





The Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges

PRESENTED TO THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS
DATE: March 21-22, 2016

SUBJECT: "I Can Afford College" Financial Aid Awareness Campaign Update and Preview of New Ad Campaign		Item Number: 3.1	
		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

SUBJECT: The California Community Colleges "I *Can* Afford College" Financial Aid Awareness Campaign Update and Screening of New TV/Online Video & Radio Ad

ISSUE: Many California families, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, believe a college education is unaffordable. This presentation will include a general overview of the campaign, and a screening of the new ad campaign that launched in January 2016.

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, 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. The state set aside funding to increase awareness about financial aid opportunities, and over the past 12 years, the "I *Can* Afford College" campaign has increased awareness that community colleges are affordable and financial aid is available year-round. The campaign has effectively connected Californians directly to financial aid resources and college financial aid offices. From Board of Governors Fee Waivers, grants and work-study programs, to scholarships and loans, more than 1 million students annually at the 113 community colleges receive federal, state and local financial aid to make their higher education dreams a reality – and many got started on their path at icanaffordcollege.com. (**Background cont'd**)

RECOMMENDATION: This item is presented for information and discussion.

(Background cont'd)

The campaign is aimed at reaching low to middle-income high school students, currently enrolled community college students, re-entry students, and influencers. The heart of the initiative is the bilingual English and Spanish website, icanaffordcollege.com, which was revamped in 2014. There have been more than 1 million unique website users since the re-launch, which is over double the growth of all previous years. In total, it is estimated that there have been 5 million plus unique visitors to the website since its introduction in July 2004, and during this time the number of community college students receiving some type of financial aid has increased by roughly 90 percent.

On January 18, the California Community Colleges "I **Can** Afford College" initiative launched "A Little Bit of Magic," the first new comprehensive advertising campaign produced in nearly five years. With the high costs of television advertising, the "I **Can** Afford College" team made the strategic decision to produce digital media and radio ads to leverage more cost-effective, online communication platforms such as social media and highly targeted websites to reach as many students, influencers and potential students as possible, reminding them of the financial aid opportunities available year-round at California community colleges. The director of the new video ad, [Zach King](#), is an [American](#) social media celebrity, film-maker and [YouTube](#) personality. He is most known for his "[magic Instagram videos](#)," digitally edited short stories that feature magic tricks. The campaign tapped Zach King for his unique ability to reach target audiences in the digital universe to raise awareness about financial aid.

The video ad, available in 60-second, 30-second and 15-second formats, features several of King's magic tricks custom-made for the spot. The radio ad, which is also the audio track for the video and digital media spots, is a musical throwback to the 1960s funk genre but blended with the melody and harmony of today's pop music, and continues the tradition of the catchy "I **Can** Afford College" jingles of the highly successful ad campaign of years past. The new ads have been met with enthusiastic support and positive responses through sharing on social media, feedback from community and statewide partners, as well as California community colleges.

Each academic year, a budget of \$2.8 million is appropriated by the governor and 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 113 community college campuses and can provide current and prospective students with free one-on-one help identifying aid and completing applications.

ANALYSIS: In 2014-15, 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 the "I **Can** Afford College" initiative provides

significant support to help the colleges reach and assist greater numbers of students in applying for financial aid.

The following is a summary of results achieved by the “I **Can** Afford College” campaign during the 2014-15 fiscal year:

- **icanaffordcollege.com** received nearly 400,000 **unique** visitors, viewing approximately 840,000 pages.
- More than 179 million impressions were delivered through radio advertising and added value elements.
- Nearly 157 million impressions were delivered through online advertising and added value elements which resulted in an estimated 231,000 visits to **icanaffordcollege.com**.
- An estimated 16.6 million **bonus impressions** were delivered through pro bono web banners, video pre-roll, streaming and Pandora.
- Roughly 37,000 current and potential students utilized links on **icanaffordcollege.com** or the campaign’s toll-free phone number (1-800-987-ICAN) to directly connect with their local community college financial aid office for assistance.
- Community college campuses promoted 583 financial aid workshops on **icanaffordcollege.com**. Students attending the events received one-on-one assistance completing financial aid applications.
- More than 332,000 pieces of collateral and promotional materials were provided statewide to community colleges, high schools, state agencies and community and faith-based organizations for distribution.

To further advance the key financial aid and college affordability messages, “I **Can** Afford College” also dedicated funds to a paid social media campaign, with results as follows:

Facebook: On October 1, 2014, the "I **Can**" Facebook audience size was 4,511 and through a paid "likes" campaign, gained 11,020 new followers, resulting in 15,531 likes - a growth of 244%.

Twitter: On October 1, 2014, the "I **Can**" Twitter audience size was 1,502 and through a paid "likes" campaign, gained 2,286 new followers, resulting in 3,788 likes - a growth of 152%.