



NEWS RELEASE

CALIFORNIA STATE TREASURER BILL LOCKYER

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Contact: Joe DeAnda
916-653-2995

Treasurer Lockyer Hands Out First Awards Under Program that Rewards Achievement, Encourages Families to Save for College *\$150,000 in College Savings Awards Will Go to 200 Sacramento Students*

SACRAMENTO – State Treasurer Bill Lockyer today distributed college savings awards to 21 kindergartners through sixth graders who were among the first winners of the ScholarShare Project for Achievement and Recognition of Creativity (SPARC) contest.

“I’m excited to be able to present these deserving students with awards and to provide them and their families an opportunity to start saving for college,” said Lockyer. “Higher education is becoming an increasingly important pathway to a good job and solid future, and every student who works hard and achieves deserves the opportunity to obtain a college degree. Through this partnership with the Sacramento County Office of Education, I hope the SPARC program provides parents and students the incentive to begin planning to pay for the rising cost of going to college.”

“The SPARC program encourages students to think about college at an early age,” said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O’Connell. “This year’s theme, ‘I will become...’ helps students imagine their future and think about potential career paths. It’s never too early to start thinking about who you want to become and start working toward that goal.”

“We must inspire more young people, including students in grades kindergarten through sixth, to think about their futures,” said Sacramento County Superintendent of Schools David W. Gordon. “We are excited about helping provide awards to local students who are being rewarded for their talent, dedication and achievement”

Lockyer, O’Connell and Gordon today handed out \$500 college savings awards to 21 SPARC winners in grades K-6 from Sacramento’s Dyer-Kelly Elementary School, in a ceremony held at the school. Assemblyman Dave Jones (D-Sacramento), Assemblyman Roger Niello (R-Sacramento) and San Juan Unified School District Superintendent Steven Enoch also participated in the event.

SPARC is a pilot-project partnership between ScholarShare, California’s 529 college savings plan, the Sacramento County Office of Education and the California Student Opportunity and Access Program (Cal-SOAP). The contest is open to students in grades K-12 at 29 Sacramento County schools. The program will distribute a total of \$150,000 in college savings awards to 200 K-12 students.

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SPARC awards recipients are chosen based on their ability to expand on the theme, "I Will Become..." Students in grades K-6 competed in an essay or poster contest for 100 awards valued at \$500 each. Students in grades 7-9 will compete in an essay contest for 50 awards valued at \$750, and students in grades 10-12 will compete in a 30-second video contest for 50 awards worth \$1,250 each. The deadlines for grades 7-9 and 10-12 entries are January and April 2008, respectively.

Each winner's award will be placed in a ScholarShare college savings account and held in trust by the ScholarShare Investment Board (SIB). The SIB, chaired by Lockyer as State Treasurer, administers the ScholarShare 529 program.

The students will be able to use the awards, plus the investment earnings they accrue, to help pay their tuition and other college expenses. Neither the students nor their family members will be able to place additional funds in the SPARC ScholarShare accounts. They can, however, establish separate, regular ScholarShare accounts and add money to those accounts on a regular basis.

Named for the section of IRS code under which they were created, 529 plans are highly regarded for their tax-advantaged status. Earnings on investments grow tax-deferred, and disbursements, when used for tuition and other qualified expenses, are federal and state tax-free.

ScholarShare accounts may be opened online with as little as \$50, or \$15 when combined with regular investments of at least \$15 per month. ScholarShare has no annual fee, no income limit and offers a high maximum contribution limit of \$320,000. The program currently holds more than \$2.6 billion in assets in more than 190,000 accounts.

The names of all award winners will be listed at www.Cal529.org, which serves as the online hub for the SPARC contest and other ScholarShare outreach programs. It also provides information and forms for state employees to set up automatic payroll deductions for ScholarShare accounts.

For a complete listing of participating schools, general SPARC information or contest rules and deadlines, visit www.Cal529.org. For information on ScholarShare, visit www.scholarshare.com.

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