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LONG BEACH LEADS STATE IN HELPING MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS ACHIEVE COLLEGE DREAMS **District Celebrates “Save Me a Spot in College Week” and First Anniversary of “College Promise”**

This week, over 15,000 middle school students in the Long Beach Unified School District will be joining thousands of middle school students across California who are signing the “Save Me a Spot in College” pledge. These students pledge to work hard, stay in school, and take the steps they need to make it to college. The State of California promises to uphold its end of the bargain – to make sure there is a spot in college and financial aid available when they get there.

As the Long Beach Unified School District celebrates the first anniversary of the Long Beach College Promise, it is further leading the way by being one of the first four school districts in California to launch the Early Commitment to College program. The Long Beach College Promise is a historic and highly successful partnership between Long Beach Unified, California State University, Long Beach, and Long Beach City College, which offers the promise of higher education to every Long Beach area student.

“With Early Commitment to College, we are giving California’s students the information they need to make it to college, the hope that they can succeed, and the promise from their school and from the state that we will help them to get there,” said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O’Connell.

ECC creates a new tool for California school districts to motivate and support young people in middle school and high school to achieve academically, finish high school, and pursue career technical or degree programs in community college or university. The bill that created Early Commitment to College, SB 890, was sponsored by the Campaign for College Opportunity, authored by former State Senator Jack Scott, and enjoyed broad-based bipartisan support. It was passed by the legislature and signed into law by Governor Schwarzenegger in September 2008.

“Our district has been making big strides in preparing students for college and careers,” according to Long Beach Unified School District Superintendent Christopher J. Steinhauser. “The Long Beach College Promise and the Early Commitment to College program create a college-going culture for our students. We are making sure that the schools in our district do all they can to make the dream of higher education a reality and ensure a better life for our students and their families.”

“Long Beach is proud to be one of the first in the state to launch the Early Commitment to College program,” said Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster. “As a former Trustee of the California State University, I know that a college education will not only benefit Long Beach students, but a well-educated and skilled workforce means prosperity for the state's entire economy.”

The program is run out of the California Department of Education (CDE) in collaboration with higher education and financial aid agencies and is voluntary for California school districts. Early Commitment to College 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 the significant and troubling trends of declining educational achievement that can hurt the future quality of life and economic competitiveness of the State.

“For the large number of students in Long Beach who do not have family members already in college, making an Early Commitment to College can be the difference between knowing they can go and thinking that college is out of their reach,” according to Michele Siqueiros, Executive Director of the Campaign for College Opportunity.

“The demand for educated workers in California is outstripping supply and unless we help this generation of students succeed in higher education, California will lose its competitive edge,” notes Long Beach City College President Eloy Ortiz Oakley. “With the Early Commitment to College program and the Long Beach College Promise, this community is doing all it can to prepare our young people to meet the increasing demands of our global economy.”

Early Commitment to College has the following major provisions:

- It provides participating school districts a communication tool from the California Department of Education to be used with 6th to 9th grade students and their parents/guardians so that they understand the college opportunities and financial aid available to them.
- The core element of the program is the “Save Me a Spot in College” Pledge, to be signed by low-income students and their parents, outlining their agreement to take the steps to finish high school and prepare for college.
- These students would gain access to UC and CSU, if they meet the eligibility requirements and apply. They would be guaranteed the opportunity to attend a California Community College.
- It makes a commitment of the Community College Fee Waiver and other financial aid to eligible low-income 6th – 9th grade students who fulfill the program requirements and are eligible in the 12th grade.
- It is inclusive of career technical and college preparatory classes in middle school and high school, and of career technical and degree programs in college.

The Long Beach College Promise provides a variety of educational benefits and services including:

- A Tuition Free Semester at Long Beach City College: As part of their Gateway to Greatness program, LBCC commits to providing a tuition-free semester to every LBUSD student by 2011.
- Guaranteed College Admission: CSULB commits to accepting all students who complete minimum college preparatory or minimum community college transfer requirements.
- Early and Continued Outreach: All three institutions will begin student and family outreach services in sixth grade and continue them through college to ensure college entrance requirements are fulfilled and students are successful.
- Multiple Pathway Support: All three institutions will support the various college pathways students may choose based on their personal situation and interests.

Many students do not learn the specific steps they need to take to get to college until it is too late. In the *“Save Me a Spot in College” Pledge*, to be signed by students and a parent or legal guardian, students would agree to:

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

The Campaign for College Opportunity is a statewide nonprofit organization whose mission is to ensure that more students are prepared for college, go to college and succeed in achieving a postsecondary degree. Last year, the Campaign sponsored SB 890 “Early Commitment to College” legislation in Sacramento with the support of over 49 bi-partisan legislative co-authors, 100 organizations, and various school districts. The bill was signed into law by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in the fall.

The four events in Long Beach, Fresno, San Francisco, and Los Angeles launching Early Commitment to College have been made possible by a grant from Citi.

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