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Financial Aid Applications Increase by 24,000 in First Year of California's Universal Financial Aid Law and *All-In* Campaign

California Leads Nation in Growth of Financial Aid Completion Rates

Sacramento, Calif., September 13, 2023 – Seventy four percent of students in the graduating class of 2023 completed a [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) or [California Dream Act Application \(CADAA\)](#), the first class that graduated since the launch of the [All-In for FAFSA/CA Dream Act](#) campaign to support California's universal financial aid participation law.

"All students deserve the freedom to succeed — the ability to build real-life skills and a career through an affordable education," said **Governor Gavin Newsom**. "Because of our commitment to affordability, California experienced the largest gains in the percentage of high school students applying for federal financial aid. Our resolve to ensure every Californian can achieve their college and career dreams has never been stronger."

Completing a FAFSA or CADAA allows students to be considered for federal aid (FAFSA applicants only), state aid, institutional aid, scholarships, and loans. Students submit one of these applications, depending on their residential status, to access the grants, scholarships, work-study opportunities, student loans, and other forms of aid available to help finance postsecondary education or training.

"California's universal participation law is expanding access to financial aid to thousands of students who may have otherwise not been aware of these opportunities," said **Catalina Cifuentes, chair of the California Student Aid Commission (Commission)**. "Ensuring that all students complete the FAFSA or CADAA is particularly impactful for students in underserved communities. Our *All-In for FAFSA/CA Dream Act* campaign opens doors of opportunity by helping students and their families make informed decisions about pursuing college, university, or career training."

Approximately \$550 million in federal and state aid goes unused annually when thousands of eligible California students miss out on financial aid. Many are unaware of financial aid, don't know how to apply or if they qualify, or fear sharing personal information because of their immigration status. The universal financial aid application law was adopted through the 2021-22 State Budget Act and companion legislation ([AB 469](#)) authored by Assemblymember Eloise Gómez Reyes to increase access to financial aid and ensure that resources are not left on the table.

“Access to educational opportunities offer pathways towards a better life for many Californians,” said **Assemblymember Eloise Gómez Reyes**. “When I authored AB 469, my hope was that this legislation would lead to more young people realizing their education dreams and the wealth of resources available to them through our policy that created a statewide financial aid application process. Over 20,000 more students submitted a FAFSA or California Dream Act Application compared to last year as a product of this legislation. This is incredible news that should be celebrated! I want to thank the Department of Education, the California Student Aid Commission, our schools, our educators, and our administrators for their efforts. We still have work to do to ensure that every student has access to the resources afforded to them and I look forward to continuing our work to accomplish that goal.”

“Achieving universal participation in this equity-focused and student-centered systemic approach to financial aid requires planning and collaboration,” said **Marlene Garcia, executive director of the California Student Aid Commission**. “I applaud the K-12 school leaders, high school counselors, educators, student groups and community based-organizations who worked together to achieve universal FAFSA/CADAA completion. These gains would not have happened without everyone's collective commitment to achieving access to financial aid for all students.”

The Commission's *All-In for FAFSA/CA Dream Act* campaign supports K-12 schools and districts with universal FAFSA/CADAA completion. Local progress towards the March 2 deadline and through the end of the school year can be tracked on the state's [Race to Submit dashboard](#).

Starting with the 2022-23 academic school year, high schools and school districts must ensure that all 12th graders in the state of California complete a FAFSA or CA Dream Act Application, unless the student submits a formal opt-out waiver.

Since the universal participation requirement started, the number of California students applying for financial aid increased significantly.

- More than **60%** of high school seniors in California’s graduating class of 2023 submitted a FAFSA or CADAA by March 2, the deadline for students planning to attend a 4-year college.
- By September 5, the deadline for students heading to community college, the total FAFSA or CADAA completion rate for the class of 2023 climbed to **74.2%** percent.
- By comparison, the financial aid completion rate for the Class of 2022 was **68.1%** at the same time one year ago. FAFSA / CA Dream Act Application completion for the Class of 2023 increased by 6 percentage points compared to the previous year.
- More than **24,000** high school students completed financial aid applications by September 5 in 2023 than in 2022.

Compared to states across the nation, California saw the largest gains in the percentage of high school students applying for federal financial aid by completing the FAFSA. California outpaced all other states in the rate of financial aid application growth year over year. State by state data on federal financial application rates is available at [FAFSA TRACKER - Form Your Future](#). California data on financial aid completion rates searchable by districts and schools is available at <https://www.csac.ca.gov/data-dashboards>.

In December, the U.S. Department of Education will release a revised federal aid application called the “Better FAFSA,” with the intention of making the application easier to complete. Aligned updates to the CA Dream Act Application will make that form easier to complete as well. It is expected that even more students will be eligible for financial aid as a result.

The Better FAFSA application window will open two months later than in a typical year. For the graduating class of 2024, the priority deadline for FAFSA and CA Dream Act submission will be April 2, instead of March 2.

The Commission will continue to support K-12 districts and high schools with [training and resources](#) so they can keep making progress and ensure that students don’t lose ground in the inaugural year of the Better FAFSA.

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The California Student Aid Commission currently serves over 400,000 students and administers the state’s \$3 billion portfolio of student financial aid programs and services, including the Cal Grant, the Middle Class Scholarship, and the California Dream Act Application. The Commission serves as a resource for policymakers and

the public on college affordability and financing issues, and advocates for policy changes to eliminate cost as a barrier to any qualified California student pursuing a higher education. Visit our website at www.csac.ca.gov or follow us on social media by clicking on our [Link Tree](#).