EARLY COMMITMENT TO COLLEGE

a tool kit for school districts to raise college aspirations and student preparation starting in middle school
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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For the large number of students who do not have family members already in college, making an early commitment to college can be the difference between knowing they can go and thinking that college is out of reach.

- Michele Siqueiros, Executive Director, The Campaign for College Opportunity
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INTRODUCTION
Once the national and world leader in higher education, California now faces serious challenges in educating its population. Unless we make significant gains in the level of educational attainment, and aggressively pursue policies that promote college access and success, the state is projected to fall one million baccalaureate degrees short of what our economy will need by the year 2025.

Higher education is one of the best pathways out of poverty in our country, and research demonstrates that college-going aspirations are high among low-income middle and high school students and their parents. Yet research also shows that actual knowledge of the college application process and financial aid opportunities is low. They are confused about where and when to start the process and how to prepare.

Early Commitment to College works to improve educational attainment by providing information to students as an incentive for early academic preparation beginning in middle school rather than at the end of high school, when it can be too late.

IN THIS TOOL KIT
This Tool Kit is intended to serve two purposes: 1) to be a resource to schools and school districts already implementing Early Commitment to College (ECC), and 2) to provide a framework for how ECC could be carried out in schools that are not yet participating.

The Tool Kit provides information about what ECC is, three models (baseline, moderate, and ambitious) for how ECC could be implemented, two profiles of school districts and how they have implemented the program, a copy of the Save Me a Spot in College Pledge, and suggestions for activities to help build a college-going culture on campus.

WHAT IS EARLY COMMITMENT TO COLLEGE?
Early Commitment to College is the result of Senate Bill 890, authored by Senator Jack Scott, and signed into law by Governor Schwarzenegger in 2008. SB 890 was sponsored by The Campaign for College Opportunity and was enthusiastically supported by a broad base of nearly 120 schools, school districts, colleges, and community organizations throughout the state.

ECC is a powerful communication tool for California school districts, designed to be integrated into pre-existing programs,
to motivate and support young people in middle school and high school to achieve academically, finish high school, and pursue degree programs or career technical education in a community college and/or university. It helps to inform students and families that college is within their reach, affordable, and that early academic preparation is critical to success.

At the core of the program is the Save Me a Spot in College Pledge which students and their parents sign, making a commitment that students will prepare for, and eventually go to, college. The pledge also communicates that students are not the only ones responsible for making sure that they go to college, but that the state and nation also have a responsibility to save them a spot in college and to provide avenues for them to finance their higher education through fee waivers or grants if they meet the requirements for such aid.

Most importantly, ECC supports the development of a college-going culture at the school site that reaches all students, not just the lucky few selected to participate in college-prep programs.

ECC has three overarching values that, given the varying partnerships and capacities in participating school districts, allow ECC implementation to be customized to the individual needs of each school site. These values, however, are at the heart of what makes ECC such a powerful college awareness tool.

1. **Academic preparation is crucial to success in higher education.** By participating in ECC, students will enroll in challenging English and math courses starting in middle-school that will prepare them to take the required A-G coursework in high school necessary to attend a CSU or UC and that equips them to succeed in college-level courses.

2. **A college-going culture is critical to ensure that students do not lose sight of their college goals.** Through the partnerships created at each participating school, students will continually be exposed to various aspects of college, thus creating a college-going culture in which college is the assumed goal, not simply an elusive dream. Activities may include student support services such as counseling and financial aid education, or experiences such as college campus visits.

3. **Aspirations for the future do not end with college success.** It is not simply the intent of ECC that students go to college and graduate, but that they link their educational aspirations with successful careers, imagining futures for themselves that they may not see modeled for them in their daily lives. Activities to facilitate this development may include career planning and exploration or interviews with individuals already working in fields of interest.

**WHAT EARLY COMMITMENT TO COLLEGE IS NOT**
ECC is not a mandatory initiative. Nor is ECC prescriptive; this voluntary tool has been designed to provide a baseline entry point for districts that is achievable, but allows districts to build upon that baseline as they see fit.

**WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE IN ECC?**
All students are eligible to participate in ECC, though the legislation specifically aims to reach 6th-grade students in the highest poverty schools. Ideally students would sign the Save Me a Spot in College Pledge in middle school and would continue to receive important and timely information and resources about college throughout high school.
WHAT DOES ECC LOOK LIKE WHEN IMPLEMENTED?

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to implementing ECC in a school or school district. ECC is meant to be customized to the unique needs of a school district by utilizing the specific resources available within the district and in the surrounding community. The power of ECC—regardless of the availability of resources—is in information and creativity!

On the following pages are three models describing varying levels of participation: baseline, moderate, and ambitious. Embedded in the document are also two profiles of school districts that are currently implementing ECC and the steps they have taken to do so.

BASELINE MODEL: ECC as an informational tool to encourage college-going

- In 6th grade, students receive the Save Me a Spot in College Pledge. They and their parents sign it and the pledge is saved in their school district record.

- At the time of enrollment, students receive the following information and services:
  » A booklet containing college information about eligibility requirements, preparation steps, etc.,
  » Transcript review and an academics assessment leading to course planning and annual reporting to the student and their parents on how they are doing relative to state standards and other benchmarks,
  » Information about the Golden State ScholarShare College Savings Trust. For details, visit www.scholarshare.com.

- Grades 9 and/or 10: Participating students visit at least one community college and, where geographically feasible, at least one four-year university.

- Grade 11: Participating students receive information on college admissions tests.

- Grade 12: Participating students receive information on college admission and community college enrollment steps, the financial aid application process, including the free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) and grade point average verification.

MODERATE MODEL: ECC as a vehicle for boosting college aspirations and preparation district-wide

- All of the baseline steps are taken, PLUS

- Students re-sign or review the Save Me a Spot in College Pledge every year, not just in 6th grade.

- An ECC launch event is organized for the beginning of the school year in which students sign the Save Me a Spot in College Pledge. Some school districts may decide to do a drawing for a small scholarship(s) to create some excitement around the event. The launch event may be held at a time when parents and families can attend as well (example: Back to School Night could be a great opportunity).

- The Save Me a Spot in College Pledge is used as a launching pad for talking to students about academic preparation and financial planning for college.

- All students create and follow an educational plan. This would include ensuring that students understand the requirements for high school graduation and admission into four-year universities,
outline the classes that they plan to take each year and, for those with special needs, are informed of and connected to support services that will help ensure their success.

- Teachers regularly incorporate information about college into their lesson plans and discussions with students.

- Students are given the opportunity to explore their future college or university and career.
  » Students learn the difference between UC, CSU, community colleges, private colleges, and for-profit colleges.
  » Tours are organized to visit local colleges and universities.
  » A college fair is organized on campus. Students and representatives of local colleges and universities are invited to the school to share information about what their institutions offer.
  » A career fair is organized on campus. Local businesses, industry leaders, and organizations are invited to the school to talk to students about different career paths and the higher education needed to get there.

- Parents receive regular communication about their role in helping their student achieve their college goals.

AMBITIOUS MODEL: ECC to develop a college-going culture district-wide
- All of the baseline and moderate model steps are taken, PLUS

- The elements necessary for a college-going culture are intentionally cultivated through regular activities and multiple avenues for delivering information (see section in tool kit that discusses a college-going culture and activity ideas). These elements are not limited to college-prep/college-readiness classes and programs, but are infused into each and every classroom on campus.

- Academic preparation is emphasized by strengthening instruction and linking K-12 curriculum achievement with college.
  » Students are encouraged to take algebra in 8th grade.
  » Strategies are developed to raise math and English achievement.
  » A-G classes are adequately provided.
  » 11th grade: Students participate in the Early Assessment Program.
  » 12th: A curriculum focused on math, English, and college readiness is implemented.

- Strong partnerships are developed with Cal-PASS, local colleges and universities, and community organizations and initiatives. By forming meaningful connections with others in the community, students are provided access to more resources to help them succeed. This becomes especially

Every day we tell our students how important graduating from high school is. Today, hundreds...are standing up and taking a pledge to push themselves to do better and get to college. If we want to reach a 100-percent graduation rate in L.A., the roots will be in this pledge.

- Mónica García, Board President, Los Angeles Unified School District
important in a time of dwindling resources from the state.
» School districts participate in Cal-PASS, sharing data with local colleges for K-16 alignment and planning. To learn more about Cal-PASS, visit www.calpass.org.
» Dual enrollment programs are developed in partnership with local community colleges.
» Summer bridge programs are developed with local community colleges to close readiness gaps.
» Admission guarantees to local universities or community college programs are offered as an incentive to meeting admission requirements and graduating from high school. Examples include:
  − The El Monte Union Pledge Compact between El Monte Union High School District, Rio Hondo College, and the University of California at Irvine: http://tinyurl.com/ElMonteCompact
  − The Long Beach College Promise between Long Beach Unified School District, Long Beach City College, and CSU Long Beach: www.longbeachcollegepromise.org
» Educational institutions and other outside entities unite in a commitment to support the education of the community’s young people. Examples include:
  − Long Beach College Promise: www.longbeachcollegepromise.org
  − L.A. Compact: www.lacompact.org
  − San Francisco Promise: http://sanfranciscopromise.org

• The school district moves from providing information to providing services. Assistance is provided to students in the areas of:
  » Course selection and planning, including career technical education and A-G;
  » Preparation for college admission tests;
  » Application to universities or enrollment into community colleges in the 11th and 12th grades.
  » Completion of financial aid forms in the 12th grade.

• The school district puts systems in place that will aid students in their transition to college.
  » GPA verification with the Student Aid Commission is automatic.
  » K-12 transcripts are provided to students who enroll in a community college.
  » Transcript evaluation services, or another system, are utilized to notify students that they have GPAs making them eligible for CSU or UC admission.
  » Counselors receive additional training around advising for college, with a special emphasis on issues around community colleges.
  » Accounts for each participating student are created on www.CaliforniaColleges.edu.

**DISTRICT PROFILE**

Merced River School District is as rural as rural can be, as described by Helio Brasil, who serves as the district’s superintendent and principal to both of the district’s schools. When Helio arrived in Merced County 10 years ago, he asked the 8th graders about college and what their plans were. For the most part, they had none. Students in the district did not consider college to be a part of their future. It’s no surprise that this was the case either. In 2009, Merced County had the lowest percentage of the population with a bachelor’s degree in the state (only 11.3% and trending downward vs. 29.9% in the state).
In the 2007/08 school year, Helio heard about Early Commitment to College and saw the potential it held as a communication tool for having those college conversations with not only his students, but also their parents. He introduced the idea to the Merced County School’s P-16 Council which then adopted it as one of their priorities. They recently decided to start implementing ECC in high school as well.

The first step he took to introducing the idea of higher education to the students in his district was organizing tours to local colleges and universities. He believes that to plan for college, you must first dream of it. It is also of vital importance to demystify college and show students and parents that Merced College and UC Merced are right in their own communities, and CSU Stanislaus is nearby in neighboring Stanislaus County. A common concern among Latino families is often the idea of sending their children away from home to go to college.

Central to ECC in the Merced River School District, however, is the pledge. Initially the pledge was incorporated into parent conferences during the first quarter and was signed by both students and parents. It is now sent home with students and signed by students, parents, and teachers. A copy is kept in each student’s file and students retain a copy for themselves as a constant reminder that even their time in middle school is in preparation for college.

ECC has truly become engrained into the culture of the school district. It is not limited to middle school students; students and their parents receive a copy of the pledge starting in kindergarten and start talking about various components of it. Students in 2nd and 3rd grade visit UC Merced and start learning about the differences between community college, CSU, and UC. Student governments form activities around ECC and classrooms adopt a college for the year, using their colors, having spirit days, and engaging in different competitions. Parents also receive monthly newsletters that often include information about college.

The key to the success of ECC in Merced River School District was support from the teachers. As is the case in many school districts in the state, resources are spread thin and yet the workload does not diminish. When presented with the idea of implementing ECC in the school district, teachers were enthusiastic about having the pledge as a framework for having conversations with parents. Rather than telling parents that their child was not doing well in a subject, they are able to start the conversation with telling them why it is important that their child succeeds in school and talk about how each stage in school is building on the last and should be viewed as preparation for college.

The pledge also serves as a good reminder to everyone in the district about what they are really doing each day—that they are doing more than working to get students to learn what they are supposed to know in each grade level, but that they are preparing students for being successful in life, for attending college so that the options that are available to them are more varied than what they see in their daily lives.

Merced River School District
Community Type: Rural
Student Population: ~185
2 schools (K-3 and 4-8)
Race/Ethnicity: 72% Latino/Hispanic
1% African American
26% White
1% Asian
English Learners: 38%
Free or Reduced Meal Program: 74%
One goal is to get everyone focused on attending college and getting them focused at an earlier age. It takes some time getting the word out and right down into the students’ hands. With the signed pledges, the only challenge is to make sure everybody in the community understands it.

- F. King Alexander, CSU Long Beach President
I Pledge:
1. I will graduate from high school by meeting all graduation requirements of my school district.
2. I will take classes to prepare for college by enrolling in the courses required for admission to the California State University and University of California (known as “A-G” requirements) and/or Career Technical Education courses.
3. I will create a CaliforniaColleges.edu account that will contain information for my college application and learn of college opportunities from the website.
4. I will plan financially for college, including discussing establishing a ScholarShare College Savings account with my family.
5. I will demonstrate my proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics by passing the California Standards Test (CST) in each grade and the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE).
6. I will apply for financial aid by completing and filing a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA) and submitting my grade point average to the Student Aid Commission by March 2nd of my senior year.
7. I will go to college by enrolling directly in a community college or applying for university admission within 12 months after high school graduation.

The State of California Pledges:
1. California will Save Me a Spot in a community college so that I can receive a certificate in a career-technical field, pursue an Associate Degree, or transfer to a college or university to earn a Bachelor’s Degree after my high school graduation.
2. I will receive a fee waiver under the California Community College Board of Governor’s fee waiver program for two or more years at a community college if I am a California resident at that time and continue to show financial need on a completed Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
3. California will Save Me a Spot at the California State University or the University of California if I meet the admissions requirements.
4. California will provide me with a Cal Grant to help cover the cost of college if I meet all the program’s eligibility requirements at the time that I apply in my senior year. A Cal Grant can be used at any eligible public or independent college or university in California.

The United States of America Pledges:
1. The United States of America will assist me financially in pursuing a college education through federal financial aid, such as a Pell Grant, if I complete a FAFSA that determines that I am eligible for this grant.

_________________________________________    _______________________________________
Pupil Signature                             Parent/Legal Guardian Signature

_________________________________________
Pupil Name

_________________________________________
Parent/Legal Guardian Name

_________________________________________
Pupil School and Grade

_________________________________________
Date
In spring 2009, LBUSD started implementing Early Commitment to College for all 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students. Students were provided with a pledge that both they and their parents signed. This pledge outlined what students would need to do in order to ensure that they could go to college, in addition to telling them about the support they could expect to receive from their local college and university, the state, and the federal government.

A year earlier, in spring 2008, the Long Beach College Promise was signed. It reflects the deep conviction of the leaders of Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD), Long Beach City College (LBCC), and California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) that they can create a college-going culture in their city. Among the guarantees of the Long Beach College Promise is a tuition-free semester at LBCC and/or guaranteed admission to CSULB for LBUSD graduates who meet college entrance requirements. At times when tuition and fees are being raised multiple times a year and admissions are being limited, these assurances are monumental.

Another element of the Long Beach College Promise is that of early and continued outreach to students and families, starting in 6th grade, about preparing for and going to college. This is where the Long Beach Unified School District has found Early Commitment to College to be an important tool.

In 4th grade, LBUSD students visit Long Beach City College and in 5th grade they take a trip to CSU Long Beach. During these early years, field trips in which students get to see a college campus and hear directly from college students are exciting and make a big impact. Yet LBUSD found that once the students were in middle school, they didn’t have a consistent district-wide communication tool to continue the college discussion and inform them of the steps that they needed to take to make sure they went to college. Although students and parents were signing the pledge each year, administrators recognized that a fuller conversation needed to be happening to make sure that the message was really reaching students.

During the 2010/11 school year, LBUSD wanted to better integrate ECC into the middle school curriculum and therefore began a new incremental implementation of the program tailored to each middle-school grade level. Over a three-year period, pledges will be developed for each grade, emphasizing different themes that students need to know and understand, and requiring students to write out specific steps they will take that school year to progress toward their college goal. For example, in 6th grade students...
will learn about the importance of managing their time wisely and why their grades matter, learn how to calculate their GPA, develop a plan for improving their grades in classes in which they may struggle and plan for taking challenging classes in high school, and pledge to explore colleges they might be interested in attending by interviewing someone that has attended a college of interest.

One challenge that the district faced in implementing ECC was in getting the information to all teachers and—given recent budget cuts—asking everyone to do one more thing with fewer resources. As a way to coordinate this effort district-wide and ease the burden of teachers, the district has developed a lesson plan for 6th grade English teachers that covers the themes of ECC for that grade level while also employing skills appropriate for the learning goals of that class (i.e. writing, note-taking, etc.). A similar approach will be taken for the 7th and 8th grade levels where ECC will also be integrated into the curriculum.

For Long Beach Unified School District, Early Commitment to College has helped to bridge a gap and add a tangible element to the work that they were already doing. It will also be a useful tool and nice segue into their Linked Learning programs at the high school level. Linked Learning is an approach that links strong academics with real world learning, to help students build a strong foundation for success in college and careers—and life.
CREATING A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE
One of the fundamental strategies of implementing Early Commitment to College on campus and throughout a school district is creating a vibrant college-going culture. A college-going culture assumes that all students should have the option to go to college if they are eligible, and that the people and institutions that surround students are responsible for helping them to prepare for that option.

A college-going culture exists when all of the following elements are present (specific activity ideas in this tool kit will be organized according to these eight elements).

College Talk
College is a regular topic of conversation. Students are asked about what they would like to do and which college or university they would like to attend.

Communicating Clear Expectations
Students understand that their time in middle school and high school is meant to prepare them for a range of postsecondary options, including the option of attending a four-year university directly after high school.

Information & Resources
Students are regularly provided with relevant information and know where to access important resources about how to prepare themselves for college as they move through middle school and high school.

Curriculum
The school is committed to providing the resources necessary for every student to meet grade-level standards every year in every classroom and to be fully-prepared for college upon graduation. Students are committed to ensuring that they are taking the classes necessary to prepare for college and to working hard to succeed in their courses.

Faculty Involvement
Faculty is committed to integrating college information into regular classroom activities.

Family Involvement
Families are given important and relevant resources about the importance of higher education and how they can be planning for their children to attend a college or university after high school. Families are included in discussions about the educational future of their children.

College Partnerships
Meaningful partnerships with local colleges and universities are formed to raise the awareness of the options nearby and students’ college aspirations.

Articulation
A seamless experience is produced for students, moving from preschool through high school, in which a college message is clearly and consistently communicated.
College Month
Institute a college month in which there is a heavy, campus-wide focus on college and that incorporates various activities. At the end of the month, students reflect on “College Month,” writing about what they learned, what they need to do in order to go to college, and make a plan to accomplish their goals.

Focus on Graduation 1
Have students contribute to a classroom bulletin board that focuses on graduation. Students might bring a graduation photograph or picture of a family member or friend to display. Images may include graduation from pre-school or kindergarten, high school, college, or training programs. Assign a persuasive paragraph or essay explaining why graduation is so important.

Focus on Graduation 2
Teachers bring in their graduation caps and take a photo of each student wearing it and holding a sign with the year that they will graduate from college. Photos are displayed in the classroom and given to the students at the end of the term.

Focus on Careers
Have students cut from magazines pictures of people in different occupations. Tell students to select a career they would be interested in pursuing from the assortment of magazine pictures. Use a digital camera to take a picture of each student. Have students superimpose their face over the face in the magazine picture. Have students list write a paragraph or essay: 1) explaining why they selected that particular occupation and 2) explaining how that occupation contributes to the community.
Focus on the Future
Have students select a career that they might want to pursue in the future. Students are to use an 8½ x 11” sheet of paper to: a) draw a portrait of himself/herself in that career, b) list the school subjects needed to excel in the career, and c) list the specialized skills and abilities needed for the career.

Door Decorating Contest
Ask students to decorate classroom doors to focus on specific colleges or careers. Doors may be judged for originality, amount of information provided, visual appeal, impact or other criteria. Door designs and student designers may be acknowledged in a display case or centrally-located bulletin board.

Real World Interview
Give students the assignment to interview someone in the community to better understand paths that lead to college or career. To prepare for the assignment, students should brainstorm questions that might be asked. Information from interviews may be used for an oral presentation or writing assignment.

Getting There
It is important for students to know that they are surrounded by opportunity for a higher education and that they do not need to travel far to reach their dreams. Have students use a map of the city to plot out the route to three colleges or universities in the area.

College Clues
The teacher places items related to college in the classroom. Students are given a period of time—a class period to a week—to find and list the location of each of the items and to explain how the item relates to college or college going.

Name That College
Divide the class into teams. Read one to five statements about one college that the students have learned about. For example, “It once was located where LACC is now,” “It was the second campus in what is now a statewide university system.” The team that can identify the school most quickly scores a point. Continue until each of the colleges have been described and identified by student teams.

Careers/Colleges Web (or Cluster)
Place students into pairs or groups of three. Allow each group to select a letter from the alphabet. Challenge students to create a web (or cluster) of careers/occupations or colleges that begin with the selected letters. Students should be expected to describe or define the careers/occupations. Students should also know where the colleges are located.

Help Wanted Ads
Remind students that each semester they actively participate in school provides information and experiences the students will need for their future. Have pairs of students search through the classified section to find an ad that lists the job title, qualifications, and salary for a specific job. Tell the students to tape the ad to a sheet of paper and then list “what I will need to know and be able to do” to fully qualify for the position. Students may include personal qualities, academic knowledge, skills and abilities.
**Communicating Clear Expectations**

**College-Ready Attributes and Activities**
Explain to students that the good habits and self-discipline needed for success in college and in careers develop early in life. Have students brainstorm a list of personal attributes and activities that will help them become college-ready. Students are then to write an essay assessing themselves based on the list.

**Grade Point Average (GPA) Check**
Show students how to compute their GPA based on last semester’s grades. Challenge students to improve their GPA for this semester by the midterm report card. Celebrate the success of students who achieve their goal. Encourage and advise those who do not to focus on improvement by the end of the semester.

**Personal Progress Report**
Ask students to reflect upon their participation, learning, work-habits and cooperation in their classes. Ask that they fill out a “report card” for each course honestly evaluating their progress and performance. Students should also include comments that indicate what the student should do to improve.

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<th>Subject Mark</th>
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<th>Cooperation</th>
<th>Times Absent</th>
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**Information & Resources**

**AB 540**
This is a lesson for every student, irrespective of their immigration status. Encourage students who were born in the US to listen and learn because they may have an opportunity to share the information with a neighbor, relative, or friend. Explain to students that California’s Assembly Bill 540 (often called AB 540) helps immigrant students to attend college because many students may be eligible to pay in-state tuition at California community colleges, the University of California and California State University campuses. That can save the students and their families hundreds or even thousands of dollars in tuition when compared with the cost of out-of-state tuition fees!

To be eligible for AB 540, a student must:
- Attend a California high school for 3 years or more,
- Pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) and graduate from a California high school,
- Sign a statement with the college or university (that does NOT go to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement [ICE]) promising that they will apply for legal residency as soon as they are eligible to do so.
Provide students with a list and/or map of community colleges, by going to [www.cccco.edu](http://www.cccco.edu). A list and map of California State Universities (CSU) can be found at [www.csumentor.edu](http://www.csumentor.edu), and the website for a list and map of University of California (UC) schools is [www.universityofcalifornia.edu](http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu).

Give pairs of students a copy of the three lists or maps. Ask each pair to select both a community college and a four-year university. There should not be duplicate choices for the community college or CSU selections. Then ask students to pair up to use a computer in the classroom, library media center or in the computer lab to visit the website for their designated community college, CSU, and UC. The assignment is to (a) determine each school’s policy for AB 540 students and (b) to compare the in-state tuition cost with the cost of out-of-state tuition. The information can be posted on a classroom chart, or as 8½” x 11” mini-posters on the bulletin board.

**Save with AP**
Inform students that many of the nation’s colleges and universities have an AP policy that grants incoming students credit, placement, or both for qualifying AP examination grades. In most cases, students who have earned a score of 3, 4, or 5 are eligible.

Inform all students that this may be especially good news for students whose families may not be able to easily afford to send them to college. It may also be encouraging for undocumented or AB 540 students because, based on their AP courses and scores, some students are able to be admitted to college as a sophomore or even a junior! That saves one or even two years of tuition costs!

Use a computer and LCD projector to visit the College Board website [www.Collegeboard.com](http://www.Collegeboard.com) to review the 37 types of AP courses that are available in high school. Ask students to take notes on the courses in which they might be interested.

**College Geography**
Give pairs of students an outline map of the United States and a directory. Have the students use the list of colleges and universities found in the appendix of the directory to find at least one college or university for each state. Challenge students to list institutions other than state colleges and universities.

**College Comparisons**
Use a computer with internet access and an LCD projector to give students a virtual tour of colleges or universities. Use Google or another search engine to locate the website for the college or university. Select two-year and four-year or public and private institutions. Select schools in different parts of the state or country. Tell students to create a diagram to compare and contrast the institutions.

**College Search**
Encourage individual students or pairs of students to use a computer in the classroom, library or computer lab to identify two colleges that might be of interest based on career interests, favorite subjects, geography, class size, etc.

**Websites:**
- [www.CaliforniaColleges.edu](http://www.CaliforniaColleges.edu)
- [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)
- [www.collegeview.com](http://www.collegeview.com)
- [www.embark.com](http://www.embark.com)
College Search 2
Inform students that there is a career for almost every interest or career goal that a student has. Encourage individual students or pairs of students to use a computer in the classroom, library, or computer lab to identify two careers that might be of interest based on personal talents and abilities, personality, favorite subjects, or environmental preferences.

Websites:  
www.acinet.org/acinet/library.asp?category=1.2  
www.streamingfuture.com  
www.californiacareers.info

Scholarship Search
Inform students that millions of dollars in scholarship money is available to students who work hard in school and who meet certain criteria. Encourage individual students or pairs of students to use a computer in the classroom, library, or computer lab to identify two scholarships that might be available to them based on their career interests, favorite subjects, race, ethnicity, gender or special abilities.

Websites:  
www.collegeboard.com  
www.fastweb.com  
www.scholarshiphelp.org

Compare and Share
Inform students that although buying college textbooks is often expensive, there are ways to reduce the costs. Have students visit a variety of websites to compare the cost of college textbooks.

Websites:  
www.Amazon.com  
www.eBay.com  
www.Half.com  
www.surfcollege.com

Count the Cost
Allow each student to select a different college or university. Then have students determine the average cost per undergraduate class at the institution they selected. Reinforce the point that every course students take and successfully complete in middle school and college saves them from having to spend money to take remedial courses in college to supply the missing knowledge and learning.
All About Advanced Placement (AP)
Use a computer and LCD projector to visit the College Board website (www.Collegeboard.com) to explore the “About AP” page. Remind students that taking AP courses can help them fulfill the high school graduation and college admission requirements.

Getting Ready for Advanced Placement (AP)
Have students brainstorm a list of qualities and abilities they need to be successful in taking college-level courses in high school. Then have them brainstorm a list of people, school or community resources, or other places to get the help they will need to be ready for such challenging work. Emphasize the point that your students can be successful in Advanced Placement courses if they take school seriously, complete assignments, and get the help they need to understand their work.

Role Models
Ask faculty and staff members to bring a photograph of themselves wearing a cap and gown from their alma mater. Display the photos in a hallway display case with captions such as, “We graduated; you can too!” or “The road to your graduation begins today.”

Alma Mater Pride Day
Faculty and staff members wear t-shirts from the college they attended and spend a few moments in each class telling students about where the college is, why they chose to go there, and what their experience was like.

Real World Interview
Give students the assignment to interview someone in the school community to better understand paths that lead to college or career. To prepare for the assignment, students should brainstorm questions that might be asked. Information from interviews may be used for an oral presentation or writing assignment.

Time to Read
Ask paraprofessionals or other staff members who are attending college to provide a copy of the syllabus for the courses they are taking. Ask students to compare and contrast the syllabi with assignments they have been given. Ask students to draw conclusions about the college workload and the preparation they will need for college.
Guess Who
Compile college-related questions about faculty and staff members. For example, “Which teacher attended three colleges in the San Francisco Bay Area?” During College Month, ask a question a day over the PA or in the bulletin. Students turn in their answers each week. Students with the most correct answers are eligible for a drawing to win books or other incentives. The goal is to encourage students to speak with the adults on their campus about college-going.

Guess Who 2
List ten to twenty college-related statements on the left-hand side of an 8½” x 11” sheet of paper. For example, “majored in Spanish,” “received financial aid,” or “attended a community college.” Students are to get signatures of faculty and staff members for whom the statement is true. Students may not get multiple signatures from any one staff member. The goal is to encourage students to speak with the adults on their campus about college-going.
College Night
Sponsor a “College Night” to provide parents and students with information about preparing for and attending college, including information about high school graduation requirements, financial aid, and recommended reading lists. Teachers, paraprofessionals, current college students, and/or alumni of the school share about their college experience.

Signing the Pledge
When students take the Save Me a Spot in College Pledge home, encourage them to discuss with their parents ways they can achieve their goal of a college education together. Make a copy of the signed pledge and encourage student to frame it and hang it on their wall.

Create a Budget
For high school juniors or seniors, have students complete a budget for one of the colleges or universities that they are considering attending. Be sure they include income that they may receive from scholarships, financial aid, or Board of Governors fee waivers (for qualifying community college students).

We think college should be an option for every one of our students. We encourage students and their parents to start thinking about college long before they enter high school.

- Ramon C. Cortines, Former Superintendent, Los Angeles Unified School District
**College Partnerships**

**College Sponsors**
Students identify several universities or colleges. Students communicate with the college asking to be “sponsored” by the institution and furnished with posters, pennants, and other college-related materials to decorate the classroom. Students also ask if current students would be willing to visit the classroom and speak about what they are studying and their experience being a student at that college or university.

**College Tours**
Reach out to a local community college and/or California State University or University of California and arrange a tour for your students on the campus.

**Educational Plan**
Have students look up the entrance requirements for the University of California, California State University, California Community Colleges, and compare them with high school graduation requirements. This activity is to demonstrate to students that if they want to go to a four-year university after high school, they need to take the A-G coursework in high school. Follow-up step: have students meet with their counselor to create an educational plan.

**Articulation**

**It’s Basic**
Explain that most colleges and universities offer basic skills courses for students who need a stronger foundation in English or math. Ask students to use the Internet to view the catalog from a local community college, University of California or California State University. Students are to locate course descriptions and course sequences for basic skills courses in English or math. Make the point that students who must enroll in the basic skills courses spend additional time and money. Encourage students to: a) take and study notes daily, b) complete assignments consistently, and c) participate actively in their classes. Remind students that earning high grades and learning the course content in middle school and high school can save them from having to spend money and time to take basic skills or additional courses in college to supply missing knowledge and learning.

**Planning for Assessment and Placement Exams**
When planning for their senior year in high school, make sure that students understand the importance of the assessment and placement exams that they will take when enrolling at a college or university. Have students research the assessment or placement policies of a college of interest and the specific exam that college uses (ACCUPLACER and COMPASS are the most common in California Community Colleges).
Inform students that taking math and English classes in their senior year can help them place higher in these exams and avoid taking basic skills courses, which take more time and money. Also inform students that they can study in preparation for the exam.

Free sample tests can be found at: www.testprepreview.com. (CAUTION: There are a lot of ads found on this website. Be sure to find the Self-Assessment Modules for each test. Students should not have to pay for any of these resources.)

For information on California State University placement tests: www.ets.org/csu/about.
For information on University of California Entry Level Writing Requirement (math placement policies and exams vary by campus): www.ucop.edu/elwr/index.html.

**Time Log**
Explain to students that the good habits and self-discipline needed for success in college and in life develop early in life. Ask students to record how they actually spent their time during any designated three days in College Month. Students are to: a) Make a check in the College/Career column if their activity can prepare them for college/career, b) Share how they spent their time with a partner or small group.

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The Early Commitment to College program is effective because it helps us to understand exactly what to do in order to get to college. It is easy to talk about going to college, and it is not enough just to say, “Yeah, I will to go to college.” One has to actually take many important early steps to make it happen.

- Susan Vang, 8th grade, Terronez Middle School, Fresno
ONLINE RESOURCES
For additional resources on preparing for college, paying for college, selecting a college or university, assessment and placement exams, AB 540, and materials in Spanish, please visit these online resources.

PREPARING FOR COLLEGE
These websites help you prepare for college step-by-step starting in middle school:
- CaliforniaColleges.edu
- KnowHow2GO: www.knowhow2go.org
- California Colleges: www.californiacolleges.edu
- College Next: www.collegenext.org
- College: Making It Happen: www.certicc.org/OrderPublications.aspx

PAYING FOR COLLEGE
ScholarShare
This website shows you how to open a college savings account.
www.scholarshare.com

Financial Aid
Federal Student Aid (FSA) Information Center
This website has a large amount of information about federal aid including grants, loans, and work study (information also available in Spanish).
1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243)

FAFSA
The FAFSA is the application for federal financial aid. It is also required to apply for other financial aid from your college or university. Students apply in their senior year of high school. Each college and university has its own deadline but it is usually in February.
www.fafsa.ed.gov

Cal Grant
A Cal Grant is free money from the state of California that you can use at any California college. To apply, students need to submit the FAFSA and a verified Cal Grant GPA by the deadline on March 2nd of their senior year in high school.
www.calgrant.org

California Student Aid Commission
Cal Grant is a program administered by the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC), but they also offer other financial aid programs. Check their website for all financial aid opportunities that may be available.
www.csac.ca.gov

FinAid.org
This website has a large amount of information on everything from grants to grad school funds.
www.finaid.org
I Can Afford College
This website helps you find financial opportunities and services for future California Community College students.
www.icanaffordcollege.com

Cash for College
Cash for College does free workshops every January and February for first-generation college-goers and low-income students to help them complete the FAFSA and CalGrant GPA verification forms so they can access financial aid.
http://tinyurl.com/cash4college

Scholarships
These websites have many scholarships of all types:
• Fast Web: www.fastweb.com
• Scholarships.com: www.scholarships.com
SELECTING A COLLEGE
California Community Colleges
This website gives you information about the community college system and links to all 112 community colleges.
www.cccco.edu

California State University (CSU)
CSU Mentor is an online tool that helps you and your family learn about the CSU system, select a CSU campus to attend, plan to finance higher education, and apply for admission.
www.csumentor.edu

University of California (UC)
This website gives you undergraduate and transfer admission information for the UC system.
www.universityofcalifornia.edu/admissions

Association of Independent California Colleges & Universities (AICCU)
This website gives you information on private colleges and universities in California.
www.aiccu.edu

AB 540—COLLEGE FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS
AB 540 Student Guide:
This document is a college and financial aid guide for undocumented immigrant students.
www.usc.edu/dept/chepa/pdf/AB%20540%20final.pdf

Mexican American Legal Defense & Educational Fund (MALDEF)
This is a list of scholarships that are open to all students regardless of immigration status.

MALDEF also has other resources for AB 540 students that can be accessed here:

SPANISH-LANGUAGE RESOURCES
These resources have information in Spanish about planning and paying for college, and links to other Spanish-language resources.
- Hispanic Scholarship Fund – Tus Palabras de Hoy: http://tuspalabrasdehoy.org/
- KnowHow2GO – Mentores en Español: www.knowhow2go.com/es.php