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New Report Finds Many Low-Income College Students Do Not Get Cal Grants Broad Coalition Releases Analysis and Recommendations to Strengthen California Grant Program

The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS) and more than a dozen other student, civil rights, business, and college access organizations today released a new analysis of how Cal Grants could better serve low-income college students. The Cal Grant program provides \$1.5 billion in need-based grant aid that each year helps hundreds of thousands of Californians pay for college. However, the report finds that many needy college students either do not receive Cal Grants or receive less than others with more resources.

The federal government uses students' financial aid applications to estimate how much their families can contribute towards college costs. **Among the lowest income students enrolled in college statewide – those with no financial resources for college – only 23 percent receive Cal Grants.** Of applicants who do receive grants, those from the lowest income families get smaller grants than their better-off peers. *Strengthening Cal Grants to Better Serve Today's Students* documents these and other gaps in the Cal Grant program and offers specific recommendations for closing them.

“California’s students are more diverse – by income, age, and race/ethnicity – than ever before. We found that the Cal Grant program leaves a lot of today’s students out and provides less help to those who need the most,” said Lauren Asher, TICAS president. “We need to build on the Cal Grant program’s strengths so that more of California’s neediest students can get to and through college.”

California’s community colleges enroll the vast majority of the state’s low-income and underrepresented minority students, yet only 16 percent of their lowest income students who apply for aid receive Cal Grants. Eligible students who apply within a year after high school are generally guaranteed grants, but community college students are the least likely to know that aid is available or to apply. Students who apply too late have to compete for a limited number of grants: **there are 17 eligible applicants for every one authorized “competitive” grant.**

“Community college students frequently have to decide between buying a required textbook, a bus pass, or even healthcare and food,” said Rich Copenhagen, president of the Student Senate for California Community Colleges. “Cal Grants could better help our students succeed in their education if they are expanded and improved.”

Recent analyses have found that California’s economic future depends on far more people completing some type of post-secondary education. Financial aid helps contain students’ need to work so they can

spend enough time studying and in class. Across all colleges, only 32 percent of California students complete credentials on time. At the community colleges, where Cal Grants are small and scarce, African-American and Latino students are much less likely to graduate than white students.

"Simple demographics tell us that California's economic future depends on the Latino community, so making completion of higher education accessible to more Latino students is essential to our future economy," stated Thomas A. Saenz, President and General Counsel of MALDEF. "We must allocate grant dollars to those who most need them to complete college."

The report includes three recommendations designed to build on the strengths of the Cal Grant program and better serve California's students going forward:

1. Increase the Cal Grant B access award, which is now worth just one quarter of its original value. Cal Grant B access awards go to the lowest income recipients, and help them limit their work hours and focus on their studies by covering non-tuition costs such as books and transportation.
2. Serve more of the state's Cal Grant eligible students. Most eligible applicants are shut out of the entitlement guarantee, and too few competitive grants are authorized and awarded.
3. Include tuition awards for first-year Cal Grant B recipients at universities. Currently, the vast majority of these very low-income students receive less than \$1,500 in Cal Grants as freshman and must find other ways to pay for tuition and fees.

The following organizations joined together to release the report and support its recommendations:

California Community College Association of Student Trustees
California Competes
California State Student Association
The Campaign for College Opportunity
The Education Trust – West
The Institute for College Access & Success
Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce
MALDEF
NAACP California
NAACP Los Angeles
Public Advocates Inc.
Southern California College Access Network
Student Senate for California Community Colleges
University of California Student Association
Young Invincibles

For more information about the coalition supporting a stronger Cal Grant program, see ticas.org/calgrants.

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An independent, nonprofit organization, The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS) works to make higher education more available and affordable for people of all backgrounds. Our 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.ticas.org and www.projectonstudentdebt.org or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/TICAS_org.