed \$14 billion. While the Commission has not taken an official position on the proposed budget, as with all valued stakeholders in the financial aid community, the latest budget news that included elimination of any new 2008-09 Cal Grant Competitive awards generates great concern.

The Commission is actively involved in processing new and renewal applications for the March 2, 2008 deadline. This year, Commission staff is also meeting the challenge of bringing up the new "live" real time grant delivery system, while maintaining our ongoing system and processes. We look forward to continuing our efforts to improve services to students and schools during the upcoming 2008-09 academic year. Our IT Division is working to complete implementation of Phase II by this summer.

It is important to note that the Cal Grant Entitlement, High School and Transfer Entitlement programs were spared from reduction in the Governor's budget proposal. Commission staff is working to educate the Legislature and the Administration on the implications of eliminating new Cal Grant Competitive awards that provide financial assistance to 22,500 students who competitively are selected annually from an application pool of older and reentry students.

The Governor recently named five new appointees to the 2008 Student Aid Commission, with an additional appointment recently made by the Assembly Speaker. The Commission will reconvene in February where the topic of Competitive Cal Grants will likely be prominent on the agenda for the newly reconstituted group.

Commission staff will keep you apprised of budget developments as they progress over the next few months. We will be communicating to the campuses

shortly about how the Commission intends to communicate this proposed change to the budget.

Assumption Program of Loans for Education Awards Still Available

The Commission is continuing to accept applications for the 2007-08 Assumption Program of Loans for Education

(APLE). APLE programs are designed to encourage outstanding students, district interns, and out of state



teachers to become California teachers in subject areas where a critical shortage has been identified or in a designated school meeting specific criteria established by the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Under the APLE, the Commission may assume up to \$11,000 in an eligible student's outstanding education loans in return for four consecutive years of full-time teaching service in California K-12 public schools. Participants who teach math, science or special education may receive up to \$1,000 of additional loan assumption benefits per year. Those who teach math, science or special education in the lowest performing schools may receive another \$1,000 a year in benefits, for up to \$19,000 in loan assumption benefits.

For more information, including current designated subjects and schools and application materials, go to www.csac.ca.gov; call the Commission at (888) 294-0153 or e-mail specialized@csac.ca.gov.

... continued on p. 2

. . . continued from p. 1

EZ Route System Enhances IVR

The Commission enhanced its **Integrated Voice Response (IVR)** system with a new **EZ Route** system that debuted January 28. When call center telephone lines are busy, the EZ Route system will now direct callers to a voice message that will inform them of the high call volume and provide them with important seasonal messages as well as Commission Web site information. The Integrated Voice Response system was developed to enhance communication between the Commission and students, schools, financial aid advisors and the general public. Since it was implemented, fewer calls have been dropped, response time to callers has been reduced and overall customer service has improved. Additionally, the seasonal messages inform callers of important program updates while they are waiting to speak to a representative.

A Change is Coming to WebGrants for Students (WGS)

WebGrants for Students will soon unveil a new, more student-friendly version of its site. WGS is a secure site that allows students to view the status of their Cal Grant or Chafee application, update their address, view payment history or inform the Commission of when they are changing schools. It provides students with the tools needed to establish and manage their Cal Grant and/or Chafee Grants. Look to early March for this change to occur.

Student Support Services Call-in Hours Extended

In an effort to assist as many students as possible before the March 2 Cal Grant filing deadline, the Commission is extending its Student Support Services Branch (Call Center) hours from **Tuesday, February 19 through Friday, February 29, 2008**. The Call Center's hours of operation will be extended each evening from 5 p.m. - 8 p.m. Call Center staff will be available to assist students with any questions they may have regarding applying for a 2008-2009 Cal Grant.

We request your assistance in getting the word out to students about the extended hours and thank you in advance for your assistance with this outreach effort.

Cash for College Workshop Series Hits the 500 Mark!

This year, more than 500 Cash for College workshops have been registered by high schools, regional Cash for College partners, community colleges, universities and community groups. More than half of all of the



workshops will take place from February through the March 2 Cal Grant deadline. Encouraging reports from organizers across the state point to higher attendance rates than

prior years, with \$1,000 scholarships a key draw for student attendance. Thanks to the generous support of the *College Access Foundation of California*, up to two \$1,000 scholarships per workshop will be offered to students who attend the workshops held across the state.

Workshop organizers looking for multi-lingual materials to assist students and families in successfully completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) can visit the Cash for College Web pages to find line-by-line presentations available for download in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Hmong, Korean and Tagalog. They may also download Cash for College student evaluation forms, Spanish language materials assisting students who may not qualify for state or federal financial aid, regionalized in-school announcements, and the Cash for College in-class, five-minute YouTube video to get students ready to apply for financial aid. Just visit www.calgrants.org and at the *Workshops* pages, click on *For Organizers*, then [Workshop Tools](#).

What Happens After the Workshops?

Organizers need to ship or mail student evaluations back to the California Student Aid Commission so that paper evaluations can be collected and entered as part of the statewide evaluation and scholarship program. Workshop Organizers are encouraged to make a copy of evaluations for their files. Please either ship to the Commission, ATTN: Cash for College, 10811 International Drive, 2nd Floor, Rancho Cordova, 95670, or student evaluations can be mailed to the Commission, ATTN: Cash for College, P.O. Box 419026, Rancho Cordova, CA 95741-9026.

Public Awareness Campaign 2008 in High Gear



The statewide launch of the Cal Grant Public Awareness Campaign met with great success at the January 16 press event held at Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento.

The campaign was honored to have Superintendent of Public Instruction, Jack O'Connell, Commissioner Lorena Hernandez and a number of other VIPs join the statewide launch as they voiced their support for higher education and Cal Grants.

The statewide launch is a full-blown statewide media relations blitz that announces the beginning of the 2008 Cal Grant application window and generates media awareness and coverage about Cash for College workshops. With nearly 370,000 California high school seniors set to graduate this June, the statewide campaign is designed to increase the number of low- and middle-income students who apply for Cal Grants.

The public awareness campaign also highlights the student-focused Web site, www.calgrants.org, with Cal Grant information in English and Spanish. The Commission is receiving a high daily volume of hits on www.calgrants.org thanks in part to the search engines and key word recognition tools. We are happy to announce that many of our partners link their Web sites to www.calgrants.org and we appreciate their continued support.

Stay tuned for more information about the Commission's Cal Grant Public Awareness Campaign in upcoming Fast Blast editions. If you have any questions about the Public Awareness Campaign, please contact Cheryl Lenz at (916)-526-8955, or clenz@csac.ca.gov.

Sale of EdFUND

Last month, the Department of Finance hired Bear Stearns to assist with the sale of EdFUND, the Commission's auxiliary organization. In addition to a traditional sale option, the Department of Finance, working with the State Treasurer, may also consider

an alternative financial arrangement to a conventional sale.

In response to the Governor's 2008-09 Proposed Budget and the proposed sale of EdFUND, Commission staff has also established an internal Transition Team to develop a plan to transition services currently supported by EdFUND, as well as to transition Commission staff currently assigned to EdFUND back to the Commission. The plan will also encompass the Commission's move to another location scheduled for this summer.

We will continue to keep you informed about the pending sale of EdFUND and our office relocation.

Helpful Financial Aid Calendar Available

Keeping track of financial aid timelines may be a daunting task for students. The Commission and EdFUND have created a helpful calendar of tips for you to share with your high school seniors and juniors to help them plan and pay for college. Tips on filing the FAFSA and verified Cal Grant GPAs, and attending Cash for College workshops are just some of the subjects highlighted in the calendar. To view the calendar, go to

www.edfund.org/newsletter/newsletter.html.

Legislative Reports Available

The Commission has completed the following reports to the Legislature. These reports, as well as other valuable reports produced by the Commission, can be viewed at

www.csac.ca.gov.



Competitive Cal Grant Report

- The Commission annually reviews the Competitive Cal Grant Program and provides an annual report on its effectiveness.

... continued on p. 4

. . . continued from p. 3

Cal Grant Transfer Entitlement Report

- This is an annual report to the Legislature and the Governor on the Cal Grant Transfer Entitlement awards.

Student Expense and Resource Survey (SEARS) Casebook

- This is a triennial casebook submitted by the Commission to the Legislature and the Governor. It reflects up-to-date student expense information on the actual costs of obtaining a postsecondary education in California and identifies available resources that students and families have to assist in paying college expenses. The data is required in order to generate the student expense budgets used to determine a student's financial need for the Entitlement and Competitive Cal Grant Programs.

If you have any questions or need additional information about these reports, please contact Ruben Romero, Research Branch Manager, at (916) 526-8237.

In Memory

The Commission regrets to inform you of the recent passing of former Commissioner Adele Levine. She passed away peacefully in her home on Wednesday, February 6.

Ms. Levine was appointed to the California Student Aid Commission in the fall of 1995 and served until March of 2006. During her 10-1/2 year tenure at the Commission, Ms. Levine was very active and served on numerous committees.

Ms. Levine was a professor emeritus at San Jose State University where she taught in the School of Education until 1991. She served as an adjunct staff member of the Institute for Development of Educational Activities (I.D.E.A.), a national organization devoted to school improvement and change.

Ms. Levine was also a professor of teacher education at CSU Hayward, before teaching at San Jose State University.



Your ideas and feedback are important to the Commission. Please forward your comments to Fastblast@csac.ca.gov