



MEDIA ADVISORY for Wednesday, March 18, 2009

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**** EMBARGOED UNTIL: Wednesday, March 18, 2009****

**SAN FRANCISCO 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 in San Francisco 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.

“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

San Francisco’s education leaders are being joined by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O’Connell who commended the San Francisco Unified School District for leading the implementation of the ECC Program. The District is one of the first four districts in the state to implement to the new program. The other three Districts are: Los Angeles Unified School District, Long Beach Unified School District, and Fresno Unified School District.

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 and enjoyed broad-based bipartisan support and was passed by the legislature and signed into law by Governor Schwarzenegger in September 2008.

The San Francisco Promise, an early commitment to college program, is a partnership between the City of San Francisco, San Francisco Unified School District and San Francisco State University (SFSU). SF Promise guarantees that each sixth grade student who graduates from the SFUSD, satisfactorily completes a specified high school curriculum and meets minimum entrance requirements will be guaranteed a seat at SFSU.

“San Francisco is proud to be one of the first cities in the state to launch the Early Commitment to College program,” said San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom. “Early Commitment to College and the San Francisco Promise will empower the youth in our city to pursue higher education and gives them the tools to succeed.”

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. This program was passed through the legislature with overwhelming, bi-partisan support and signed by the Governor in September.

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 San Francisco 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 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 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.

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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