



2016-02

Pardon the Silence

January 13, 2016

By Jonathan Lightman

It's good to see the response to the [initial blog](#). In less than a week, we have already received interest from faculty members and other system stakeholders to contribute to this effort. I'm hoping over time that the robust discussion of FACCC's blog posts will inspire greater advocacy and participation throughout our system.

In the meantime, there's (sadly) little enthusiasm for the Governors' proposed [2016-17 budget](#). Lest anyone from the Administration or Legislature be reading this, please do not confuse the limited applause with lack of appreciation. We are all deeply grateful for the continuing commitment to our community college system and look forward to working with policymakers throughout this budget cycle on ways to improve the proposal.

That being said, let's take a look at what's included and excluded in the proposal. Growth and COLA are both included—allowing our system to keep pace with ongoing costs—although neither at amount to celebrate (especially the 0.47% COLA, reflecting low inflation on a national level). The Workforce Task Force is funded at \$200 million (perhaps the big winner in the budget proposal, although we still await the upcoming trailer bill to tell us what it all means) with another ongoing \$48 million for SB 1070 Economic and Workforce Development projects.

Deferred maintenance and mandates are also big additions as one-time expenses. There are a few other proposals, including basic skills, innovation awards, zero-cost textbooks, and select categorical program COLAs.

What didn't make it into the budget tells a larger story: full-time faculty, part-time faculty support, restoration of CalWORKs, additional base support to help with ongoing STRS and PERS increases, and additional student financial aid. Needless to say, these are not only important, but central to our ability to serve students. In case anyone was wondering, neither Student Success nor Equity was slated for increase.

We knew going into this budget discussion that our proposed augmentation would be less than 2015-16 (current year budget). That has everything to do with the complex Test 1, Test 2, Test 3 formulations of Proposition 98 (we went from Test 1 to Test 3) and the upcoming loss of Proposition 30 sales tax revenue. Nonetheless, even within this more limited framework, aside from those in CTE (who rightfully deserve predictable ongoing state funding—read, not grants) the enthusiasm is generated more from the excluded than the included items.

Our immediate task is reconciling our budget priorities with Governor Brown's overall goals for community colleges. We know from prior experience how monumental a mistake it was for our system to advance a Student Success initiative that did not prioritize full-time faculty, part-time faculty support, counselors, and student services. We can't repeat this type of mistake in our current effort to improve workforce education.

Let's remember that not too long ago, we were looking to pare 500,000 students from our system and some of our institutions were actually contemplated for closure. At that time, we likened any increase in funding to a miracle from heaven (it's important to keep that in perspective). Today's discussions may be less earth shattering, but no less important.

Our challenge is to effectively tell our story (early and often) and not lose sight of our goals. We gain nothing from silence and even less from ingratitude. Let's get to work.

Jonathan Lightman is Executive Director of FACCC.

Follow FACCC's electronic, social, and print media for information on the budget and ways to get involved. Contact Communications Director [Austin Webster](#) to contribute a future blog.