

PRESS RELEASE for August 6, 2008

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See corresponding link for local student stories.

****Wednesday, August 6, 2008****

**‘PREPARE STUDENTS NOW TO AVOID FUTURE BUDGET WOES’ WARN EDUCATION LEADERS
State Leaders, Over 300 Students Converge at Capitol to Urge Lawmakers to Pass SB 890 Early
Commitment to College**

Sacramento, Calif. – The ‘education pipeline’ that carries students from secondary school through college is broken say business and education leaders. California will not have enough students graduating with 2-year and 4-year college degrees to meet workforce demand over the next 15 to 20 years.

This could lead to economic woes far more dire than the current budget shortfall. SB 890 Early Commitment to College is a bill that would teach students early about how to go to college and how to pay for it. According to State Senator and soon to be the Community College System Chancellor Jack Scott, SB 890 is one key solution that will carry California in the right direction.

Because of the large, aging baby boomer generation, the number of retirees in California will grow 64 percent faster than those who are working and paying taxes, according to University of Southern California (USC) Demographer Dowell Myers. “We need to get significantly more of our young people to go to college in order to carry the heavier load of so many going into retirement,” he says, “and Early Commitment to College is one of the best ways I know to put more students on this track.”

Over 300 middle and high school students along with education advocates and key state leaders are converging in Sacramento on August 6th to urge California lawmakers to pass SB 890, Early Commitment to College. The program has a relatively low price-tag, \$125,000 a year, according to the California Department of Education, because it builds on existing programs.

One of these 300 students is Josefina Vega an incoming 7th grader at San Diego’s Montgomery Middle School. Ms. Vega won a grand prize for her essay in the “Save Me a Spot in College” contest sponsored by the Campaign for College Opportunity. She will be going to Sacramento on August 6th to urge legislators to teach students early about college and save her and her peers a spot in one of the state’s colleges or universities.

Josefina Vega and her classmates need all the support they can get to make it to college. California is facing an ‘education crisis’ warn education and policy leaders around the state, including the Campaign for College Opportunity. While a study last month pointed to the state’s extremely high dropout rate of one in four students, another recent study has pointed to the low rate – less than 43% – of high school graduates going directly into college, making California 48th in the nation.

Ms. Vega’s 6th grade teacher Edrick Macalaguim knows first-hand how important it is for students as young as Ms. Vega to learn about college. Many in his class, like Ms. Vega, would be the first in their families to go to college and most come from low-income backgrounds. Mr. Macalaguim’s class is representative of the growing majority of California’s young people.

Mr. Macalaguim also knows that learning practical information about college can change his sixth grader's lives – many of whom have nowhere else to get this information. Every year he has his sixth graders write away to colleges and universities to get brochures so that they learn how to reach out to those schools. And every year for the past three years he has had his students enter the “Save Me a Spot in College” Contest.

“Early Commitment to College is powerful and unique because it packages college and financial aid opportunities into one commitment made to students at an early age – starting in the 6th grade,” says Michele Siqueiros, Executive Director of the Campaign for College Opportunity.

And most importantly, passage of the bill is a definitive step that lawmakers can take in a year of belt-tightening to address education issues and California's steady high school graduation and college-going downturn.

The Department of Education has endorsed the bill and some of the California's largest school districts, including Los Angeles Unified School District with nearly 700,000 students, have expressed a desire to implement the program.

"Early Commitment to College supports our mission to improve graduation and college entrance rates by encouraging students to set these goals in middle school and then rewarding them for their success," said LAUSD Board President Mónica García. "Senate Bill 890 will be an important tool as we continue work toward 100% graduation."

The bill has garnered widespread bi-partisan support and is co-authored by 39 republicans and democrats in the Assembly. The Assembly Appropriations Committee is scheduled to decide on all bills being held in suspense on August 7, including SB 890.

When Josefina Vega's Finney Elementary School teachers heard that she had won the “Save Me a Spot in College” Contest, they began passing around a hat to raise money for her to go to Sacramento and join education and policy leaders urging lawmakers to pass SB 890 Early Commitment to College.

“Everything that has happened has touched the hearts of our entire district – everybody is rallying behind her. We want her to feel like her college experience has already started. We really want to see her succeed.” says Ms. Vega's 6th grade teacher Edrick Macalaguim who teaches at Finney Elementary School in San Diego's Chula Vista Elementary School District.

SB 890 would create the “Save Me a Spot in College” Pledge to be signed by students and their parent or legal guardian. Students would pledge to finish high school, take courses to prepare for college and to complete the FAFSA (federal financial aid application) by March 2nd of their senior year. In return, the state will ensure that there is a spot for every student in one of California's community colleges or in a CSU or UC if the student meets admission requirements. The state also pledges financial aid for eligible students to help pay for fees, books, supplies and living expenses, including the community college fee waiver and support in applying for the CalGrant and federal Pell Grant.

SB 890 would create a voluntary program for local school districts managed by the Superintendent of Public Instruction. It would allow the California Department of Education to design a college-going curriculum aimed at middle-school students and it would encourage further collaboration between school districts, higher education institutions, and student aid agencies.

The “Save Me a Spot in College” Scholarship Contest is funded by the College Access Foundation of California and the McConnell Foundation and sponsored by the Campaign for College Opportunity.

SB 890s endorsers include the California Chamber of Commerce, the California Community Colleges, the California State University system, the University of California, Pacific Gas & Electric, the California Farm Bureau, and over 100 other statewide and local organizations and schools. For the complete list go to www.collegecampaign.org/sb890-list-of-supporters.html.

About the Campaign for College Opportunity: The Campaign for College Opportunity is a broad-based, bipartisan coalition, including business, education and labor leaders, and is dedicated to ensuring the next generation of Californians has the opportunity to go to college. For more information, visit: www.collegecampaign.org.

Media interested in attending or learning more information should contact Blake Ulveling at: (510) 282-1489 or blake@collegecampaign.org.

WHAT: “Save Us a Spot in College” Day at the Capitol
Over 300 students and key state leaders converge to support SB 890 Early Commitment to College

WHEN: Wednesday, August 6, 2008, 10:00 a.m. PST

WHERE: State Capitol, Sacramento, north steps, at the corner of 10th and “L” Streets

WHO: Diane Woodruff, Chancellor of the California Community College System
State Senator Jack Scott, Chair of the Senate Education Committee
Senate President Pro-Tem Darrell Steinberg, Senators Tom Torlakson and Gloria Romero
Assembly Members Kevin De Leon, Warren Furutani, Jim Beall, Alberto Torrico, and Cathleen Galgiani
Michele Siqueiros, Executive Director, the Campaign for College Opportunity
Several students will also speak

ATTACHED: Student Profiles (in one PDF document)

- Josefina Vega – 7th grader from San Diego (featured in this press release)
- Yvette Lopez – 11th grader from San Diego
- Ana Garcia – 8th grader from Santa Ana
- Aubrey Hunter – 8th grader from South Los Angeles
- Socorro Gallegos – 10th grader from Compton, Los Angeles
- Liliana & Luis Jimenez – from Modesto (10th grader and incoming freshman at Modesto City College)
- Milton Grant – 12th grader from Salinas
- Alexandra Sanchez – 9th grader from Salinas
- Hattie Wimer – from Bieber, CA – incoming freshman at Lassen Community College

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