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**CAL GRANT 2007 CAMPAIGN: EDUCATION BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL
FINANCIALLY ACCESSIBLE TO ALL CALIFORNIA STUDENTS**

More than 300 Cash for College Financial Aid Workshops Offer Multi-lingual Hands-on Help to Students and Families to Apply for Cal Grants and Other Financial Aid

SAN DIEGO, Jan. 16, 2007 – The California Student Aid Commission launched the official start of the 2007 Cal Grant application period today at Mission Bay High School, vowing to help boost the state’s diminishing college entrance rates by getting more students to apply for financial aid and head to the state’s post-secondary campuses and technical programs. Recent education trends in California show the state ranks 40th in the U.S. for high school students going directly to college. With nearly 400,000 California high school seniors in 2007, the new campaign is designed to aggressively raise awareness about the availability of Cal Grants as a financial aid option to low- and middle-income students and encourage students to apply by the March 2 Cal Grant deadline. The Cal Grant application window is January 1 – March 2.

“It’s our mission to keep students moving forward with their education after high school graduation,” said Diana Fuentes-Michel, executive director of the Commission. “With a Cal Grant, more than 90 percent of Cal Grant recipients attending two- or four-year schools re-enroll for a second year. And, students and parents should know that the Cal Grant will cover the proposed new fee increases instituted at UC and CSU campuses.”

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During the 2006-07 school year, the California Student Aid Commission offered nearly \$900 million in Cal Grants and other financial aid to 290,000 eligible students throughout the state. With a Cal Grant, students can be awarded up to \$9,700 per year to pay for college or career/technical school expenses.

The Cal Grant campaign comes as many state and local leaders refocus efforts on reducing financial barriers to pursuing a post-high school education in order to help California maintain its economic edge. Recent research reveals a landscape in California where obtaining a higher education is increasingly out of reach:

- The proportion of high school graduates enrolling directly into colleges has dropped over the past decade, from 61 percent in 1995 to 52 percent in 2005.
- Only 35 percent of high school freshmen enroll in college within four years, as compared to 53 percent among the top states.
- The direct college-going rate has declined for all racial/ethnic groups over the last decade.
- Given the current disparities in educational attainment and projected growth by race/ethnicity, California's income will fall below the U.S. average by 2020 – unless race/ethnic gaps are closed.

“Many of today's high school seniors assume they cannot continue with post-high school studies because they cannot afford tuition,” said Acting Commission Chair Louise McClain.

“For others, thinking past a high school diploma is overwhelming. Students unsure of their plans after high school should absolutely maximize their future options and apply for financial aid now.”

Students and families can get help applying for a Cal Grant and other financial aid at local Cash for College workshops where they receive line-by-line assistance on the required financial aid forms. The program is offering a \$1,000 scholarship incentive available at each qualifying workshop to make sure all students apply for financial aid. More than \$300,000 scholarships are offered through the generous support of The Education Financing Foundation of California.

To apply for a Cal Grant, students must fill out and submit two forms – a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and a Cal Grant GPA Verification form. Other financial and academic eligibility requirements apply. Students and families can visit calgrants.org or call (888) CA-GRANT (888-224-7268) to learn more about Cal Grants, find the forms they need to apply and locate a workshop in their community.

The new outreach campaign uniquely blends traditional advertising and online marketing with radio and television, a newly designed Web site, (www.calgrants.org), and in-person testimonials on campuses and at events from the new Cal Grant College Cash Crew – a group of current and recently graduated college students. Each College Cash Crew member brings a unique perspective to share with students on why it is important to pursue education beyond high school and that financial aid is available to them if they just apply.

“I was one of those kids who didn’t think about going to college,” said UC Berkeley student Cindy Pineda, a Cash Crew spokesperson and Cal Grant recipient. “Now, I’m getting my bachelor’s degree and plan to attend graduate school. Someday, I hope to pursue a career in Washington, D.C.” Pineda added that she could never reach such lofty dreams unless she could afford to go. “The Cal Grant program has played a large part in making my dreams come true,” she said.

During January and February, Pineda and the College Cash Crew will help spread the word about Cal Grants at local high school events in San Diego, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento and Fresno.

Throughout the year, the Commission offers several programs and services to reach students and families. The Commission’s Cal-SOAP is an early outreach program for grades 7-12 that helps plant the seeds about post-secondary education and financial aid while raising achievement levels of low-income, elementary and secondary school students. Additionally, the Commission oversees special financial aid programs, such as the California Chafee Grant Program, which

offers valuable aid to foster youth. Various loan assumption program also provide needed financial assistance for teachers, National Guard members and nurses.

The Commission joins forces with key partners across California including financial aid and outreach professionals at college, university and career technical institutions, California high schools, the California Department of Education and corporate and community organizations to improve the college-going rates.

“California high schools cannot improve the college-going rate alone,” said Jack O’Connell, superintendent of public instruction. “We rely on our state and community partners to make sure graduating high school seniors complete the application process for federal and state aid, such as the Cal Grant.”

Added Michel of the Commission: “Now more than ever, the Cal Grant program provides a viable alternative for many students who are ready to walk away from the pathway to college – either because they feel they can’t afford it, or because they have less than perfect grades. Students need to remain motivated to pursue post-secondary education, and the best way for us to do that is to spread the word about financial aid and help point them in the direction toward collegiate and career success.”

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