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**2008 CAL GRANT CAMPAIGN KICKS OFF:**

**More than 400 Cash for College Workshops Offer Multilingual Help to Students and Families Applying for a Cal Grant and Other Financial Aid Through March 2**

**SACRAMENTO, Jan. 16, 2008** – The California Student Aid Commission launched the official start of its 2008 Cal Grant application period today at Luther Burbank High School, with the goal of boosting California’s diminishing college-going rate by getting more students to apply for financial aid to attend college or pursue a technical or career education.

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 a Cal Grant. The Cal Grant application window runs January 1 – March 2.

“Now more than ever, Cal Grants are the ticket many students need to pursue an education beyond high school, whatever their goals,” said Commission Executive Director Diana Fuentes-Michel. “Cal Grants not only open doors to higher education, but they also keep those doors open for students who otherwise could not afford college or who would have to work more – and take longer – to complete their educational goals.”

She added, “More than 90 percent of students who receive a Cal Grant re-enroll for a second year, and receiving a Cal Grant significantly increases the likelihood that students will remain in school for four years.”

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Cal Grants cover tuition and fees at California's public colleges and universities, and some Cal Grants also help students pay for textbooks and living expenses. In addition, students pursuing a career or technical education can receive up to \$576 a year for books, tuition and equipment, and up to \$2,592 for tuition and fees for those who go to a school other than a California Community College (community colleges do not charge tuition and Cal Grant-eligible students can apply to have their fees waived).

All college-bound high school seniors who qualify for a Cal Grant are guaranteed to receive one. To qualify, students must have financial need, at least a 2.0 GPA, and apply by the March 2 Cal Grant application deadline, in addition to meeting other requirements. Cal Grants for career or technical education have no minimum GPA requirement.

The Commission has joined forces with key partners across California, including financial aid and outreach professionals at colleges, universities and career and technical schools, high schools, corporate and community organizations, the Legislature and the California Department of Education to raise the number of students who pursue an education beyond high school.

"We're working hard to close not only the achievement gap, but also the opportunity gap for our disadvantaged students," said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell. "Cal Grants help students maximize their financial aid options to pursue all types of education beyond high school."

Recent trends show California ranks 40<sup>th</sup> among states in the rate of high school students going directly to college and 46<sup>th</sup> among states in college completion rates. Further research reveals:

- The proportion of high school graduates enrolling directly into colleges has dropped over the past decade, from 61 percent in 1995 to 52 percent in 2005.
- Only 35 percent of high school freshmen enroll in college within four years, as compared to 53 percent among the top states, according to an October 2006 Institute for Higher Educational Leadership and Policy report.

- Most Californians (84 percent) say that affording college is at least somewhat of a problem for students today, with 53 percent calling it a big problem. An October 2007 Public Policy Institute of California Statewide Survey also found that two-thirds of Californians believe that the cost of a college education prevents qualified, motivated students from pursuing higher education.
- Three-fourths of Latino young adults not currently in college would have been more likely to attend college if they had better information about financial aid, according to a recent Tomas Rivera Policy Institute survey. More than half of all Latino parents and 43 percent of Latino young adults could not name a single source of financial aid.

Yet, a college degree matters more than ever today. More education means higher incomes. Higher education is closely tied to the state's economic health and the economic value of a college degree.

Consider:

- Nearly two-thirds of Californians think a college education is necessary for success in today's workplace, according to an October 2007 Public Policy Institute of California Statewide Survey.
- A 2007 California Postsecondary Education Commission report says that the average income of a person with a high school diploma was \$27,000, while the average income for a bachelor's degree holder was \$56,000.
- That same report says that earning a degree increases the income potential of a high school graduate from 47 percent for an associate degree to 189 percent for a graduate or professional degree.

To apply for a Cal Grant, students must fill out and submit two forms – a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and a verified Cal Grant GPA – by the March 2 deadline. Because this year's deadline falls on a Sunday, Cal Grant GPA Verification forms received on Monday, March 3 will be accepted. Students and families can visit [www.calgrants.org](http://www.calgrants.org) or call toll free 888-CA-GRANT (888-224-7268) to learn more about Cal Grants, find the forms they need to apply and locate a California Cash for College workshop in their community.

When students apply for a Cal Grant, they are also applying for thousands of dollars in financial aid from the federal government, including the recently increased federal Pell Grants and low-interest federal student loans, as well as financial aid from colleges, such as community college fee waivers. Together, the various types of state, federal and college aid can help make college more affordable for Californians.

Students and families can ensure they have their best chance at getting all the financial aid they may be eligible for by attending one of the Commission's award-winning California Cash for College workshops. The workshops are held locally in 90 percent of all counties across the state in January and February. Attendees receive line-by-line help filling out the required forms. Nearly a thousand financial aid professionals and trained volunteers assist low-income and first-generation students to successfully complete the financial aid application process.

High school seniors who attend a workshop and apply for a Cal Grant and other financial aid by the March 2 deadline can qualify for an extra \$1,000 scholarship. At least one \$1,000 scholarship is offered at each workshop to encourage students to apply for a Cal Grant, and up to 500 scholarships will be awarded statewide after the March 2 deadline. The College Access Foundation of California is providing a generous grant of \$800,000 to finance statewide and local Los Angeles area scholarships. Since 2005, the Foundation – the largest of its kind in California – has provided more than \$7 million in scholarship program funding to Commission-related programs, such as the California Cash for College and Cal-SOAP outreach programs to encourage financially needy students to apply for state and federal aid.

Working hard to provide additional encouragement to all students to apply for financial aid are members of the Cal Grant College Cash Crew, a group of current and recently graduated students who themselves are Cal Grant recipients.

“Attending college wasn’t even on my radar after high school graduation, and instead I enlisted in the military,” said CSU Stanislaus student Salvador Salazar-Gomez, a Cal Grant College Cash Crew spokesperson and Cal Grant recipient. “After serving time overseas and starting a family, I now realize how important getting my degree is not only to my success, but for the well-being of my

family as well. I'm currently working towards my bachelor's degree in criminal justice and plan to enter law enforcement upon graduation." Gomez added that he could never have enrolled in college without the help of a Cal Grant. "The Cal Grant program has allowed me to continue my education, which will enable me to provide the best life I can for my family," he said.

Access to education beyond high school remains a Commission priority as the state is facing tight budget constraints, making it that much more urgent for students to get the word that financial aid is available and now is the time to apply.

During the 2007-08 school year, the Commission offered approximately \$800 million in Cal Grants and other financial aid to more than 299,000 eligible students throughout California.

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