

TOPIC: COLLEGE ACCESS CHALLENGE GRANT FOR COLORADO

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I. SUMMARY

The Colorado Department of Higher Education applied for federal funding under the College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) Program to support the Colorado Commission on Higher Education's (CCHE) Work Plan of Closing the Ethnic Achievement Gap. Beginning in August 2010 through the next five years, DHE is eligible to apply for annual funding at \$1.6 million each year for a total of \$8 million. The funding for this federal program was made 'permanent' in July 2010 through the Health Care Reconciliation Act.

Colorado had participated in the CACG program for two years with funding made available to the Department and administered by College Invest. With that funding, the Department created a financial literacy website (www.educationcents.org) to award need-based grants (awarded this September), and to provide information to students and families on how to pay for, and the benefits of, attending postsecondary education. This year, the Department moved responsibility for the grant to the Academic Affairs, Research, and Technology Division (AART) and submitted a new application in July 2010. With increased and expected continued funding over five years, along with a new conceptual framework with achievable delivery plans to guide the Department's efforts, staff are hopeful about efforts to make progress on closing the ethnic achievement gap.

II. BACKGROUND

The CACG Program is a formula grant program that is designed to foster partnerships among Federal, State, local government entities, and philanthropic organizations to significantly increase the number of underrepresented students who enter and remain in postsecondary education. CACG provides grants to States to meet the needs of underrepresented students and families.

Activities

The following activities and services are authorized under the grant:

- 1) Providing information to students and families on *postsecondary education benefits, opportunities, planning, and career preparation*;
- 2) Providing information on *financing options, including activities that promote financial literacy and debt management* among students and families;
- 3) Conducting outreach activities for *students who may be at risk of not enrolling in or completing college*;
- 4) Assisting students in *completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)*;
- 5) *Offering need based grant aid* to students;

- 6) Implementing professional *development for guidance counselors at middle and secondary* schools, and financial aid administrators and college admissions counselors at institutions of higher education, to improve such individuals' capacity to assist students and parents with:
 - a) Understanding:
 - Entrance requirements for admission to institutions of higher education, and
 - State eligibility requirements for Academic Competitiveness Grants or National SMART Grants;
 - b) Applying to institutions of higher education, applying for financial assistance and scholarships;
 - c) Activities that increase students' ability to successfully complete the coursework required for a postsecondary degree (including tutoring and mentoring); and
 - d) Activities to improve secondary school students' preparedness for postsecondary entrance examinations.
- 7) *Repayment of student loans*, student loan cancellation, or lowering of interest rates. States are not allowed to use funds to promote any lender's loans.

Qualifying Students and Families

States must make activities and services available to all qualifying students and families regardless of: (a) choice of postsecondary institution; (b) type of student loan received; (c) server of such loan; and (d) student's academic performance. Students and families cannot be charged a fee to participate in activities and services. In the case of an activity providing grant aid, states cannot require students to meet any condition other than eligibility for Federal financial assistance under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965.

Priority

Priority must be given to students and families who are living below the poverty line applicable to the individual's family size.

Federal Share and Non-Federal Matching Requirement

Federal funds may be used to pay for up to two thirds of the cost of the activities and services provided as part of a CACG grant. States are required to provide non-Federal funds equal to one third of the costs of authorized activities and services. This non-Federal match may be met through cash or in-kind contributions and cannot be waived. Matching contributions may be provided from State resources, contributions from private organizations, or both.

Maintenance of Effort

For any academic year beginning on or after July 1, 2008, States are required to expend amounts that are equal to or greater than: (1) the average amount provided for non-capital and non-direct research and development expenses or costs by the state to the public institutions during the five most recent academic years for which satisfactory data are available; and (2) the average amount provided for student financial aid for paying postsecondary education costs by the state to private institutions during the most recent academic years for which satisfactory data are available.

Performance Indicators for the CACG

The CACG program will be measured against the following performance measures:

- 1) For states offering scholarship programs, the *percentage increase in the proportion of high school seniors offered CACG grants who enroll in college* within a year after graduation.
- 2) For the portion of State projects offering services directly to secondary schools, the *percentage increase in the proportion of high school senior program participants who complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)*.

The CACG program will also be measured against the following efficiency measure:

The decrease in the gap between the cost of the scholarship program per high school senior offered a CACG grant and the cost per high school senior offered a CACG scholarship and enrolling in college within a year after graduation.

Report

A grantee receiving a payment under this section shall prepare and submit an annual report to the Secretary on the activities and services carried out under this section, and on the implementation of such activities and services. The report shall include—

- (1) each activity or service that was provided to students and families over the course of the year;
- (2) the cost of providing each activity or service;
- (3) the number, and percentage, if feasible and applicable, of students who received each activity or service; and
- (4) the total contributions from private organizations included in the grantee's non-Federal share for the fiscal year.

ABSTRACT of the Colorado College Access Challenge Grant

The purpose of the Colorado College Access Challenge Grant Program (CCACGP) is to address Colorado's goal to reduce the higher education attainment ethnic achievement gap. Colorado is one of the highest educated states in the country. It also has the highest gap in academic achievement between majority and minority populations and one of the lowest college matriculation rates, particularly for minority students. The CCHE has established "Closing the Ethnic Achievement Gap" as a major goal. Through CCACGP, educational achievement, especially that of underrepresented Coloradans, will increase. Equally important, the number of twenty-first century, educated workers from underrepresented populations will increase. CCACGP efforts are aligned with our Governor's key educational initiatives: the P-20 Education Coordinating Council and the Jobs Cabinet. We have focused our CCACG proposal activities around the themes of "**Closing the GAP**" and "**Mind the GAP**" (*Gaining Access to Postsecondary*). Both phrases capture our efforts to promote access to postsecondary education and the need for our strategies to be targeted and mindful of effective access activities that will increase the percentage of individuals who are **Gaining Access to Postsecondary**. Beyond access,

retention is an equally important aspect to emphasize and keeping students enrolled is a high priority. As such, the CCACGP will also focus on transfer issues that are critical to keeping students enrolled and moving through the postsecondary pipeline.

The goal of CCACGP is to build on existing statewide capacity and to use established infrastructure to recruit and retain low-income postsecondary students, both traditional and non-traditional ages. The method is to promote the benefits of and opportunities for postsecondary education; inform students and parents of the importance of planning for postsecondary education and careers, and to understand how to remove financial barriers to postsecondary education; provide assistance to professionals who serve as guidance counselors in high schools and colleges; and make available direct financial aid to needy students.

The bulk of CCACGP for the 2010-2011 cycle will be spent on need-based scholarships with a focus on financial literacy (understanding money and financing of college), improving DHE website information on transfer options (e.g., online transfer center), support programs for families and schools on how to gain access to postsecondary options and on how to pay for these, and a small amount of funds for loan forgiveness for high school counselors in high-needs schools. The center piece for communication about college financial literacy will be the previously created CACG website, www.educationcents.org.

The scope of CCACGP is statewide with special attention given to rural and remote areas of the state. The focus is to build on existing services and partnerships rather than create new, stand-alone programs. The existing infrastructure of CCHE will assure sustainability of services as well as leverage new and existing funding to meet the goals. We will also maximize dollars spent on direct services and aid to underrepresented students.