



The Education Trust–West

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CONTACT:

Jelena Hasbrouck

jhasbrouck@edtrustwest.org

408.833.4039

New Research Explores Crucial Equity Considerations for Expanding Financial Aid Access and Availability in California

SACRAMENTO, CA (December 13, 2018) - New research released today from The Education Trust–West examines financial aid access in California and offers guidance for improving the state’s Cal Grant program. The pair of new resources looks at the effectiveness of efforts to streamline Cal Grant applications, provides key considerations for making the Cal Grant more equitable, and recommends next steps state and district leaders should take to increase students’ access to financial aid.

Paving the Path to College Aid: Expanding Access to the Cal Grant Program looks at work being done to increase Cal Grant application rates, including the initial implementation of AB 2160, a bill authored by Assemblymember Phil Ting to streamline the Cal Grant application process by requiring that high schools submit GPAs electronically. Over the past five years, Cal Grant application completion rates have increased by 10 percentage points, with 56 percent of high school seniors completing applications in 2017. Rates were even higher in the highest-poverty schools, where 66 percent of twelfth graders completed applications in 2017. *Paving the Path* outlines effective practices that county offices of education, districts, and schools are using to meet this new requirement and increase Cal Grant access, and offers suggestions for ways in which state, district, and school leaders can further improve access to financial aid.

Accompanying the *Paving the Path* brief is Ed Trust–West’s latest Equity Alert, “Improving Cal Grant Equity”, which highlights three barriers to equity within the Cal Grant program, and offers recommendations for how policymakers can make immediate changes to benefit students. The equity alert identifies three main fixes:

1. Fully fund and guarantee access to the Cal Grant program;
2. Adjust the Cal Grant to address non-tuition expenses; and
3. Expand the Cal Grant to support student transitions from high school to college.

“Financial aid plays a key role in making the college dream a reality for many of California’s low-income students,” said Carrie Hahnel, Interim Co-Executive Director at The Education Trust–West. “While

California has steadily improved Cal Grant application rates, our state is still allowing hundreds of thousands of seniors to graduate without applying for financial aid, even though it could help make college more affordable and accessible.”

“California is on the right track when it comes to improving Cal Grant application rates for students across the state, but we must move faster and with a consistent equity lens” said Elisha Smith Arrillaga, Interim Co-Executive Director at the Education Trust–West. “The Cal Grant program is an effective and necessary support for students, and by ensuring any adjustments to the program prioritize equity, we can lead the nation in financial aid application rates and increase the number of students attending and succeeding in our state’s colleges and universities.”

“Streamlining the Cal Grant application process is the simplest way to ensure thousands of students in our state have access to the California dream. I’m glad to see application rates have increased, especially in California’s highest poverty schools, since implementation of my legislation, AB 2160, to do just this. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the legislature, along with The Education Trust-West and other stakeholders to further strengthen our financial aid programs and make sure affordable college is truly a reality in California,” said Assemblymember Phil Ting (D-San Francisco).

Each year, over 300,000 eligible students are turned away from Cal Grant awards. The California Student Aid Commission took an important step forward recently when it passed a motion directing staff to work with legislators to address each of these barriers. Now, it’s up to legislators and other state leaders to make these equity-centered policy reforms a reality. *Paving the Path* and “Improving Cal Grant Equity” both conclude with a call to action to ensure the millions of students applying to and already studying in our state’s colleges and universities have the funding required to be successful in their education.

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The Education Trust—West works for educational justice and the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, pre-K through college. We expose opportunity and achievement gaps that separate students of color and low-income students from other youth, and we identify and advocate for the strategies that will forever close those gaps.