

## GUEST VIEW

### The Cal Grant: What's at stake?

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Article Launched: 02/26/2008 07:52:44 PM PST

WHEN this year's high school seniors graduate in June - more than 260,000 of them across the state - going to college or seeking a career education should be top among their options, regardless of their financial means. Right now, through March 2, students can apply for a Cal Grant and other state, federal and private financial aid to help them pay for an education beyond high school.

A Cal Grant can make the difference whether many low- and middle-income high school seniors continue their education beyond high school. Being offered a Cal Grant has been found to have a powerful impact not only on a student's ability to attend college, but also to remain in school, according to the 2004 California Student Aid Commission/EDFUND report, "Determined to Succeed: Realizing the College Dream in California."

Cal Grant recipients are much more likely to re-enroll in college for second and subsequent years than those who did not receive a Cal Grant.

California's college-going and college-completion rates today are serious concerns for the state's future economic and social development. The Golden State lags behind nearly all states, ranking 40th among states in the rate of high school seniors going directly to college and 46th among states in college-completion rates, according to recent reports by California State University's Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy.

Compounding these concerns is the belief by most Californians that they cannot afford college, according to a 2007 report by the Public Policy Institute of California. This view is particularly acute among those communities whose students have not historically attended college.

There is no question that the state's economic vitality is closely tied to higher education. Californians who do not have an education beyond high school stand to make less than those who do. In 2005, the average income of workers with a high school diploma or GED was \$27,000 while the average income for those with a bachelor's degree was \$56,000, according to the California Postsecondary Education Commission.

During their lifetime, college graduates can earn more than \$1 million more than someone with only a high school diploma.

By 2025, only 32 percent of the state's working-age adults will have a college degree, according to the Public Policy Institute's May 2007 report, "Can California Import Enough College Graduates to Meet Workforce Needs?" However, economic projections indicate that two of every five jobs (41 percent) will require a college degree.

Moreover, educational attainment continues to be unevenly distributed among ethnic groups in California, with 50 percent of whites and 58.6 percent of Asians age 25 to 64 having received an associate degree or higher by 2005 compared to only 14.9 percent of Latinos

and 33.7 percent of African Americans. If Hispanics, African Americans and Native Americans had the opportunity to achieve the same levels of education as whites by 2020, California's personal income would increase by a significant \$101.6 billion (in year 2000 dollars), according to the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

Unless these worrisome trends are reversed, California's economy is poised to suffer a shortage of skilled workers. California must keep its commitment to honor the basic tenets of its Master Plan for Education.

The inter-segmental nature of the Cal Grant program, with its built-in choice and access, is the best way to entice students to stay the course, complete a higher education and, ultimately, enter into a profitable career that benefits them and the state.

To be sure, college is not for everyone and not all high school graduates want or should go on to college. But those students who have prepared for college or who want to pursue a career or technical education should find open doors. A Cal Grant can be their ticket to success and the state's ticket to a stronger economy.

High school seniors have until March 2 to submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (the FAFSA), and their verified GPA to apply for a Cal Grant. When students submit the FAFSA, they are also applying for federal, campus-based financial aid and many private scholarships.

During these uncertain economic times, it makes good financial sense to do what we can to invest in a brighter future. During these last few days before Sunday's deadline, volunteers are donating their time to provide students and their parents with help completing the required forms at Cash for College workshops statewide.

We need to encourage all students to follow their dreams for the future - especially in these tough economic times - whether they want to pursue a traditional college degree or train for a career.

[www.calgrants.org](http://www.calgrants.org)

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