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Governor Brown Proposes Cuts to College Affordability for Low-Income Californians

We are saddened to see more than \$300 million in Cal Grant cuts in the 2012-13 budget proposal released by California Governor Jerry Brown earlier today. Cal Grants are a crucial lifeline for hundreds of thousands of California students who couldn't afford to attend or complete college without them.

Some of these cuts take a common sense approach to increasing accountability for all types of schools and preserving affordability at the state's public colleges. For instance, prohibiting state grant dollars from subsidizing students' attendance at colleges where more than one in four student loan borrowers default on their loans is smart policy in any budget climate. Also, the Governor's proposal would maintain maximum award levels at all public colleges, where the vast majority of students in the state are enrolled.

However, some of the cuts would fundamentally transform the program from a true engine of opportunity for students who need a hand to a reward for those already much more likely to attend and complete college. In particular, the Governor would dramatically increase the required grade point average for Cal Grant B awards from 2.0 to 2.75. These grants go primarily to low-income students at community colleges. This change would pull the rug out from under the underrepresented students whose college success is central to our state's economic recovery. This is a dramatic cut to student eligibility, and one that would happen so suddenly that students who have long counted on a Cal Grant would instead find themselves empty handed.

We will continue to analyze the effects of these and other Cal Grant proposals on students as budget negotiations continue in the coming months.

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An independent, nonprofit organization, the Institute for College Access & Success works to make higher education more available and affordable for people of all backgrounds. The Institute's Project on Student Debt works to increase public understanding of rising student debt and the implications for our families, economy, and society. For more information see www.projectonstudentdebt.org and www.ticas.org.