

## Item 12 (Information)

### Update on the Race to Submit Campaign: FAFSA & California Dream Act Application Initiative

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#### **SUMMARY:**

This item provides a final update on the California Student Aid Commission's (Commission) Race to Submit Statewide Campaign and Race to Submit Dashboard (Dashboard) tool for the 2018-19 application period. This includes a summary of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the California Dream Act Application (CADAA) completion rates, as well as the selection of the top schools within each of the seven levels determined by the senior graduating class size in FAFSA/CADAA completion rates between October 1, 2017 and March 2, 2018. The intent of the campaign was to encourage high schools and districts to access the Dashboard tool to track and increase the total number of submitted financial aid applications.

In May 2018, the Commission recognized the top performing schools in the Race to Submit Dashboard through electronic communication and will invite the winners to a ceremony in Sacramento that will take place in October 2018. The celebratory event will recognize the top five schools in each of the seven levels determined by the graduating senior class size. These schools will be awarded with a Race to Submit banner to commemorate their accomplishment. The Commission appreciates the joint efforts from superintendents, principals, and high school counselors in encouraging their students to succeed in their pursuit of higher education and guiding them through the financial aid application process.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

After promoting the Race to Submit Statewide Campaign and Dashboard tool throughout the Cal Grant March 2 application period, Commission staff recognized the top performing schools for their efforts in promoting FAFSA/CADAA submissions among their high school seniors and achieving high completion rates for the 2018-19 application year.

Commission staff will continue to enhance the Dashboard and incorporate changes for the upcoming FAFSA/CADAA application competition. With these enhancements the statewide campaign and dashboard tool is expected to achieve greater completion rates for future FAFSA/CADAA application periods.

#### **BRIEF HISTORY OF KEY ISSUE(S):**

The 2017-18 Early FAFSA Initiative was implemented by the United States Department of Education (USED) to simplify and improve the FAFSA process for students and their families. In addition, the initiative's ultimate goal was to increase high school graduation and college completion rates, especially among students from low-income families. The timely completion of a FAFSA is an essential step for obtaining financial aid to pursue a postsecondary education. The FAFSA Completion Initiative enables state student grant agencies, schools and district partners to identify and target students who have not filed a FAFSA and provide assistance with filing their applications. Identifying and guiding such students can promote college access and success by ensuring students, particularly from low-income families, have access to financial aid to fund their higher education.

In a given academic year, the Commission collects more than 1.7 million federal and state financial aid applications and approximately one-half million Grade Point Averages (GPAs) in order to process and award over \$2 billion in state Cal Grant financial aid. Many California high schools and communities

across California have implemented FAFSA/CADAA completion programs to increase the number of financial aid applicants and some high school districts and county offices of education have designed tools to measure the number of completed financial aid applications among their high schools. These efforts have successfully challenged schools to encourage students and families to apply for financial aid. The Riverside County Office of Education and Riverside County high schools participated in former First Lady Michelle Obama's 2016 Reach Higher call to action and launched the "Race to Submit. They rolled out an ambitious campaign that increased the percentage of FAFSA and CADAA completions from 52 percent for the class of 2014 to 70 percent for the class of 2017.

On October 3, 2017, the Commission launched the Race to Submit Dashboard. This tool allowed high schools, district offices, county offices of education and the public to view FAFSA/CADAA submission data and rates throughout California. On October 4, 2017, the Race to Submit Statewide Campaign promoted the Dashboard through a launch event. The event was sponsored by the Commission and hosted by the Riverside County Education Consortium, Riverside County Office of Education, and the Val Verde Unified School District. The event was supported by students, teachers, counselors, school administrators, and superintendents, as well as headlined by actress Gabrielle Union who shared her personal story and reminded students of the importance of going to college.

**ANALYSIS:**

See Attachment 12.1

**RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S):**

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**ATTACHMENTS:**

Description

- Attachment 12.1: Analysis of Race to Submit Campaign

**ANALYSIS OF RACE TO SUBMIT CAMPAIGN**

The Race to Submit Dashboard (Dashboard) allowed high schools, school districts, counties, students, organizations and the public to track schools’ financial aid application counts and Cal Grant awarding by academic year. This tool was intended to encourage teachers, counselors, and other school administrators to reach out to students and guide them through the financial aid application process to ensure timely applications through the March 2 Cal Grant deadline.

The Dashboard provided weekly updates and generated progress updates by high school, school district, and county. The progress updates included the following data:

- FAFSA/CADAA [submitted and completed]
- Number of Cal Grant applications [submitted and completed]
- Number of students eligible for Cal Grants
- Number of Cal Grant awards

Table 1 reflects the FAFSA/CADAA completion data for AYs 2013-14 through 2018-19 (as of the March 2, 2018, Cal Grant deadline). For the 2018-19 academic year, a total of 254,222 FAFSA/CADAAs were submitted, which is 53.56 percent of the total of the California Public High School senior enrollment as per the certified October 2017, enrollment data provided by the California Department of Education.

**Table 1:**  
High School Seniors FAFSA and CADAA Completion Data  
Data as of 5/4/2018

Academic Year	FAFSA Applications	CADAA Applications	Combined Applications	Reported CDE Senior Enrollment	FAFSA/CADAA Completion (%)
2018-19*	245,851	8,372	254,223	474,610	53.56%
2017-18*	243,128	8,701	251,829	464,240	54.25%
2016-17	229,177	8,355	237,532	473,967	50.55%
2015-16	229,217	7,625	236,842	472,612	50.43%

\* active academic years

**Data Challenges**

As the Race to Submit competition continued, the following challenges, were identified and addressed:

1. CDE Senior Enrollment - The Commission began using 2016-17 senior enrollment counts from the California Department of Education (CDE) in lieu of the certified 2017-18 senior enrollment data which was not available on CDE's Data Quest system until April. As enrollment counts may differ between the two years, the completion rates were not reflecting accurate completion percentages for some schools. To address this challenge, the Commission requested early access to the 2017-18 senior enrollment data from the CDE for the purposes of the Race to Submit Initiative. Based on CDE’s data processing timelines, the Commission was able to provide an updated senior enrollment count with preliminary numbers from CDE prior to the March 2nd deadline. These preliminary numbers were helpful in displaying more accurately

the schools' performance on the Race to Submit Dashboard. The Commission received final senior enrollment counts (October 2017, CDE certified data) by mid-April which were incorporated into the Race to Submit Dashboard prior to selecting the top performing schools in each category. Based on feedback received, there was internal discussion about using point in time March 2<sup>nd</sup> enrollment data as reported by the high schools to reflect more up to date enrollment. A request was made to CDE in early May about obtaining the March 2<sup>nd</sup> enrollment data, but they were not able to provide an expected date of completion. If the March 2<sup>nd</sup> enrollment is not available on time, then we will continue to use the certified October counts.

2. Educational level - Because the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) does not ask the applicant's high school graduation date, the Commission uses a proxy to determine high school seniors for that graduating cohort. The applicant's educational level, per FAFSA question 29, is part of the Commission's proxy. First year applicants respond to their college grade level with "never attended college and 1st year undergraduate" or "attended college before and 1st year undergraduate." For FAFSA counts on the Dashboard, the Commission was only including the "never attended college" response to avoid mixing students from different graduating cohorts. However, high school officials notified the Commission that dually enrolled students (high school and college) were likely to respond with the "attended college before" answer. To address this concern, Commission staff expanded the educational level criteria to capture students in this scenario and make them part of the FAFSA completion rates. The updates to the system were completed in late February.

3. Age of high school seniors - As part of the FAFSA limitation issue described in #2 above, the Commission has also incorporated an age proxy to identify graduating high school seniors. Applicants that are age 19 and younger with the "never attended college and 1st year undergraduate" response were initially used to total FAFSA counts for a high school. Nonetheless, the Commission also received feedback that some graduating high school seniors are 20 or 21. In response to this challenge, Commission staff expanded the age criteria, while maintaining the data integrity of the graduation cohorts. The system changes and corresponding updates to the Dashboard were made prior to the March 2 deadline ensuring that the data was as accurate and equitable as possible for the final completion percentages.

### **Communication and Outreach Plan**

Commission staff continued to promote the Race to Submit statewide campaign and Dashboard tool to high schools, school districts, offices of education and other key partners up until the Cal Grant March 2, 2018, deadline. They were all highly encouraged to use the Dashboard to track their high school's FAFSA/CADAA progress.

The Dashboard tool was also helpful to provide follow-up to schools with low FAFSA/CADAA submission rates and offer assistance to increase their participation in the Race to Submit initiative such as through hosting cash for college workshops for their students.

Commission staff worked with the following key partner organizations to strengthen the Race to Submit campaign and Dashboard tool outreach efforts:

- Commission staff worked with CDE to obtain the 2017-18 senior enrollment numbers for each high school and the aggregate total. These numbers are what we used to calculate the FAFSA/CADAA percentage at each high school and determine the winners of the competition.

## Attachment 12.1

- California Cash for College (CCFC) and CCFC Regional Coordinating Organizations (RCO) hosted CCFC events and shared the importance of the Race to Submit Initiative with their local high schools.
- The California Student Opportunity and Access Program (Cal-SOAP) promoted the FAFSA/CADAA completion with their schools and communicated the benefits of tracking their progress through the Dashboard tool.
- The Association of California Superintendents and Administrators (ACSA) was given a detailed report of FAFSA/CADAA submission rates by region that was presented at the ACSA Superintendents' Symposium on January 24-16, 2018, and at the Every Child Counts Symposium on February 14-16, 2018. Superintendent of Val Verde Unified School District, Mike McCormick participated as the Ambassador for the Race to Submit campaign before superintendents and administrators at these two conferences.
- The Get Schooled Foundation was awarded a generous grant from the James Irvine Foundation that contributed five \$1,000 scholarships for seniors who completed a FAFSA or CADAA and who completed an exit survey at a Cash for College event. There were approximately 28,000 students eligible for these scholarships and the winners were selected and awarded in April 2018. Get Schooled also launched the #RacetoSubmit college challenge at [www.racetosubmitca.com](http://www.racetosubmitca.com) to strengthen the Commission's statewide campaign and provided additional grants to school campuses in conjunction with the following:
  1. Engaging 100 high schools for focused participation in the campaign with the opportunity to earn \$2,000 in cash for their campus;
  2. Recruiting up to six student ambassadors at those campuses to energize and engage the student body to attend a Cash for College workshop;
  3. Encouraging utilization of the existing text "College" to 335577 feature;
  4. Directing visits to the Commission's Race to Submit dashboard to encourage applications by the March 2 Cal Grant deadline.
- DJ Khaled (recording artist and producer) partnered with Get Schooled and the Commission to promote the #RacetoSubmit challenge with the message "get the knowledge to pay for college".

### Recognition Program for FAFSA/CADAA Completion

Throughout the 2018-19 Cal Grant application season, the Race to Submit statewide campaign hosted a friendly competition between California public high schools, including charter schools, to encourage an increase in FAFSA/CADAA submissions. Accessed through the Race to Submit homepage, the Race to Submit Leaderboard (Leaderboard) tracked schools' application submission and completion numbers as well as total percentages. The Leaderboard was initially divided into six levels (a seventh level was added later) determined by the graduating class size and displayed the top ten school placements by school enrollment size.

The tables below illustrate the five schools in each level that made significant strides in FAFSA/CADAA completion rates between October 1, 2017, and March 2, 2018.

LEVEL 1 - Student enrollment count less than or equal to 50			
School Name	High School Senior Enrollment	FAFSA/CADAA Completed Apps	
		Count	Percent
Creekside High, Sonoma	7	20	285.71%
Ambassador Phillip V. Sanchez Public Charter, Fresno	12	26	216.67%
Crescent View South Charter, Fresno	16	32	200.00%
Diego Hills Charter, San Diego	32	59	184.38%
Calaveras River Academy, San Andreas	2	3	150.00%

Based on the completion percentages for the top five schools in Level 1, as displayed in the table above, Commission staff followed up with some of these schools to better understand the completion counts in relation to their senior enrollment. From these communications and the many calls received from high schools in the Commission’s Institutional Support unit throughout the 2018-19 Race to Submit competition, staff confirmed the following:

- The FAFSA/CADAA completion percentages in the Race to Submit Leaderboard are derived from the number of applications completed by students indicating attendance at a specific high school, against the October 2017, certified enrollment data provided by CDE. Because high school students move from one school to another throughout the academic year for various reasons, the enrollment count by March 2, 2018, might have changed, potentially generating some discrepancies in the completion percentages reflected on the Leaderboard. In the smaller schools, changes to the enrollment data after October 2017, would have had a bigger impact in the completion percentages.
- It is very common for charter schools to have dually enrolled students (high school and college) and a significant number of juniors graduating by the end of the year. Although the junior students are not considered within the senior enrollment, these students are completing and submitting their FAFSAs/CADAAs to receive on-time financial aid consideration to start college in the spring of the 2018-19 academic year. Once again, in the smaller schools, this scenario has a strong impact on the completion percentages. In the table above, three out of the five schools listed are charter schools.
- Finally, adult, juvenile and continuation schools face challenges in providing enrollment counts and other applicable data by the default cohort of freshman, sophomore, junior and senior years. They are structured very differently to better satisfy the needs of their unique student populations and often struggle to comply with specific requirements such as submitting electronic Grade Point Averages to the Commission for all their seniors. Their students are not always “seniors” or “juniors”, etc.; they are working towards satisfying graduation requirements through an individual plan tailored to their needs. The two non-charter schools in the table above, are continuation schools.

LEVEL 2 - Student enrollment count greater than or equal to 51 and less than or equal to 100			
School Name	High School Senior Enrollment	FAFSA/CADAA Completed Apps	
		Count	Percent
Oakland Charter High, Oakland	91	99	108.79%
Contreras Learning Center-Academic Leadership Community, Los Angeles	81	82	101.23%
Preuss School UCSD, San Diego	98	97	98.98%
UCLA Community K-12, Los Angeles	91	90	98.90%
Health Careers Academy, Stockton	79	78	98.73%

LEVEL 3 - Student enrollment count greater than or equal to 101 and less than or equal to 200			
School Name	High School Senior Enrollment	FAFSA/CADAA Completed Apps	
		Count	Percent
California Academy of Mathematics and Science, Carson	163	162	99.39%
Alliance Dr. Olga Mohan High, Los Angeles	117	116	99.15%
Ednovate - USC Hybrid High, Los Angeles	118	115	97.46%
Alliance Margaret M. Bloomfield Technology Academy High, Huntington Park	117	114	97.44%
Alliance Susan and Eric Smidt Technology High, Los Angeles	114	111	97.37%

LEVEL 4 - Student enrollment count greater than or equal to 201 and less than or equal to 325			
School Name	High School Senior Enrollment	FAFSA/CADAA Completed Apps	
		Count	Percent
Downtown Business High, Los Angeles	219	221	100.91%
Benjamin Franklin Senior High, Los Angeles	274	246	89.78%
San Diego International Studies, San Diego	202	180	89.11%
Edward R. Roybal Learning Center, Los Angeles	242	213	88.02%
Northridge Academy High, Northridge	219	192	87.67%

LEVEL 5 - Student enrollment count greater than or equal to 326 and less than or equal to 500			
School Name	High School Senior Enrollment	FAFSA/CADAA Completed Apps	
		Count	Percent
Santa Clara High, Santa Clara	487	483	99.18%
Ramon C. Cortines School of Visual and Performing Arts, Los Angeles	351	306	87.18%
Jurupa Valley High, Mira Loma	368	311	84.51%
Fresno High, Fresno	478	401	83.89%
Santa Paula High, Santa Paula	344	285	82.85%

LEVEL 6 - Student enrollment count greater than or equal to 501 and less than or equal to 700			
School Name	High School Senior Enrollment	FAFSA/CADAA Completed Apps	
		Count	Percent
Citrus Hill High, Perris	548	506	92.34%
Hector G. Godinez, Santa Ana	635	553	87.09%
Sunnyside High, Fresno	588	501	85.20%
La Quinta High, Westminster	554	468	84.48%
Edison High, Fresno	554	457	82.49%

The Commission initially divided the Leaderboard for the Race to Submit competition into six levels determined by the graduating class size, but after further review and discussion, staff decided to incorporate one additional level (Level 7) that would be more representative of the larger, urban schools with high numbers of underrepresented students. The Commission recognizes that the larger the student population, the bigger the challenge to reach a one hundred percent FAFSA/CADAA completion rate; and will continue to work with staff to revisit the enrollment levels for next year and make any necessary adjustments per the completion data available from this initial year.



LEVEL 7 - Student enrollment count greater than or equal to 701			
School Name	High School Senior Enrollment	FAFSA/CADAA Completed Apps	
		Count	Percent
Rancho Verde High, Moreno Valley	786	724	92.11%
San Marcos High, San Marcos	755	559	74.04%
Granada Hills Charter High, Granada Hills	1,139	832	73.05%
Santiago High, Corona	913	653	71.52%
Downey High, Downey	935	665	71.12%

In early June 2018, the Commission was pleased to announce the top performing schools in the Race to Submit Dashboard through electronic communication. The winners will be invited to participate in the ceremony that will take place in Sacramento in October 2018. The top five schools in each of the seven levels will be awarded with a Race to Submit banner to commemorate their accomplishment. Commission staff is finalizing the details of the ceremony and confirming the attendance of the Governor, members of the Assembly and Senate, as well as the attendance of the representatives of the thirty-five awarded schools.

The Commission is grateful for all the efforts made by all the public schools that participated in this year's Race to Submit and understands both, the challenges that many counselors must overcome to assist and encourage their students in their pursuit of higher education, as well as the amazing opportunities they have to positively impact their students' lives. The Commission looks forward to celebrating the 2018-19 winners and encourages all superintendents, presidents, and school counselors to prepare for the upcoming 2019-20 Race to Submit for the continued success of their students.