

Item 9 (Information)

Update on the African American Student Outreach Initiative

SUMMARY:

This item provides an update on the activities associated with the California Student Aid Commission's African American Student Outreach Initiative.

RECOMMENDATION:

This item is for informational purposes only. No action is necessary.

BRIEF HISTORY OF KEY ISSUE(S):

The California Student Aid Commission regularly performs outreach to historically underserved communities in California to encourage high school seniors to apply for financial aid to pursue postsecondary education. Cost is too often a barrier for otherwise qualified students seeking a higher education. Data show that, in California, African American students have consistently lower college attendance rates than their Hispanic, White and Asian counterparts. To close the gap in higher education and to ensure more African American students attend and succeed in college, applying for financial aid is critical to providing them the necessary financial resources to enroll, attend and persist.

To address the needs of African American students and families, Commission staff explored new ways to increase financial aid awareness at high schools with five percent or more African American students. The goal was to increase the number of African American students that complete a FAFSA.

During the first year of the African American Student Initiative in 2018-19, Commission staff worked with the California Black Media (CBM) coalition to cultivate working partnerships with over 21 Black media outlets throughout the state. During the 2018-19 Cash for College season, on-air, radio, online streaming, print and texting awareness campaigns were implemented with four specific media outlets: KLJH, Sacramento Cultural Hub, Post Newsgroup and the Sacramento Observer. A total of 1,068 Cash for College Workshops were held during the 2018-19 application season and of those, 342 were hosted at high schools with a five percent or more African American student population, an increase of 55 workshops from the prior application season.

For the 2019-20 application season, Commission staff engaged in a "March 2nd Cal Grant Deadline" promotional and informational campaign targeting African American families living in the Oakland-San Francisco-San Jose Bay Area; Los Angeles Metropolitan Area; and, the Sacramento Valley. The 60-day cross-platform, multi-media campaign ran from January 8, 2019 until March 1, 2019. The messaging and branding activities included online digital and print advertisements; direct text messages to influencers; informational editorial content, and eight, 15-minute Facebook live segments, delivered from highly populated locations such as malls, the L.A. Convention Center, and community centers.

Of the total 1,070 Cash for College Workshops offered during the 2019-20 application season, 340 were held at high schools with five percent or more African American student population. While Cash for College workshops scheduled to be held in the Los Angeles area were cancelled due to the teacher strike, the number of workshops in the area increased from 287 to 340, an 18% growth over two application seasons.

Cal-SOAP supported the Commission's African American Outreach Initiative by hosting several activities directed at African American students. Additionally, the Cal-SOAP consortia established relationships with African American centered community based organizations including the Association of African American Educators and the Coalition in San Diego, local branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Marcus Foster Education Institute and others.

Last year, the Commission sent the California Department of Education (CDE) a list of completed 2017-18 financial aid applications for matching on the ethnicity code. Of the 235,684 applications sent, 210,730 had an ethnic code matched. The data was returned in aggregated counts by high school and ethnic groups. The data indicated that of the four largest groups (African American, Asian, Hispanic or Latino, and White), African-Americans have the lowest rate of submission (38.7%). Commission staff will work with the CDE to match the data for the 2018-19 financial aid applications on ethnicity code and compare the results with the prior application year submission rates.

ANALYSIS:

Commission staff identified short-and-long term strategies to address the financial aid awareness needs of African American high school students and families. Each strategy is listed below, along with the work that has been completed to address the objectives. While Commission staff continue to seek specific race/ethnicity data and data that would demonstrate successful outcomes, we will continue to work to strengthen our existing outreach, training and student support programs to create a college-going culture for under-represented communities including for African American students. Staff plan to review the activities for the current application year and those efforts made to increase the number FAFSA completion for African American students to identify the outcomes and to assess the effectiveness of our various programs, including this initiative.

African American Initiative Objectives:

1) Equip and empower African American community-based organizations (CBO) and other non profit organizations to expand financial aid information.

- Mailed over 500 financial aid information packages to African American CBOs to increase the flow of information to students and to promote a college-going culture in their communities. Engaged CBOs to participate in community events, geared toward higher education, to provide information about applying for financial aid.
- Partnered with the National College Resources Foundation to include Cash for College workshops at their large-scale college fair events to incentivize student attendance. Commission staff participated in three Black College Expos in Los Angeles, Oakland and San Diego to provide assistance with filing out the FAFSA/CADAA and to provide financial aid information to students and families.
- Participated in the Sacramento Martin Luther King event on January 21, 2019 to answer questions related to financial aid.
- The Commission co-sponsored and staff participated in the planning, implementation and execution of Sacramento's first Black College Expo at Sacramento State University on Saturday, January 26, 2019. It has been reported that between 2,000 and 3,000 students, families, teachers, counselors, community volunteers, sorority and fraternity volunteers, and faith-based leaders attended throughout the day.
- Assisted students and families with financial aid information at 14 United College Access Network (UCAN) college fairs.

- Commission staff partnered with the California Association of African American Superintendents and Administrations to organize a Cash for College event on Saturday, March 2, 2019 to assist African American students and families complete the FAFSA. Staff sent emails to over 2,000 students inviting them to attend the workshop.

2) Increase Cash for College workshops and student attendance at high schools with 100 or more African American students.

- Targeted high schools with high percentage of African American students and low FAFSA completion rates to encourage hosting Cash for College workshops.
- Mailed over 300 financial aid information packages to 124 high schools with a high percentage of African American students that did not host a Cash for College workshop in the prior application year. Mailing list included coaches, black student unions, and associated student body presidents.
- Contacted all Los Angeles high schools to encourage them to host Cash for College workshops at their campus.

3) Increase Cash for College statewide effectiveness.

- Continued promotion of the Race to Submit dashboard to high schools with a high percentage of African American students.
- Improved, targeted Cash for College promotion and marketing materials.
- Provided workshop hosts with additional training opportunities on best practices for organizing workshops, completing the FAFSA and CADAA, and basic financial aid information. All Cash for College Regional Coordinating Organizations participated in parent engagement trainings.

4) Strengthen relationships with and promote the work of our education and outreach partners.

- Increased periodic communications to school and district administrators with updates of FAFSA/CADAA completion rates, training opportunities, special events and other efforts to engage students. Specifically committing to ongoing communication with and coordinating with members of the Los Angeles Unified School District to increase information, training and assistance to the African American community.
- Expanded High School Counselor workshops in areas with higher than average percentages of African American students and low FAFSA/CADAA completion rates.
- Continued to support the expansion of services provided to African American students and established effective working relationships with community based organizations by Cash for College Regional Coordinating Organizations and the Cal-SOAP consortia.

5) Utilize existing and develop new media/communications partnerships throughout the upcoming state financial aid application season to promote financial aid awareness.

- Commission staff is working with the California Black Media (CBM) coalition that cultivates important relationships with over 21 Black media outlets throughout the state. Members include print, digital and broadcast media entities. Staff plan to present information at Black media meetings and events to provide information about Cal Grants and the application process. The

Commission has received a listing of 13 media outlets from CBM to develop partnerships with members of the coalition.

6) Continue to promote FAFSA/CADAA completion after the March 2 Cal Grant deadline.

- Continue to communicate with students from high schools with a high percentage of African American students who did not file a FAFSA by the March 2 deadline encouraging them to still apply to receive federal, state and other financial aid resources.

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