

## Early Commitment to College (SB 890 - Senator Scott)

SB 890 - the ***Early Commitment to College Act of 2007*** - ensures that students and their families, beginning in middle school, understand that if they prepare for college, California will provide them the opportunity to pursue career technical education or a college degree in our community colleges and universities and provide financial assistance for eligible students with need. A bipartisan group of legislators has joined Senator Scott in introducing this bill.

The proposal is simple because it builds on existing programs, but powerful because it packages these opportunities into one commitment made to students at an early age. It seeks to reverse significant and troubling trends of declining educational achievement that can hurt the future quality of life and economic competitiveness of the state.

The proposal reflects two shared values – opportunity, by giving students a path to prepare themselves for education after high school and joint responsibility, communicating our expectations of students, families, and the state to each do our part.

The legislation would create the Save Me a Spot in College Pledge, to be signed by students and a parent or legal guardian. Students would agree to:

- 1) Meet all graduation requirements to finish high school in California.
- 2) Take courses to prepare, which may include A-G and career tech classes.
- 3) Seek to achieve proficiency in math and in reading and writing in English.
- 4) Complete a FAFSA and apply for financial aid by March 2<sup>nd</sup> of their senior year.
- 5) Meet application and other requirements for university admission or enroll directly in community college soon after high school graduation.

In return, the state will provide the following opportunities:

- 1) A spot in a California Community College for the student to pursue career technical education, pursue a degree, or transfer to a four-year university.
- 2) A spot in the University of California or California State University provided the student meets the eligibility and admission requirements set by each system.
- 3) Financial aid for eligible students to help pay for fees, books, supplies, and living expenses, including a guarantee of the Community College Board of Governor Fee Waiver for two years as long as the student continues to demonstrate need, as well as support to apply for the CalGrant and federal Pell Grant, which can both be used at a public or private college.

Local school districts, in collaboration with community colleges, public universities, private colleges, community and business groups, and student aid organizations, would provide services to help students achieve their goals. The legislation will create a voluntary program for local districts managed by the Superintendent of Public Instruction in collaboration with higher education and student aid agencies. The legislation is built on existing admission, eligibility or application rules for programs. It also allows local colleges to enter a supplemental agreement to guarantee admission to an individual campus. SB 890 is pending in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

(turn over for Questions and Answers)

## **Common Questions and Answers about Early Commitment to College**

### **What is the problem this proposal is trying to solve? Why is this needed?**

Over the last ten years, the college-going rate has declined for high school graduates of every ethnic group. In just the last two years, California has slipped from 40<sup>th</sup> to 48<sup>th</sup> in national rankings of states on this important measure. Our fastest-growing populations, for example in the Central Valley and the Inland Empire and among ethnic minorities, have the lowest rates of college participation. If these trends are not reversed, California will face a shortage of educated workers to keep our economy competitive and will see a decline of personal income and state tax revenues greater than any other state in the country.

### **What is the goal of the Early Commitment to College?**

The goal of the proposal is to help improve our high school graduation rates, academic achievement of students, and our college-going and success rates, especially among low-income students, to ensure that California has a well-educated population for a healthy democracy and competitive economy.

### **If the program builds on existing commitments, what will be different than now?**

The biggest difference is that more students and families will be aware of the commitments we have. Unfortunately, for low-income students or students who are the first in their family to go to college, there is a lack of awareness of the opportunities available and the steps to prepare and pay for college. By communicating to students early, we will reach students before a great number drop out of high school.

### **How does this proposal relate to the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education?**

This proposal is a powerful way for the state to renew its commitment to the Master Plan as we approach its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In 1960, state leaders made the commitment to provide a place in college for anyone who seeks it. This proposal takes that commitment and, for the first time, makes it directly to students and families at a young age.

### **Is anything like this being done in California?**

San Diego State, UC Davis, Riverside City College, and San Joaquin Delta College have developed partnerships with local school districts making local commitments of access. Oral Lee Brown, an Oakland realtor, kept a promise to a class of Oakland first graders that she would fund their college education if they finished high school. This bill helps spread this effort – backed by a commitment from the legislature and Governor.

### **Can this be done statewide?**

In the early 1990's, Indiana launched the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars Program, committing a financial aid grant equal to tuition for four years to low-income students. The program has been a major success, helping more low-income students go to college and helping move Indiana from 40<sup>th</sup> in college-going to 9<sup>th</sup> among all states.

### **How much will this cost?**

The Department of Education estimates the cost of this effort to be \$125,000 to develop the program and enlist school districts to participate. As a voluntary program for school districts, this not a costly local mandate.

*SB 890 has been introduced by Senator Jack Scott (D-Pasadena) and a bipartisan group of co-authors. For more information, contact Abdi Soltani (510) 645-1362 or [abdi@collegecampaign.org](mailto:abdi@collegecampaign.org).*