

CONTENTS EMBARGOED: Not for broadcast
or publication before 11 a.m. PST, Feb. 27

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SB 890 — A NEW DEAL FOR MIDDLE SCHOOLERS: STUDY HARD AND WE’LL SAVE YOU A SPOT IN COLLEGE

PROMINENT LEADERS CALL ON CALIFORNIA TO IMPROVE COLLEGE-GOING

SACRAMENTO — Study hard and graduate from high school, and California will save you a spot in college.

That’s the bargain offered to middle school students in SB 890, new legislation unveiled today by State Senator Jack Scott (D-Pasadena), Chair of the Senate Education Committee, who pledged to champion its passage this year. An accompanying report, “Early College Commitment,” outlines the positive benefits of the proposal for students, schools and the state.

Introduced with bipartisan support, SB 890 would renew the promise made in the state’s 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education: that every qualified student will have the opportunity to attend a community college or university. Principal co-authors include Senator Mark Wyland (R-Carlsbad), Vice-Chair of the Senate Education Committee; and Anthony Portantino (D-Pasadena), Chair of the Assembly Higher Education Committee. Assemblymembers Tom Berryhill (R-Modesto) and Alberto Torrico (D-Newark) have also signed on as co-authors.

“We are here to renew our state’s historic commitment to college access and, for the first time, make that commitment directly to students and families beginning in middle school,” Scott said. “This legislation is intended to improve academic achievement, boost college-going and help our young people pursue their dreams.”

The proposed Early College Commitment program features a letter signed by the Governor and the Superintendent of Public Instruction informing all students of their opportunities to go to college in California. The program also creates the “Save Me a Spot in College Pledge,” to be signed by low-income 6th – 9th grade students who commit to finish high school, take challenging classes, achieve proficiency in English and math, and apply to college and financial aid programs.

The state, in turn, will honor their effort by guaranteeing them a spot in a California community college. Students whose future family income does not exceed a certain threshold will also be guaranteed a community college fee waiver for two years. In addition, students will receive a spot in the California State University or the University of California, and a Cal Grant which can be used at a public or private college, provided that they meet eligibility requirements and apply.

Participating school districts will provide a “Roadmap to College” suite of services, including information for parents, visits to a community college and university campus and assistance with college and financial aid applications. Importantly, all the state’s major college and financial aid opportunities will be packaged into one program that outlines the student’s responsibilities.

The legislation responds to a growing concern that California needs to improve educational achievement. In a letter sponsored by the Campaign for College Opportunity to the Governor and legislative leaders,

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100 prominent business, labor and community leaders urged an increase in the number of college graduates over the next 10 years to keep California's economic edge. As one important step, they called on the state to make this commitment beginning in middle school.

Bill Hauck, President of California Business Roundtable and a signatory to the letter, said action is needed to ensure the state's economic future. "If the state doesn't reverse the decline in our college-going rate, California will face an alarming decline in per capita income and a shortage of educated workers to keep our economy competitive," Hauck said.

Brenda Davis, President of the California State Parent Teacher Association (PTA), another signatory to the letter, said "Lack of information about the opportunities the state makes available is a major barrier for students and parents. We need to send the message to parents that college is accessible and affordable — and that there are steps their children need to take to prepare."

The Campaign for College Opportunity released a report, "Early College Commitment," that shows that California is 40th — and slipping — among all U.S. states in the college-going rate of high school graduates. The report finds that this problem is connected to persistent achievement gaps in middle school and high school. It cites that if educational attainment is not improved for each ethnic group, the state stands to see a \$2,400 decline in per capita income, far more than any other state.

The report also documents local innovations that can be built upon, such as the Compact for Success, a partnership which guarantees graduates of Sweetwater Unified School District who meet program requirements a spot at San Diego State University. Gabby Campos, now in her first year at San Diego State, spoke about the benefits of the program in helping her to prepare for and go to college during a telephone press conference call earlier today.

States that have made an early college commitment have seen significant results. For example, Indiana's 21st Century Scholars Program has helped that state move from 40th to 9th in college-going. The program provides four years of financial aid equivalent to the cost of covering college tuition for low-income middle school students who meet its requirements.

As noted by Clark Kerr, then-President of the University of California and an architect of the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education, no other state or nation had made college available to all high school graduates, democratizing education. The new legislation by Sen. Scott and co-authors builds on this tradition.

"We have all the building blocks in our education system in California to do this. It's time to put them together and give our young people an early college commitment," said Abdi Soltani, executive director of the Campaign for College Opportunity. "With SB 890, we can empower our students and parents, our schools and colleges, to build California's future today."

About Campaign for College Opportunity: *The Campaign for College Opportunity is a broad-based, bipartisan coalition - including business, education and labor leaders - dedicated to ensuring that the next generation of Californians has the opportunity to go to college as promised by the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education. For more information, visit: www.collegecampaign.org.*

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