



California Community Colleges Student Financial Aid Administrators Association

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Dear Senators and Assemblymembers,

I am writing to you on behalf of the 500+ members of the California Community Colleges Student Financial Aid Administrators Association (CCCSFAAA). Our professional association represents the financial aid staff and programs at all 110 community colleges and more than 2.6 million students comprising the largest segment of higher education in the world.

We offer cautious support of the Department of Finance's proposal to decentralize the administration of the Cal Grant program. CCCSFAAA agrees that changes to the processing of Cal Grants may improve access for community college students. Since there are few details in the proposal at this time, we outline our comments in response to the CPEC Report of 2003, the January 2009 Legislative Analyst's Office budget analysis, the California Education Round Table letter of support dated February 20, 2009 and the Department of Finance un-backed bill dated January 21, 2009.

The Cal Grant program is significant in our segment: although California Community Colleges deliver less Cal Grant dollars than other segments, we exceed all segments in the number of Cal Grants disbursed. CCCs deliver 71% of the Competitive Cal Grants while expending only 38.9% of the Competitive Cal Grant dollars.

Our primary focus when considering decentralization must be the question of what best serves students. We believe that a decentralized model must address the following:

- An efficient decentralized Entitlement Cal Grant program would be modeled after the federal Pell Grant program, including a centralized system for drawdown and eligibility criteria, available in a universal electronic format such as XML as used for the federal Pell Grant program. Such a model would provide students continued portability of their Cal Grants, and would efficiently allow for electronic exchanges of data with all colleges.
- A decentralized Competitive Cal Grant program presents more challenges. Currently all competitive Cal Grant applicants are selected from one eligibility pool. Decentralizing this process to 300+ schools might not be an efficient and equitable option. A centralized approach at system wide offices or a statewide level provides a workable solution for these awards.
- Since California Community Colleges are open access and do not require high school transcripts as a requirement for admission, a centralized database of GPAs would be necessary to prevent students and high schools from submitting GPA Verifications to multiple colleges.
- The proposal to execute an interagency agreement to oversee Specialized Programs such as CHAFEE, SNAPLE, APLE, etc. appears to be a workable option for timely and effective delivery of aid to students. The success of this change would depend on the identification and achievement of service standards in timeliness and effective delivery of aid to students.
- Decentralized award notifications could be a better model for students. Most colleges welcome the opportunity to communicate a comprehensive aid package directly to their students. This model would allow the opportunity for segments to provide a clear and comprehensive message while still allowing for college choice/uniqueness to meet their student's needs.
- The September 2 competitive Cal Grants awarded to community college students are an important portion of the existing program. A decentralized model should continue to include this portion of the program.
- There may be one-time transition costs at community colleges to support the information technology changes required for the new electronic reporting and disbursement model.

CCCSFAAA welcome the possibilities for improvement of aid delivery for students that are presented in the proposals. We request the opportunity to be part of the ongoing discussions regarding the details of improving aid delivery to students and respectfully offer the services of our officers.

Most Sincerely,



Brad Hardison
CCCSFAAA President

CC. ✓ Linda Michalowski, Vice Chancellor, Student Services
Diana Fuentes Michel, Executive Director, California Student Aid Commission