
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Carol Liu, Chair
2015 - 2016 Regular

Bill No: AB 1091
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Version: June 1, 2015
Urgency: No
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Hearing Date: July 15, 2015
Fiscal: Yes

Subject: Student financial aid: Cal Grant Program

SUMMARY

This bill authorizes the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) to require verification of high school graduation to be electronically submitted for high school graduates for the purpose of determining financial aid eligibility, as specified and requires the electronic submission of grade point average information on a standardize form.

BACKGROUND

- 1) Existing law authorizes the Cal Grant program, administered by the CSAC, to provide grants to financially needy students to attend a college or university. The Cal Grant programs include both the entitlement and the competitive Cal Grant awards. The program consists of the Cal Grant A, Cal Grant B, and Cal Grant C programs, and eligibility is based upon financial need, grade point average, California residency and other criteria. (Education Code § 69430-69433)
- 2) A school district is prohibited from permitting access to pupil records without written parental consent but makes some exceptions, as specified. Current law authorizes school districts to release information from pupil records to agencies or organizations in connection with the application of a pupil for, or receipt of, financial aid. However, information permitting the personal identification of a pupil or his or her parents, may be disclosed only as necessary for the purpose to determine the eligibility of the pupil for financial aid, to determine the amount of the financial aid, to determine the conditions that will be imposed regarding the financial aid, or to enforce the terms or conditions of the financial aid. (EC § 49076)
- 3) Existing Law, requires grade point averages (GPAs) for Cal Grant A and B applicants to be submitted to CSAC; requires GPAs to include a certification by a school official that the GPA is accurately reported; authorizes CSAC to establish grace periods for the receipt of GPAs and corrections; and, establishes Legislative intent that high schools and institutions of higher education certify GPAs of students in time to meet Cal Grant application deadlines. (EC § 69432)
- 4) Existing law requires a GPA for all high school seniors at public schools to be submitted to CSAC electronically by a school or school district official and requires a school district to provide an opportunity for a student and/or guardian to opt out and requires students and/or guardians to be notified of the opportunity to opt out. (EC § 96432.9)

ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Authorizes the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) to require verification of high school graduation to be electronically submitted for high school graduates who graduated from a public school, including charter schools, in the prior academic year.
- 2) Provides for an exception to the electronic submission of high school graduation information for students who have opted out, as specified under current law.
- 3) Requires the electronic submission of grade point average information on a standardize form.
- 4) Declares legislative intent that high school districts verify the graduation of their students in time to meet the established deadlines and that the CSAC make available to high schools or high school districts a list of seniors who have and have not completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid or the California Dream Act Application.
- 5) Establishes if the Commission on State Mandates determines that this act contains costs mandated by the state, the state shall reimburse the applicable entities.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, the Cal Grant process can be improved to eliminate barriers that will help student's better access the aid they need to attend college, and help school districts identify students who have not completed the FAFSA. The author asserts that many students often times become overwhelmed in the Cal Grant process or do not have access to internet or other resources, and fail to complete this important step that makes the difference between whether they attend college or not.

This bill aims to streamline the financial aid process and increase Cal Grant and FAFSA completion rates by requiring the electronic submission of high school graduation information.

- 2) ***Existing process for verification:*** According to the CSAC the method for providing verification varies depending on the school district. For the most part, it is the responsibility of the school district to submit the information to CSAC; however, if the district fails to provide the information, the responsibility falls on the student. Generally, most submissions are electronic, but thousands of paper forms are submitted that have to be keyed in manually. This bill seeks to give the CSAC the authority to create a consistent process to collect information necessary for determining Cal Grant eligibility.
- 3) ***Privacy rights.*** The federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) applies to all schools that receive federal funding through the U.S. Department of

Education and protects the privacy of student educational records. Generally, schools must have written permission from the parent or eligible student in order to release any information from a student's educational record. However, schools are authorized to disclose records without consent to specific parties or under specific conditions, including to appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student. This exemption is currently used to authorize the provision of the student's grade point average and graduation information to California Student Aid Commission when a student is applying for financial aid.

SUPPORT

California School Boards Association
Coachella Valley Economic Partnership
Education Trust West

OPPOSITION

None received.

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