



It Could Have Been Worse

By Jonathan Lightman

In any typical year, FACCC's public comment on the state budget goes something like this, "there is both good and bad news . . ." The drill rarely changes.

This year is an exception. There is no good news and there is no reason to sugarcoat the carnage. Districts have been asked to cut \$120 million out of their base apportionment and \$313 million from categorical programs (potentially mitigated by one-time federal funds). Adding insult to injury, the state will defer \$703 million in payments from 2009-10 to 2010-11 while demanding \$6 per unit more from our students – a 30 percent increase. The combined effects of budget cuts and fee hikes will likely result in 250,000 fewer students, with mass lay-offs expected of part-time faculty and classified staff.

In the dark days of May and June we were asked to command a ship which sprung 1,000 leaks. We could plug only the big holes, just enough to keep it afloat. Major repair would be deferred. Here is the result of our triage.

Defeat of Administration's Plan to Reimburse Physical Education (P.E.) at the Non-Credit Rate

FACCC joined other community college stakeholders in vigorously opposing efforts to reimburse P.E. at \$2,745 instead of \$4,565 per full-time equivalent student (FTES). The Department of Finance said that community colleges could still offer P.E. courses for credit; they simply would be reimbursed at the non-credit rate. This is not a precedence we can allow as it effectively allows state policy makers to use the budget process to determine curriculum – today P.E., tomorrow chemistry. It's the flip side of "local control!"

The Administration clearly did not consider the ripple effect across academic departments. P.E. courses, often featuring higher student-teacher ratios, financially supplement other subjects with lower ratios, like Career Technical Education. The

reverberations would wreak havoc on many disciplines.

It's telling that similar proposals were not leveled against either the California State University or University of California. Community college students were singled out.

Thankfully, the press picked up on this story, highlighting the famous athletes who began at the California Community Colleges, including Jackie Robison, George Brett and Dick Vermeil. For every Hall-of-Famer, however, there are thousands who dream of becoming a physical therapist, athletic trainer, or sports coach, all needing lower division P.E. courses.

There is no doubt that P.E. will face its share of cuts, but for this round, it will not be singled out. The bottom line, it could have been worse.

Capping Student Fee Increases at \$6 per Unit

FACCC unapologetically fights to lower student fees. We need only look back at recent history, when fees jumped from \$11 to \$26 per unit in just 18 months, to see how fee hikes can devastate access to higher education. At that time we lost over 300,000 students, prompting legislators to reverse course and lower them to \$20 per unit.

The most recent report card from the National Center Public Policy and Higher Education gave California the only passing grade in the nation for affordability. While 49 other states received an "F," we earned a "C," because of our community colleges.

For several years, the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) has been championing higher fees on community college students. Its most recent rationale suggests that the federal government will pick up more of the tab if we set fees at

somewhere between \$30 - \$60 per unit. Republicans and Democrats assigned to the Joint Legislative Budget Conference Committee listened in earnest to the LAO's pitch.

In this round, the Administration stood with, not against, us. A fee hike did not appear in the Governor's budget. This proposal would come directly from legislative leaders, some of whom advocated for fee levels in the realm of \$40 - \$60 per unit. The final budget raised fees by 30 percent, to \$26 per unit.

As part of the Budget Act, the Legislature took the controversial step of dedicating the new fee revenue to the colleges as a means of mitigating other cuts within our system. While this move will indeed scale back reductions in other areas, it sets a precedence for our students to absorb a greater share of the overall costs of their education. If the Legislature continues on this path, \$60 per unit will soon be a reality.

For the time being, however, capping the fee increase to \$6 per unit is a small victory. It could have been worse.

Limiting Categorical Flexibility to a Select Group of Programs

For several budget rounds, the Administration has sounded the drumbeats for categorical "flexibility" in K-12 and community colleges, meaning that local boards, not the State, should determine how much money each program should have. While the concept of "flexibility" might sound good in theory, it defeats the very purpose of categorical funding. These programs, like Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), Part-Time Faculty Equity, and Matriculation were established because districts were not devoting enough attention to them.

FACCC has vigorously opposed such flexibility, preferring instead to maintain programmatic integrity. Until this budget round, our argument has won because the fight truly belongs in the K-12 arena, not community colleges. Legislators have understood that categorical programs comprise less than 15 percent of the overall community college budget, not a significant enough amount to wage such a fight.

In the last budget battle, legislative leaders were concerned that flexibility needed to accompany fiscal reductions. Local trustees would be given flexibility to move dollars from one categorical program to another or from the general fund to support categorical programs. Categorical dollars could not, however, be moved to support the general fund.

FACCC joined with others in warning against unlimited flexibility at the local level. Could trustees reasonably choose between the Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS) and EOPS? The compromise was to establish two sets of programs, “protected” and “unprotected” (see Side Bar). The first group can receive, but not donate, money from other categorical programs or the general fund. “Unprotected” categoricals can be raided at the local level.

While the Budget Act is better than the Administration’s proposal, FACCC remains

deeply concerned about the “unprotected” programs, particularly Matriculation and those for part-time faculty. FACCC urges all its members to engage local trustees, faculty leaders and campus administration in these important discussions.

Defeat of Administration’s Proposal for a Five-Year Moratorium on Full-Time Faculty Hiring and Compliance with the Fifty Percent Law

In the midst of a K-12 budget hearing, the Administration distributed another of its “relief of mandates” proposals for community college faculty, a five-year exemption on both the Faculty Obligation Number (sometimes labeled the 75/25 rule) and the Fifty Percent Law. These are both significantly important – an ersatz “third rail” of the faculty agenda; the Administration’s proposal triggered a quick response from FACCC.

The Faculty Obligation Number (FON) represents the district’s hiring obligation of full-time faculty. This is a fairly complicated process, entailing multiple layers of approvals. Needless to say, the budget shortfall alone, absent further exemption, would postpone meaningful hiring of full-time faculty for years to come.

Governor Schwarzenegger’s proposal was redundant at best, dangerous at worst. It would have set a damaging precedent, interfering with FACCC’s ability to advocate more full-time hiring when the economy

improves. With a dash of coaxing and prodding, the Legislature agreed with FACCC, refusing to adopt the proposal for the Budget Act.

Like the FON, the five-year exemption on the Fifty Percent Law would have set a terrible precedent. The Fifty Percent Law requires districts to spend at least one-half of their educational expenses on instruction; it preserves the character of community colleges as teaching institutions. Districts already have the ability to seek an exemption, and these are routinely granted by the Community College Board of Governors. There was no need for a blanket five-year exemption for all districts. Once again, the Legislature agreed with FACCC and denied the Administration’s request.

Yes, it could have been worse, a lot worse. That’s not a cause for celebration but a statement of reality. The ship remained afloat, but the holes are still glaring. Major repair will take several years and involve us all. Throughout it all, FACCC won’t jump ship and neither should you. Help spread the word.

Categorical Programs

Protected

- Basic Skills
- CalWORKs
- DSPS
- EOPS and CARE
- Foster Care Education
- Fund for Student Success
- Nursing
- Student Financial Aid Administration
- Telecommunications and Technology

Unprotected

- Apprenticeship
- SB 70/Career-Technical Education*
- Child Care Tax Bailout
- Economic Development
- Equal Employment Opportunity
- Matriculation
- Part-Time Faculty Compensation, Health Insurance and Office Hours
- Physical Plant/Instructional Equipment
- Transfer Education and Articulation

*Legislative drafting error; will be moved to “protected” status.