

## CALIFORNIA

## Community college funding makes ballot

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An initiative that would increase funding for California's community colleges and lower student fees to \$15 per unit has qualified for the next statewide ballot, the Secretary of State's Office announced Wednesday.

The measure, which was certified for the February 2008 ballot with 619,644 signatures, would increase the guaranteed funding for community colleges under a new formula. That equation would increase funding based on the population growth of college-age residents. The present calculation uses enrollment figures for grades kindergarten to 12 -- which is currently flat. Passage requires a simple majority vote.

The state guarantees about 40 percent of its general fund will be given to the K-12 schools and community colleges. Under the proposed new law, that annual minimum funding guarantee would increase by about \$880 million over three years as the state's general fund grows, according to an analysis by the state Legislative Analyst's Office.

The change is vital, said Scott Lay, president and CEO of the Community College League of California, a nonprofit association of the state's 72 community college districts.

"If we continue with business as usual, we are going to deny access to community colleges," Lay said.

However, shifting more money to the schools and community colleges would mean it would not go to other state priorities, which concerns the California State University system.

"CSU has concerns about fiscal impact on its budget if community college fees were fixed at a certain level and guaranteed a set percentage of funding," said CSU spokeswoman Clara Potes-Fellow.

The initiative would also decrease community college student fees to \$15 per unit from the current \$20 per unit and prohibit the Legislature from increasing fees on the state's 1.5 million community college students by more than the change in per capita personal income. The colleges would lose about \$71 million in annual revenue from the cut in fees, but that amount would be more than made up by the added state funding.

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