

THE COST OF OPPORTUNITY: ACCESS TO COLLEGE FINANCIAL AID IN CALIFORNIA

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Webinar

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The Education Trust—West



Ed Trust—West Mission

The Education Trust—West works for the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, pre-k through college. We expose opportunity and achievement gaps that separate students of color and low-income students from other youth, and we identify and advocate for the strategies that will forever close those gaps.

WHY THIS ISSUE IS IMPORTANT

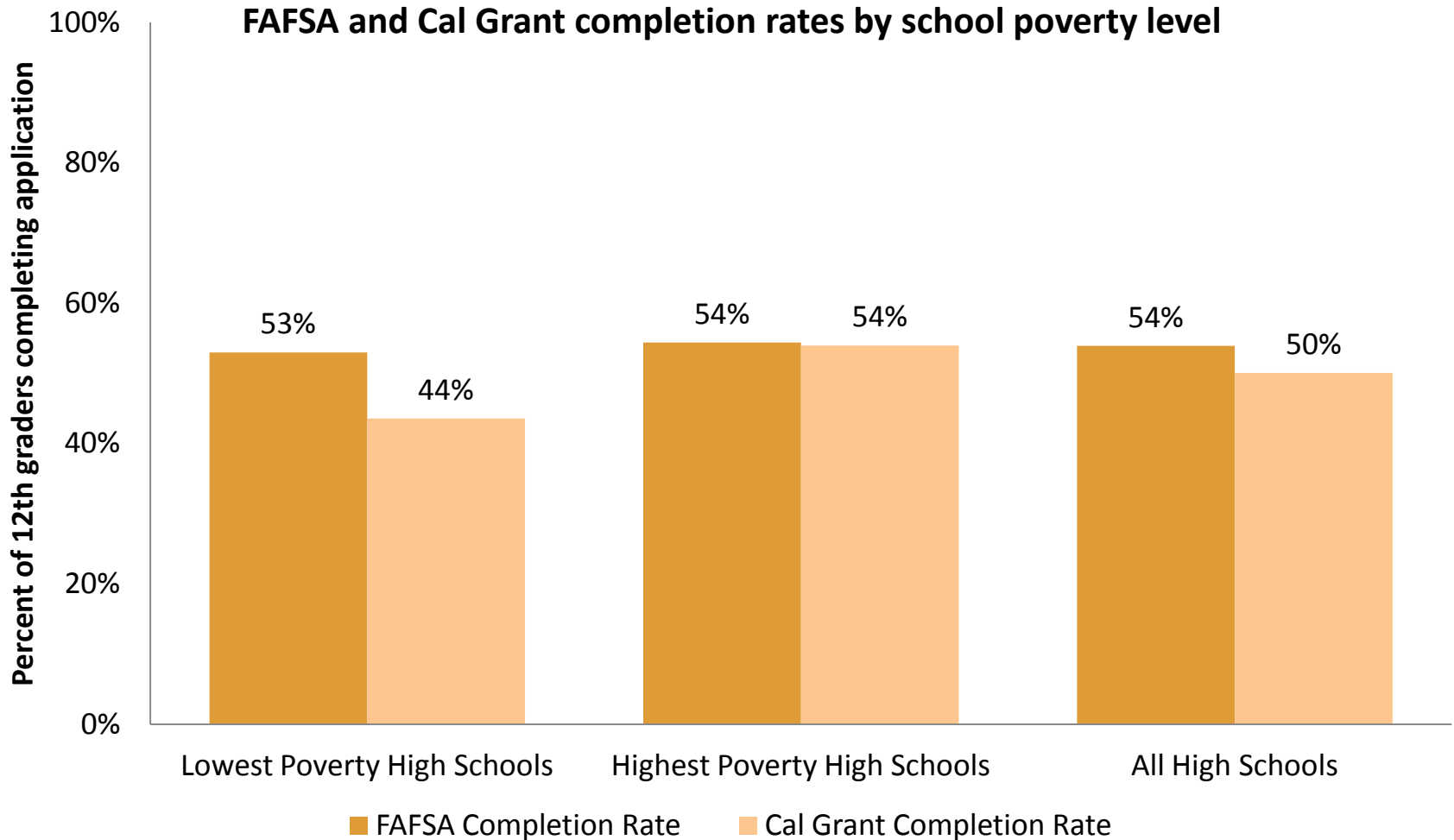
- College attainment is becoming increasingly important, but costs are also rising, making it more inaccessible
- More than half of all California students come from low-income households
- Cost is the reason most often cited by qualified students for choosing not to go to college, yet many students never apply for aid
- Completing a FAFSA increases the likelihood that a student will enroll and persist in college

ABOUT THE DATA

- Data from multiple sources:
 - US Dept of Education Office of Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
 - California Student Aid Commission (Cal Grants)
 - California Dept. of Education (Enrollment)
- Combined these sources to generate FAFSA and Cal Grant completion rates for California public high schools
- Data for 2011-12 Seniors (2012-13 Financial Aid Year) approx. 495,000 students

Key findings

HIGH AND LOW POVERTY SCHOOLS SHOWED SIMILAR APPLICATION RATES



TOP 100 SCHOOLS FOR FAFSA COMPLETION SHOW DIVERSE CHARACTERISTICS

Achievement

- 49 of the top 100 schools had API scores in top 30%, 18 had API scores in the bottom 30%

Size

- While many of the top 100 schools were small or charter schools, 16 were traditional schools with more than 500 seniors

Programs

- One third of the top 100 were magnet schools, or thematic programs of study (e.g. Performing Arts)

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Successful schools shared certain practices:

1. Directly submitting GPA and graduation verifications to CSAC for all students, following up with students with discrepancies or invalid information
2. Hosting Cash for College workshops and alternative workshops for students who are unable to attend Cash for College
3. Offering language translation for families at financial aid events
4. Counselor visits to senior classrooms to raise awareness and inform students of importance of FAFSA and availability of supports
5. Contacting parents via email and phone to remind them about the important steps required to complete the FAFSA

FEDERAL AND STATE AGENCIES HAVE MADE EFFORTS TO INCREASE ACCESS

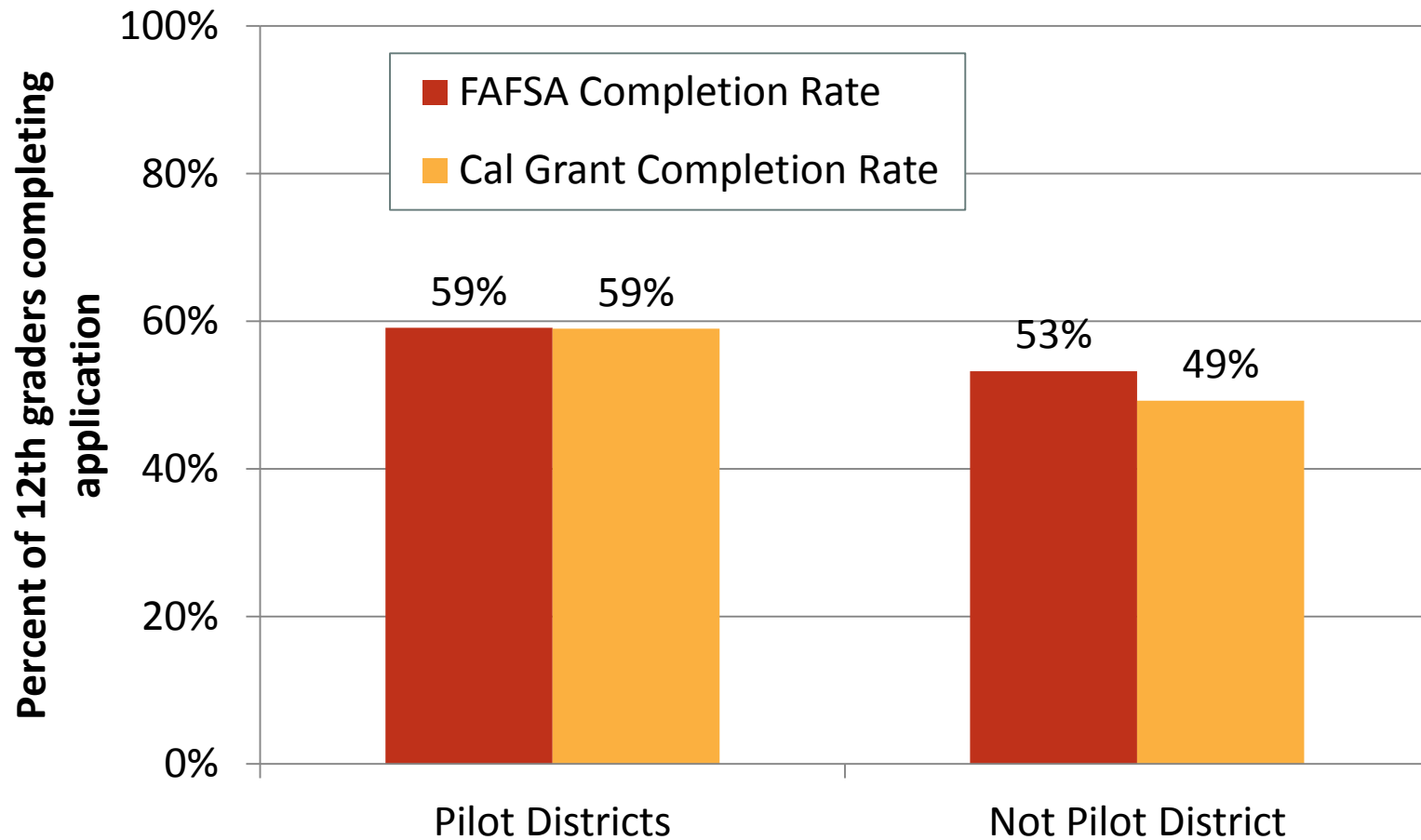
Federal and state efforts

- Streamlining and simplifying applications
- Increased outreach and communications

FSA specific

- Pilot program to provide districts with student-level data
- Publishing school-level data on completion

FSA PILOT DISTRICTS SHOW HIGHER APPLICATION RATES



WHAT CAN BE DONE?

At the state level:

1. Broaden communication to districts, schools, students, and communities about the availability of aid and importance of applying for it
2. Encourage schools and districts to submit GPA and graduation verifications for students in bulk, thereby streamlining the process and eliminating opportunities for errors that might render students ineligible
3. Charge CSAC with providing individualized student –level data on FAFSA and Cal Grant completions to schools and districts in a manner similar to the FSA pilot program
4. Regularly report aggregated application data to high schools and the public

Financial Aid Tracker:

A Web Tool for Tracking FAFSA and Cal Grant Application Rates

<http://financialaid.edtrustwest.org/>

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