

Date of Hearing: April 28, 2015

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Jose Medina, Chair

AB 1091 (Eduardo Garcia) – As Amended March 26, 2015

**SUBJECT:** Student financial aid: Cal Grant Program

**SUMMARY:** Requires the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) to take specified actions to improve information sharing between school districts and CSAC for purposes of determining student Cal Grant eligibility. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires CSAC to develop, and make available on its Internet Web site to each school district, a graduation verification template for use by the school district to input and upload graduation verification data for its pupils, so that the commission can determine if those pupils are eligible for Cal Grants.
- 2) Requires CSAC to, to the greatest extent feasible, align the collection and reporting of information between the United States Department of Education's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) system, CSAC, and school districts that is used to determine if applicants are eligible for Cal Grants and whether to issue Cal Grant awards for students who attend qualifying institutions.
- 3) Requires CSAC to develop, and make available on its Internet Web site to each school district for the district's use, a standard report that lists the names of all grade 12 pupils within the school district who have and have not completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid or the California Dream Act application.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) 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. (Education Code Section 69432)
- 2) 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. (EDC 96432.9)
- 3) 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 may be necessary for purposes as 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. (EDC 49076)

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:** *Background.* To apply for a Cal Grant award, students (or parents of dependent students) are required, by March 2<sup>nd</sup>, to: (1) complete and submit the FAFSA; and, (2) file a verified GPA with CSAC. In 2013, the Education Trust-West (ETW) issued a report finding that only 54% of California's 12<sup>th</sup> graders completed a FAFSA in 2012, and only 50% completed both steps of the requirements to apply for a Cal Grant by the March 2<sup>nd</sup> deadline. ETW found that one high-impact practice to encourage financial aid applications employed by districts is to submit GPAs electronically for all students. ETW research indicates that districts that piloted using electronic GPA verification and other data-driven practices found a 15% increase in Cal Grant completion. In 2014, AB 2160 (Ting), Chapter 679, required all high schools to submit a GPA for all high school seniors to CSAC electronically (electronic submission occurs through the CSAC WebGrants system).

*WebGrants.* WebGrants is CSAC's internet-based access for Cal Grant applications. It provides high schools with the ability to upload student GPAs and determine if a student has completed a FAFSA, schools can also search and edit records, download CSAC policy memos and bulletins, print School of Origin Reports, and use other high school GPA collection tools. In addition to the recently enacted requirement for high school pupil GPA data to be uploaded electronically, according to the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), currently all community colleges are using WebGrants to upload GPAs for students enrolled in the last two years. According to CSAC, when a student for whom CSAC has received a GPA but not a FAFSA is identified, CSAC provides a report to the schools. Ideally a school is using that information to contact students to ensure FAFSA completion.

*Purpose of this bill.* The author intends for this proposal to build upon the foundation of AB 2160 by ensuring the following:

- 1) Authorizing CSAC to require electronic submission of graduation verification data (an eligibility condition of Cal Grant) for students. According to CSAC, because of high school campus closures following the end of the school year, it is important that this information is submitted to CSAC promptly to ensure that student awards are not delayed. It is important to note that CSAC does authorize students to self-certify high school graduation. This bill is not intended to change the student self-certification process.
- 2) Establishing Legislative intent that CSAC provide to high schools and school districts a list of all high school pupils who have not completed a FAFSA or Dream Act application. The goal of this provision is to support high schools and districts in encouraging FAFSA/Dream Act completion.

*Recommended amendments.* Consistent with the author's intent, Committee staff recommends removing the current language and redrafting the provisions of this bill, as follows:

69432.9 (c)(2) The commission shall require that a grade point average, and may require verification of high school graduation or its equivalent, as required pursuant to section 69433.9(e)(3), be submitted to it electronically for all grade 12 pupils at public schools, including charter schools, each academic year, except for pupils who have opted out as provided in subdivision (d). Social security numbers shall not be included in the information submitted to the commission.

69432.9 (c)(5) It is the intent of the Legislature that high schools or high school districts and institutions of higher education certify the grade point averages and verify the graduation of their students in time to meet the application deadlines imposed by this chapter.

69432.9 (c)(7) It is the intent of the Legislature that the commission make available to each high school and each school district a report identifying all grade 12 pupils within the high school or school district, respectively, who have and have not completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid or the California Dream Act application.

#### **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

##### **Support**

California Student Aid Commission

##### **Opposition**

None on File

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