



California Community College Student Federal and State Financial Aid Opportunity Act (AB 668 - Assemblyman Portantino)

The **CCC Financial Aid Opportunity Act of 2007** ensures that California Community College Students have the opportunity to apply for financial aid, particularly the federal Pell Grant, the Board of Governors Fee Waiver and the CalGrant.

The bill seeks to:

- Make college more affordable for low-income students by helping cover the costs of textbooks and living expenses.
- Improve access to college for students who otherwise may not be able to attend.
- Increase the chance of student success by helping students cover the cost of their education and reducing work hours outside of school.
- Make sure our students get their fair share of federal financial aid dollars that California taxpayers are already paying for.

The legislation builds on recent success in financial aid delivery in California Community Colleges since funding for financial aid administration increased in 2003. The legislation strengthens the commitment to the Fee Waiver program and does not raise fees.

The legislation would make the following comprehensive set of changes:

- 1) Have all new Community College students sign a waiver at the time of enrollment indicating that they are aware of financial aid programs and that they can seek assistance at the financial aid office
- 2) Have all colleges notify students receiving the Fee Waiver who are not yet receiving the Pell grant that they may qualify for federal aid and can apply for it
- 3) Have the Chancellor's Office disseminate best practices and provide training to increase financial aid use
- 4) Provide funding for the Chancellor's Office, in coordination with local colleges, to hold high school counselor conferences to better inform them of Community College programs and to help all college-bound students apply for aid
- 5) Have the Legislative Analyst Office annually report on the amount of funding for financial aid administration in the Community Colleges, CSU and UC

The total costs of the legislation are for 3 additional personnel in the Community College Chancellor's office and \$200,000 for high school counselor conferences. It is the intent of the Legislature to provide funding in the 2008-2009 Budget Act to implement these provisions.

(turn over for Questions and Answers)

Common Questions and Answers about the CCC Financial Aid Opportunity Act

Is California getting its fair share on federal student financial aid?

California taxpayers send our hard-earned money to the federal government, but our students don't get their fair share of federal aid. The federal Pell grant program is an entitlement for low-income students, yet we are not fully taking advantage of it. Right now, we are leaving money on the table.

Given our low fees and the fee waiver program, why is this legislation needed?

California Community College students have to pay for textbooks, supplies, transportation and living expenses to go to college. We do have low fees, and we waive them for eligible students with financial need, but students still have substantial costs of going to college. In fact, the non-fee costs of college are pretty much the same at community college, UC, CSU or a private college.

How do California Community College students compare to other students in their use of financial aid?

California Community College students receive the Pell grant at lower rates than community college students across the nation. They also receive the Pell grant at lower rates than students at UC and CSU. But these students tend to be more low-income and have the same financial need – if not more – than other students.

Why are our students not receiving federal aid at the same rate as others?

Historically, because of our low fees and the fee waiver program, we have thought that community college is affordable. But the reality is sinking in now that these students have the same costs of going to college, above fees, as any other students. California Community Colleges have had little funding to help students apply for aid. Students who work or attend part-time often do not think they are eligible for aid. Due to these and other factors, our students apply at lower rates. Of those that apply, many do not qualify at first glance due to working too much, but with the right assistance from a professional, they can still qualify for aid.

This all seems pretty technical, what's really at stake?

First, we believe that students have a right to know about financial aid programs that they may be eligible for. The whole college needs to embrace the task of making sure that students are aware of financial aid, starting at the moment of enrollment. Second, community colleges are the main path to postsecondary education and they educate the overwhelming majority of low-income and minority students. We need to make sure these students receive all the financial aid they are eligible for, to help ensure access and help more of these students reach their educational goals.

The Financial Aid Opportunity Act has been introduced by Assemblyman Portantino. For more information, contact Abdi Soltani (510) 645-1362 or abdi@collegecampaign.org.