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## **LOS ANGELES LEADS STATE IN HELPING MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS ACHIEVE COLLEGE DREAMS** **District Celebrates “Save Me a Spot in College Week”; Students Sign College Pledge**

This week students from Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) will join thousands of middle school students across California who are signing the “Save Me a Spot in College” pledge. These students from eight schools in the district 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.

“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

LAUSD, the largest school district in the state, is one of the first four to implement to the new program. The other three California districts are: San Francisco Unified School District, Long Beach Unified School District, and Fresno Unified School District.

“Early Commitment to College will empower youth and families in our community to make good choices and ensure their success in the future,” says Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. “More young people from our city attending college means more adults trained in the skills necessary to the workforce – and that means greater prosperity for Los Angeles as a whole.”

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

“We think college should be an option for every one of our students. We encourage students and their parents to start thinking about college long before they enter high school,” said Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Superintendent Ramon C. Cortines. “Committing to that goal in middle school will give students plenty of time to take A – G courses and seek out the right college for their passion, interest and career choice. There is a college for every student.”

The program run out of the California Department of Education (CDE) in collaboration with higher education and financial aid agencies 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 Los Angeles 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 will soon outstrip supply and if we do not provide education for our citizens, we lose our competitive edge,” notes Siqueiros. “Early Commitment to College is an important step for California to take right now to prepare for the futures of our young people and the future of the state as a whole.”

*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 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade students and their parents/guardians so that they understand the college opportunities and financial aid are available to them.
- The core element of the program is the “Save Me a Spot in College” Pledge, to be signed by 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 the University of California system or the California State University system, 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 6<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grade students who fulfill the program requirements and are eligible in the 12<sup>th</sup> 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.

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 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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