



The Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges

PRESENTED TO THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

DATE: January 13-14, 2014

SUBJECT: "I Can Afford College" Financial Aid Awareness Campaign Update and Preview of Redesigned Website		Item Number: 3.4	
		Attachment: No	
CATEGORY:	Communications	TYPE OF BOARD CONSIDERATION:	
Recommended By:	 Paul Feist, Vice Chancellor	Consent/Routine	
		First Reading	
Approved for Consideration:	 Brice W. Harris, Chancellor	Action	
		Information	X

ISSUE: Many California families, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are under the perception that a college education is unaffordable. Since the 2003-04 academic year, the California Community Colleges "I **Can** Afford College" financial aid awareness campaign has informed millions of students that money and other resources are available to attend community college. This presentation will include a general overview of the campaign, and a preview/tutorial of the newly redesigned website that will launch this year.

BACKGROUND: "I **Can** Afford College" is a statewide initiative funded with Proposition 98 dollars and directed and managed by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. When the Legislature and governor significantly increased enrollment fees in the 2003-04 academic year from \$11 per unit to \$18 per unit, there was concern that although the fees were still the lowest in the nation, many low-income Californians would no longer be able to afford higher education. So, it was agreed that the state would set aside funding to increase awareness about financial aid opportunities and the colleges would hire additional staff to provide students with free one-on-one help identifying those opportunities and applying for aid.

The heart of the initiative is a bilingual English and Spanish website, icanaffordcollege.com. Each academic year, a budget of \$2.8 million is appropriated by the Legislature for the "I **Can** Afford College" campaign to promote the following messages:

- California community colleges remain affordable.
- Financial aid is available to cover enrollment fees and help with other costs such as books, supplies and even living expenses.
- Financial aid professionals are available on all 112 community college campuses and can provide current and prospective students with free one-on-one help identifying aid and completing applications.

This campaign is aimed at reaching low to middle-income high school students, currently enrolled community college students, re-entry students, and influencers. More than 2.5 million people have visited the “I Can Afford College” website since the campaign’s inception nearly a decade ago and the number of community college students receiving some type of financial aid has increased by roughly 70 percent.

RECOMMENDATION: This item is presented for information and discussion.

ANALYSIS: In 2011-12, the California Community Colleges system served nearly one million students with financial aid totaling approximately \$2.7 billion. While these numbers are large, there is still evidence that many Californians are either unaware that financial aid is available at community colleges or they self-disqualify because they think they’re not eligible. Community college financial aid offices historically have not had the resources to ensure that all eligible students are aware of the opportunities available to them and to assist them in completing the application process. However, the funding from this initiative is helping the campuses reach and assist greater numbers of students.

The following is a summary of results achieved by the “I **Can** Afford College” campaign during 2012-13 fiscal year:

- icanaffordcollege.com received nearly 347,000 **unique** visitors viewing nearly 714,000 pages.
- At least 152.2 million impressions were delivered through online advertising and added value elements.
- More than 142 million impressions were delivered through radio advertising and added value elements.
- Nearly 17,000 current and potential students were directly connected with their local community college financial aid office for assistance through icanaffordcollege.com and 1-800-987-ICAN (4226).

- Community college campuses promoted approximately 800 financial aid workshops. on icanaffordcollege.com. Students attending the events received one-on-one assistance completing financial aid applications.
- More than 191,900 pieces of “I **Can** Afford College” collateral and promotional material were provided statewide to community colleges, high schools, state agencies and community and faith-based organizations to support outreach efforts.

Building on this success, the campaign has worked over the past year to refresh the icanaffordcollege.com website. A few key features of the new site are a completely new design, primarily featuring photos of our colleges, students, faculty and staff; enhanced navigation options, including a step-by-step process designed especially for new users; videos of current and former students sharing their financial aid success stories; and a reorganization of all content based on feedback received from students during recent one-on-one usability research testing.

The new website will still contain all of the same general content currently available at icanaffordcollege.com, including valuable financial aid information; detailed information and applications that enable students to apply online for federal, state and community college financial aid; and a college locator function that connects students with financial aid professionals at their local college where the expectation is that they will receive free one-on-one assistance completing the application.

Next steps

The new “I **Can** Afford College” website is scheduled to launch in mid-January 2014.

Following the launch, the team will continue to monitor and analyze site usage, and collect feedback from students and financial aid staff at the colleges. Based on that feedback, further revisions and adjustments will be made to the site, as needed. As we move into the 2014-15 academic year, we will continue to look at ways of further expanding the site and updating/posting additional information as it becomes available.