

FAST BLAST



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

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Commission Urges Leaders to Spare Competitive Grant Funding

The Commission voted unanimously on February 29 to ask the Governor and the Legislature to spare funding for the state's Competitive Cal Grant program, which mainly serves young adults who have been out of high school for a while and want to return to pursue or complete a higher education.

The vote comes on the heels of the Governor's January 10 budget proposal to reduce funding the program by \$57.4 million. While renewal applicants would get grants, no additional funds have been allocated for new awards in the 2008-09 budget year.

Read the complete news release on the Commission's Web site at www.csac.ca.gov.

Commission Notifies Students of Tentative Competitive Cal Grant Awards

The Governor's 2008-09 proposed budget would eliminate new awards for Competitive Cal Grants for the 2008-09 academic year, but would authorize renewal Competitive Cal Grant awards. Delaying processing of the awards until final budget decisions are made would impact institutions' financial aid decisions as well as the decisions students will need to make on their choice of an institution for the 2008-09 academic year. Therefore, the Commission will continue processing March 2 Competitive Cal Grant awards and notifying students of their tentative awards. The Commission will also caution students that their award may be withdrawn.

Students will receive notice of their tentative awards via postcards rather than a California Aid Report. The postcard will recommend students check the Commission's Web site for updates on the final budget outcome and encourage them to establish a WebGrants for Students account. The Commission

will send students a final correspondence to confirm or withdraw their award offer once the final state budget has been approved. This approach was developed in consultation with representatives from the Grants Advisory Committee and the higher education segments. We appreciate their input and will continue to work with them on this process.

2008-09 Cal Grant Entitlement Award Notification Begins

Preliminary award letters to prospective 2008-09 Entitlement Cal Grant applicants have started going out. Students will also receive information on how their school will determine the amount of their Cal Grant, how to monitor and update their information on WebGrants for Students, and other important facts about the Commission and their Cal Grant award. Students whose applications are incomplete or inaccurate will receive a 2008-09 Cal Grant Application Correction Form and a letter requesting additional information for the application process.

Chafee Grant Update

The Commission has awarded all of the 2007-08 fiscal year federal and state funds to eligible foster youth students for the California Chafee Grant Program. We also continue to use any returned and unused funds to make additional awards.

In addition, the Commission continues its work with the John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes to identify donors for the foundation's *Backpack for Schools* project. To date, the foundation has provided 800 former foster youth (who participate in the Chafee Foster Youth Program) with a \$100 gift card to assist their transition from foster care to independent living as a college student. The Commission, along with our partners at the Los Angeles Cash for College project, is assisting former Senator Burton in his efforts to help foster youth through this project.

WebGrants for Students Redesigned

WebGrants for Students (WGS), a secure Web site offered by the Commission, has been redesigned to provide more comprehensive and useful tools for all students. These tools allow 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.

All students who have completed and filed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) are encouraged to visit WGS, where they can create an account and log on. An exciting new feature of WGS provides all students access to important resource information without logging onto the system with a user ID. From the home portal, parents, counselors and students can access frequently asked questions, important deadlines, program manuals and much more. WGS is accessed from the home pages at www.csac.ca.gov or www.calgrants.org (select the WebGrants for Students link on the right side).

Tell us what you think about the new and improved WebGrants for Students. E-mail your comments to Fastblast@csac.ca.gov

2008 Public Awareness Campaign “Cal Grant : Your Ticket to Success”

The Commission’s Cal Grant Public Awareness Campaign, *Cal Grant: Your Ticket to Success*, hit its peak January 1 through March 2. The campaign promoted Cal Grant awareness through the distribution of education materials (College Cash Box, PIN cards, posters, fliers) and radio, television, Internet and print media channels. In collaboration with high school counselors, college financial aid administrators, legislators, Cal-SOAP project directors, Los Angeles Cash for College and other community based organizations, we reached out to students and parents about Cal Grants and the March 2 deadline. Additionally, the messaging encouraged students and families to attend local Cash for College workshops to get help filling out the FAFSA and GPA forms and to qualify for an extra \$1,000 incentive scholarship provided by the College Access Foundation of California.

Initial data on the number of Cal Grant applications received show that FAFSAs are up 4 percent from last year. This increase is only a year-to-year number

comparison. The final application tally will be available in the coming weeks.

We are very pleased that the campaign generated more than \$1.5 million in partnership support.

The Commission thanks all who helped support and promote the Cal Grants application process. We know how valuable your time is and we appreciate the time you have taken to personally reach out to the community we all serve in support of higher education.

Nominations Being Accepted for the Marmaduke Award for High School Counselors

The Commission is now accepting nominations for the annual Arthur Marmaduke High School Counselor Award. The Marmaduke Award recognizes one high school counselor each year who has demonstrated superior skills, dedication and commitment in helping students gain access to postsecondary education through the Commission’s grant, scholarship and loan assumption programs.

We ask that high school principals submit nominations to the Commission by April 4. Nominees should exhibit excellent skills in counseling and motivating students to pursue an education after high school. They should also be strong advocates of the financial aid tools that are available to support students’ educational goals, including Cal Grants and scholarships. Nominees should demonstrate notable dedication to the student populations they serve. Moreover, their performance should result in an exceptional number of students receiving financial aid as a direct result of their counseling efforts.

The Marmaduke Award was established by the Commission in 1985 in honor of the late Arthur Marmaduke for his dedication and commitment in helping students gain access to postsecondary education through the Commission’s programs. Arthur Marmaduke served as the Executive Director of the Commission for 25 years.

Nomination forms were sent to all high schools last week and have been posted to the home page at www.csac.ca.gov.

Commission Joins First Lady Maria Shriver at *We Connect* Events

The Commission joined First Lady Maria Shriver on February 11 for the kick-off of the *We Connect Campaign* to help raise awareness about Cal Grants and financial aid programs and resources. The *We Connect Campaign* supports and promotes statewide public-private partnerships that help California's working families become more financially secure by connecting them to vital programs and resources.

The two-day statewide *We Connect Campaign* toured Los Angeles, Fresno, Sacramento and San Francisco. Cal-SOAP representatives shared information on program services in their local areas for young family members, 7 - 12 grade students, as well as how to create a college going culture at home for high school and re-entry students. Commission staff assisted families of high school seniors and recent graduates and re-entry students in completing the FAFSA on the Web Worksheet and Cal Grant GPA Verification Form. Additionally, next steps to complete the FAFSA online were shared and local Cash for College workshop site information was provided.

The Commission applauds the First Lady's efforts to reach so many deserving families and was honored to be a part of this important kick-off.

California Cash for College Receives Distinguished Service Award

The California Cash for College program received a 2008 Distinguished Service Award from the College Board's Western Regional Assembly Council at its annual Western Region Forum held this February in Newport Beach. More than 700 high school counselors, and college and financial aid outreach professionals and financial aid administrators from 12 states attended the forum. These awards are often given to individuals; however, because the Cash for College network is comprised of nearly a thousand community volunteers, high school counselors, community college and university financial aid administrators, and outreach professionals, all working to help low-income and first-generation college bound-students access education beyond high school, the Cash for College network received this honor. Accepting the award were Commissioner Antonio "Tony" Solórzano, Jr. and Despina Costopolous, California Cash for College Coordinator, representing the Commission, and David Ratray, Los Angeles Cash for College, representing the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. The Commission thanks each individual, high school, community college and university, CASFAA and CCCSFAAA, and regional and community partners for participating in the Cash for College effort.



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