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“DIGITAL TEXTBOOKS,” OPEN AND FREE, IF APPROVED AS STANDARDS-ALIGNED BY TOP STATE EDUCATION OFFICIALS, MAY SOON BE COMING TO A CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOL NEAR YOU.

On May 19, 2009, California voters rejected five of six measures on the statewide election ballot. Faced with a \$21 billion deficit beginning July 1, 2009, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger is looking for ways to innovate, to save money, and to tap into California expertise in education technology development.

The Governor is asking content developers to submit digital material suitable for high school classes, such as math and science, for review. He has asked California’s top three State education officials, Glen Thomas, Secretary of Education; Jack O’Connell, State Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Ted Mitchell, State Board of Education President, to do the review and collaboratively to develop a list of free, open, educational resources for high school students, that are deemed to be aligned to California State education standards. Such sources sometimes are called “digital textbooks.” Their report is due on August 10, 2009.

Though California has a kindergarten through grade 8 textbook adoption procedure, it has no statewide review of Grades 9 through 12 instructional materials. Hence, high schools currently may use open educational resources or “digital textbooks,” if they wish. And after the trio of State education officials delivers its August report, local school districts will have responsibility to “adopt” texts for high school use. They are not required to select so-called “digital textbooks” – no matter how open, free and aligned they may be. However, there will be a list of resources which top State education officials have determined to be aligned to California’s education standards, to consider.

Since diverse learners benefit from access to diverse instructional materials, some see this cost savings venture as an opportunity to advance digital technology and educational resources. [See the *eSchool News* article, “California considers open digital textbooks” (May 21, 2009) at <http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/top-news/index.cfm?i=58861> for more details.]

SENATORS DURBIN (D-IL) AND BURR (R-NC) INTRODUCE S 1129, THE “PATHWAYS TO COLLEGE ACT”

On May 21, 2009, Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Richard Burr (R-NC) introduced S 1129, the “Pathways to College Act.” Senator Durbin is the Senate Majority Whip.

The Senators quoted from a recent report from McKinsey Company consultants, “The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America’s Schools.” The McKinsey study states that:

EDUCATION LEGISLATIVE SERVICES, INC.

WASHINGTON, DC:
230 E Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002
TEL: 202/544-7364 FAX: 202/547-4205

Sally Shake, President/CEO
E-MAIL: ELS.CA@COX.NET

CALIFORNIA:
1717 Birdsong Place, EL Cajon, CA 92021
TEL: 619/444-4997 FAX: 619/444-4997

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If “America had raised the educational attainment of our students to those of high-performing nations like Finland and South Korea between 1983 and 1998, U.S. G.D.P. (Gross Domestic Product) in 2008 would have been between \$1.3 trillion and \$2.3 trillion higher than it is today.”

“If the gap between low-income American students of higher means had been narrowed, U.S. G.D.P. in 2008 would have been \$400 billion to \$670 billion higher.”

President Obama in his first speech to Congress set a goal for the United States to have the highest college graduation rate in the world by 2020. To compete economically and prevent recessions in the future, the educational achievement gap for all Americans must close, and more students must receive a college education.

Of U.S. eighth graders in the year 2000, only 20% of those in the lowest income brackets will earn a college degree by 2012, whereas 68% of the eighth graders in the highest income category, will gain a college diploma by 2012. The two Senators agree that:

“Every student who wants to go to college should have that opportunity, and we should provide them with the tools they need.”

Of the 2007 graduating class, “half... enrolled in college” from the Chicago Public Schools, which was “an increase of 6.5 percent over the last 4 years.”

“The national increase was less than 1 percent in the same time frame. Nationally, the number of African-American graduates going to college has decreased by 6 percent over the last 4 years while the Chicago rate has increased by almost 8 percent.”

Background Data for the “Pathways to College Act”

In order to increase student college attendance rates, Senators Durbin and Burr introduced the “**Pathways to College Act**,” which would provide grants for local school districts, to help increase the numbers of low-income students who enter and succeed in college, through better information and guidance services in their high schools.

A report entitled “**Potholes on the Road to College**,” produced by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, looked at difficulties faced by Chicago Public School students who wanted to go to college but didn’t. This report found that “**the most important factor in whether students enroll in a four-year college is if they attended a school where teachers create a strong college-going culture and help students with the process of applying.**” S 1129 grants funding would help school districts develop such a culture, and improve their services to help guide students through the college applications and admissions process.

Chicago Public Schools tracks its college enrollment rates, and hence can learn what tools and strategies work favorably. Low-income students often need more help to connect their current school work to their college dreams and life goals, and to realize them.

Statistics are powerful and motivating:

1. An educated workforce is essential to the economic success of the United States. Over 80% of 23 million jobs that will be created during the next decade, will require postsecondary education.

2. Only 36% of 18- to 24-year olds currently are enrolled in postsecondary education.
3. Workers earn \$7,000 more each year with a bachelors degree than with a high school degree only, and can anticipate earning \$1 million more in a lifetime than those with only a high school degree.
4. All schools should provide guidance to engage students in college and career awareness and make certain that students are enrolled in a rigorous curriculum that prepares them for postsecondary education.
5. While 87% of students from the top income quartile enroll in college, only 57% of students from the lowest income quartile enroll.
6. The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250 high school students per counselor, while the U.S. Department of Education calculates an average student-to-counselor ratio of 315:1 in U.S. high schools.
7. Private schools counselors spend, on average, 58% of their time on postsecondary education counseling. In public schools, the percentage is only 25% of counselor time.
8. First-generation and low-income families frequently overestimate the costs of college tuition while they underestimate availability of student financial aid. These students and families have less access to college application and financial aid resources than other groups.
9. College intervention and preparation programs “can double the college-going rates of at-risk youth,” boosting their goals, enrollment in college and graduation from college.

Grant Award Eligibility and Key Definitions

Eligible local school districts would apply to the U.S. Secretary of Education for a five-year competitive “**Pathways to College**” grant award. An eligible local school district would be one in which a majority of high schools served by the district are “high-need” high schools. A “**high-need**” high school is defined as one in which “**not less than 50 percent of the students enrolled in the school are:**

- A. Eligible for a federally subsidized Free or Reduced Price Lunch;
- B. Eligible to be counted under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act;
- C. In families eligible for assistance under the State program funded under Title IV, Part A of the Social Security Act.

The term “**high school graduation rate**,” under this legislation, means “the percentage of students with a regular diploma in the standard number of years;” as clarified under Section 200.19 (b)(1) of Title 34, Code of Federal Regulations.

The term “**college-going rate**” means, under this bill, “the percentage of high school graduates who enroll at an institution of higher education in the school year immediately following graduation from high school.”

Required Uses of Funds Under S 1129

Each program funded under this legislation must develop and implement, or expand, a program to increase the number of low-income students who enroll in postsecondary educational institutions, including institutions with competitive admissions criteria. Each program would be required to:

1. Provide **professional development in postsecondary education advising**, to high school teachers and school counselors.
2. Implement a “**comprehensive college guidance program**” for all the students in a high school served by an eligible local school district that
 - a. **Ensures that all students and their parents are notified regularly** during a student’s time in high school, **beginning in the first year of high school, about**
 - High school graduation requirements
 - College entrance requirements
 - Economic and social benefits of higher education
 - College expenses by institutional type, net price, and expenses above and beyond tuition
 - Resources for paying for college, including financial aid availability, diversity, and eligibility
 - b. Assists students in **preparing for college entrance tests and how to register for them.**
 - c. **Provides guidance, one-on-one, to students** and assists them in **making application** to a higher education institution, for federal financial aid, plus State, local and private financial aid and scholarships.
 - d. Provides students with **opportunities to explore postsecondary education outside of schools** such as through college fairs and tours, career fairs and workplace visits, and similar experiences.
 - e. Provides at least **one meeting per student by the first semester of the first year of high school with a school counselor**; college access personnel (under the Higher Education Act), trained teacher, or other professional or organization such as a community-based organization (CBO) approved by the school, for the purpose of **discussing postsecondary options and goals, creating a plan to achieve those goals**; provide at least **two meetings each year to discuss progress** on the plan.
3. Ensures that **each high school** served by the eligible local school district **develops a comprehensive schoolwide action plan to strengthen the college-going culture** in the high school.
4. Develop or **maintain a postsecondary access center in the school** where college access professionals work, such as those described under the Higher Education Act.

Allowable Uses of Funds Under S 1129

Each program funded under this legislation, may:

1. **Establish mandatory postsecondary planning classes** for high school students, to help with the college preparation and application process.

2. **Hire and train “postsecondary coaches,”** who have expertise in the college-going process, to supplement regular school counselors.

3. **Increase the number of school counselors** who specialize in college-going services for students.
4. **Train student teachers to assist** in developing a college-going culture in their high schools.
5. **Establish partnerships with** programs funded under the Higher Education Act (Title IV, Part A, Chapters 1 and 2 of Subpart 2), and with community and nonprofit organizations, to increase college-going rates at high schools served by the eligible local school district.
6. **Provide long-term postsecondary follow up** with graduates of the high schools served by the eligible local school district, increase alumni involvement in mentoring and advising high school students.
7. **Deliver college and career planning curriculum** as a stand-alone course, or embedded in other classes, or delivered by the school counselor through guidance curriculum for all high school students.

Strategic Fit of S 1129, With President Obama’s Priorities

As might be expected from an Illinois Senator and Democratic Majority Whip in the Senate, S 1129, the “Pathways to College Act,” dovetails nicely with the FY 2010 Budget Request and education policy priorities of a former U.S. Senator from Illinois, who is now President of the United States, Barack Obama. The President’s overarching education goal for the nation is to have every person gain at least one year of postsecondary education, and by the year 2020 have the U.S. again leading the world as the nation with the highest graduation rate.

But S 1129 is also sponsored by conservative Republican Senator Burr, from a Southern state. Both Senators Burr and Durbin support raising student achievement levels, expanding availability of rigorous curricula in high schools, and encouraging and preparing more students, especially those from low-income families, to go to college and to graduate. So this bill is appealing on a bipartisan basis.

This legislation also reflects the move to increase U.S. competitiveness globally, economically, and educationally. This priority also underlies the current voluntary state-led initiatives to develop “common core,” “national,” or “American standards in key subject areas, including English Language Arts and mathematics, and in college and career readiness at high school graduation.

In order to develop more college and career ready students, academic standards need to be higher, clearer and fewer, according to recent studies. And in order to expand the numbers of high school students who not only are academically prepared to go to college, but actually apply and enroll, additional supports and assistance are necessary for students and their families, at an early enough stage in their schooling, to become aware of college opportunities and to engage in appropriate planning.

Both the President and U.S. Education Secretary Duncan conceive of learning as a “cradle to career” continuing process rather than simply a series of segments based upon age, grade level, or subject content. S 1129 weaves strategies and funding which may become available to high schools, through renewed ESEA/NCLB reauthorization legislation, with resources that are available through the Higher Education Act and its federal

funding streams. So, not only do the policies cross over from K-12 levels to postsecondary levels, but funding does as well.