



**TO:** Chief Executive Officers  
Chief Business Officers  
Chief Information System Officers  
Chief Instructional Officers  
Chief Student Service Officers  
Financial Aid Officers

**FROM:** Marty J. Alvarado, Executive Vice Chancellor, Educational Services & Support  
Lizette Navarette, Vice Chancellor, College Finance and Facilities Planning

**RE:** Updated Student Expense Resource Survey (SEARS) Data

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This memo summarizes the release of revised estimates on student expenses from the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC); the data file with regional costs by subcategory of expenses is attached. This data from CSAC both updates the previous student expense budget numbers for this year with recent survey responses from students, and also allows for an analysis of how student costs vary by region. Analyzing costs by region addresses a concern of many districts in high cost areas that their students have not been able to qualify for the California College Promise Grant (CCPG) because the metrics did not account for regional cost differences.

In addition, maximizing the number of students that qualify for the CCPG could have implications for institutional funding through the supplemental allocation in the Student Centered Funding Formula (SCFF). Furthermore, the Governor has asked the Chancellor's Office to work with districts and colleges to implement best practices to increase student access to financial aid under the Pell Grant and California College Promise Grant program. Using the most up-to-date estimates on student costs furthers this effort and will help ensure that students receive adequate resources to support their total cost of attendance.

### **History of student expense budgets and SEARS**

CSAC publishes one estimate of student expense budget data annually for the entire state, which colleges are allowed to adopt as their own cost of attendance estimates. From the early 1970s through 2006-07, CSAC implemented SEARS every three years. However, between 2007 and 2018 the SEARS survey was not conducted. In this period, CSAC updated its estimates of annual student expenses by making inflation adjustments.

CSAC conducted surveys across the state on 150,000 students between fall 2018 and spring of 2019. Data was collected from a cross-section of students in the community colleges, the CSU, the UC and private colleges. While data was only collected at 55 of the 114 community colleges, data was collected at community colleges in each microregion of the state and therefore CSAC was able to

produce reliable regional estimates for the community college sector (over 80,000 community college students were surveyed).

### **Release and Summary of California Community College Data**

SEARS data for the California Community College sector was recently sent to the Chancellor's Office in a raw unanalyzed format. This data shows expenses in the following categories: books and supplies, food, housing, transportation, and personal/miscellaneous. (Colleges add tuition/fee information to these non-tuition cost estimates to round out their student budgets.) Data are given for students living with parents, living on campus, and living off campus and are broken out by 15 microregions.

The Chancellor's Office worked in coordination with The Institute for College Access and Success (TICAS) to analyze this data and compare it to the reported student expense budgets used by the colleges in 2019. This analysis revealed that many colleges' individual estimates of student cost were below the regional averages derived from the survey data. While adequate responses were collected to compile a regional analysis, there were not enough responses to break down this analysis to the individual college or district level. While the SEARS data shows higher student costs in many of the regions, it shows lower costs for others. Colleges in these regions may have more reliable methods for assessing student Cost of Attendance (COA) and may choose to use those instead of the SEARS data.

### **Impact of Updated Data on Fee Waivers**

Utilizing the updated student expense budget estimates could have a direct effect on the number of students who qualify for the California College Promise Grant (CCPG), formerly known as the BOG fee waiver. The CCPG waives enrollment fees for students that demonstrate at least \$1,104 in unmet financial need. Financial need is the difference between a student's expected family contribution, based on the FAFSA or California Dream Act Application, and the COA at a college. Changes to the COA will have an impact on whether a student has at least \$1,104 in unmet need.

### **Impact on Institutional Funding**

The Student Centered Funding Formula, passed by the Legislature in 2018, once fully implemented will fund community college districts in part based on the number of CCPG students enrolled and the number of successful educational outcomes achieved by those students. Therefore, if colleges and districts increase the number of students who receive a CCPG, this action could have a direct and positive effect on the amount of funds the district receives through the supplemental allocation and the student success allocation of the Student Centered Funding Formula. More information about the Student Centered Funding Formula can be found [here](#).

### **Use of SEARS data**

As reported by CSAC, the SEARS data is the only source of statewide cross-segment estimates of student's expenses and resources to attend college. Within the CCCs, SEARS is also the primary data source used to calculate the annual student expense budget, which estimates how much students spend for living and school related expenses in addition to tuition/fees for students living with parents, students living on-campus, or students living off-campus.

**Updated SEARS Data Memo**

May 08, 2020

The student expense budgets, once released by CSAC, are available to institutions to utilize, if they choose to, when determining their official Cost of Attendance (COA) figures for public release. Institutions have an open period in which they can adjust their cost estimates using their actual institutional costs with the student expense budget as a source of data. Institutions can adjust as needed or use the expenses as outlined by CSAC.

The Chancellor's Office recommends that colleges review the SEARS regional data enclosed to inform their own assessments of student expense budgets and COA for the 2020-21 academic year. Due to the timing of this memo, COA estimates already submitted to CSAC cannot be updated. Districts may still use the updated COA estimates for CCPG and Pell Grants. This data may not accurately reflect college-level data already collected and is not intended to supersede any data currently in use. SEARS data may be used in-part, wholly, or not at all as the basis for colleges as they calculate their COA estimates. In addition, colleges should keep in mind that students who may have previously not qualified for a CCPG but are now eligible may have previously been captured in a college's AB 19 counts. Students who become eligible for the CCPG under the revised SEARS estimates would then be removed from AB 19 counts for the institution.

For more information about the SEARS, please contact the California Student Aid Commission at [schoolsupport@csac.ca.gov](mailto:schoolsupport@csac.ca.gov). If you have questions about this guidance, please contact Gina Browne at [gbrowne@cccco.edu](mailto:gbrowne@cccco.edu), Bryan Dickason at [bdickason@cccco.edu](mailto:bdickason@cccco.edu), or Ruby Nieto at [rnieto@cccco.edu](mailto:rnieto@cccco.edu)

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