



California Community Colleges Student Financial Aid Administrators Association

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November 2, 2009

The Honorable Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger

Dear Governor,

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 2.8 million students comprising the largest segment of higher education in the world.

We offered 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. The Cal Grant Decentralization bill, AB 187, has passed the California legislature and is now on your desk for signature. While we still support decentralization as an improvement in services to students, we do not believe this is the best approach. We respectfully ask that emergency appropriations be made to restore \$4.3 million of the California Student Aid Commission's budget and that a different approach is taken to implement the decentralization model.

We have serious concerns about the structure for the pilot and the pilot's administrative oversight. As currently proposed, the existing entity and its leadership would design and oversee the implementation of the pilot which, if successful, could possibly affect their own employment status. This is a potential conflict of interest as we collectively explore pursuing a new delivery model, one that works best for the students of California.

We believe the UC and CSU segments have expressed the ability to implement quickly at all of their campuses because they have a different financial aid delivery process than community colleges. Yet, by this proposal only 2 UC campuses and only 5 CSU campuses could participate in the pilot.

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. Running this pilot simultaneously with the current delivery system will send a very confusing message to students and parents who may get different award packages at colleges in the same segments, because one school is participating in the pilot program and one is not.

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.
- 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 students' 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, which present another set of challenges in these difficult economic times.

CCCSFAAA welcomes 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 development of a decentralization model that works for the students. Please do what is best for the college students of California and do not sign AB 187 as passed by the legislature.

Most Sincerely,



Brad Hardison

CCCSFAAA President

- cc. Marlene Garcia, Vice Chancellor, California Community College Chancellor's Office
- Linda Michalowski, Vice Chancellor, California Community College Chancellor's Office
- Eric Skinner, Vice Chancellor, California Community College Chancellor's Office
- Jeannie Oropeza, California Department of Finance