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Scholarship Foundation of Santa Barbara Among Select Few Tapped to Beta Test New FAFSA

Santa Barbara, CA — The Scholarship Foundation of Santa Barbara is one of only six organizations nationwide selected by the U.S. Department of Education to conduct initial testing of the latest Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The Scholarship Foundation’s testing efforts will involve students from three Santa Maria high schools as well as financial aid specialists at Westmont College in Santa Barbara.

“The Scholarship Foundation’s selection for this important testing role affirms our organization’s stature as a national leader in the areas of financial aid advising and support to students and families,” said Foundation President and CEO Melinda Cabrera. “The flawed rollout of the FAFSA last year resulted in overwhelming stress and anxiety for students, and in some cases deterred students from submitting the application altogether, causing them to miss out on much-needed financial aid. Being part of this beta test means that we can be part of the solution to a flawed process, resulting in a more equitable and effective financial aid application. We view our participation in this first round of testing as an extension of our longstanding commitment to community betterment through college degree attainment.”

Also participating in the first round of FAFSA beta testing are: Alabama Possible (AL), Bridge2Life (FL), College AIM (GA), Education is Freedom (TX), and the Scholarship Fund of Alexandria (VA). Three additional rounds of testing will take place as part of the Education Department’s phased rollout of the FAFSA in advance of the form’s widescale release by December 1.

“Through October and November, we will expand our testing to include tens of thousands of students and many different types of high schools and postsecondary institutions,” said FAFSA

Executive Advisor Jeremy Singer. “Testing the FAFSA system with real students and institutions in a wide range of contexts is critical to ensuring a successful launch by Dec. 1, and we are grateful to the many organizations that will help us achieve this goal.”

The Scholarship Foundation is enlisting seniors from Santa Maria, Pioneer Valley, and Ernest Righetti high schools to complete the FAFSA in person during a workshop in early October. Several representatives from the U.S. Department of Education will be on hand to observe and support the process. The submitted applications will be reviewed for technical and informational errors by personnel in the Student Financial Services office at Westmont.

“We are grateful for our partners in this important work. Without the active support of representatives from the Santa Maria Joint Union High School District and Westmont College, this testing process would not be possible,” said Ms. Cabrera.

Each year, educational institutions as well as federal and state agencies require high school seniors and college students to complete the FAFSA to become eligible for scholarships, grants, and loans, as do many private organizations that provide college financial aid. The form is typically released on October 1, but last year’s iteration was delayed until late December. Ensuing technical problems further complicated admissions and funding decisions for students nationwide, prompting the Education Department’s phased rollout this year. The department is coordinating beta testing in partnership with the National College Attainment Network.

“The Scholarship Foundation of Santa Barbara has an enduring legacy of supporting students in our community who want to pursue higher education,” said Irene Neller, vice president for enrollment marketing and communications at Westmont. “Our partnership with the Foundation has given deserving students an opportunity to benefit from a life-changing education at Westmont. Problems with last year’s FAFSA rollout affected the country’s most vulnerable students, so partnerships like this have become even more important. We look forward to helping local students and their families overcome any obstacles they may face in chasing their dreams at a four-year college.”

The Scholarship Foundation of Santa Barbara is the nation’s largest community-based provider of college scholarships, having cumulatively awarded in excess of \$150 million to some 62,000 county students since its founding in 1962. A nonprofit organization, the Scholarship Foundation also provides free financial aid advising services. For additional information, visit www.sbscholarship.org.

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