Annual Cash 4 Colleges Day this weekend in Aptos

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APTOS — Financial aid counselors will be on hand at Cabrillo College in Aptos on Sunday offering help to students and parents in completing their financial aid applications for higher education.

Counselors from Cabrillo College and UC Santa Cruz will help students and their parents in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and new this year, the California Dream Act application, which allows qualified undocumented students to apply for state-funded financial aid including institutional grants, community college fee waivers, Cal Grant and Chafee Grant.

Approximately 20 trained Cabrillo and UCSC financial aid counselors and staff members will be on hand Sunday.

Assistance will be provided in both English and Spanish.

The workshop is free and open to all students in the community, regardless of where they want to attend college or university.

"Financial aid is important to students' success, and figuring out financing can be a huge and confusing process," said Dennis Bailey-Fougner, vice president of Student Services at Cabrillo College.

Bailey-Fougner said they wanted to address some popular misconceptions about financial aid and help demystify the process.

"Some parents think they do not qualify or make too much money," Bailey-Fougner said, or they may not know how to apply if they are divorced, just lost a job or have multiple children attending university. "We will walk you through it," he said.

"The timing of this event is particularly important, as the CalGrant deadline is March 2, and CalGrants can be received through the completion of a FAFSA or a Dream Act application," he said.

Financial aid counselors will provide assistance in completing California Dream Applications, open to eligible undocumented students under the criteria set by California Bill AB 540, such as they’ve attended a California high school for three or more years and graduated or attained a GED.

AB 540 allowed eligible students to pay in-state college tuition but until last year, did not qualify them for any financial aid.

This changed last year when they were allowed to apply for non-state funded scholarships.

New this year, AB 540 students are eligible to apply for state-funded financial aid, including the Cal Grant, which Bailey-Fougner said represents a huge financial relief for students and their families.

"I've seen students crying because they no longer have to work three jobs," said Bailey-Fougner.