

# Maricopa Community Colleges board: 2 new members, same 4-3 split

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talks about his win	after re- election defeat	Republican Party event	he's long sher
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*New board, with 4-3 split seemingly intact, will oversee potential 'transformation' of system that serves 120,000 students*



(Photo: David Kadlubowski/The Republic)

Two new members in January will join the [Maricopa Community Colleges governing board \(/story/news/politics/elections/2016/11/03/five-candidates-vie-2-seats-divided-maricopa-community-colleges-board/93125648/\)](#), which apparently will still have deep ideological fissures as it nears key funding decisions.

Linda Thor, former president of Rio Salado College, ousted incumbent John Heep for one of the district's two at-large seats, which are elected countywide.

Laurin Hendrix, a Realtor and former state lawmaker, narrowly edged Mesa Vice Mayor Dennis Kavanaugh for the District 1 seat, which covers the East Valley.

Incumbents Alfredo Gutierrez, the board's president, and Dana Saar ran unopposed this election. The three remaining seats on the seven-person board were not up for re-election.

That leaves the board's philosophical makeup largely unchanged.

"I don't see any change in the composition of the board," said Jean McGrath, part of the conservative bloc on the board.



Linda Thor, former president of Rio Salado College, ousted incumbent John Heep for one of the district's two at-large seats, which are elected countywide. (Photo: Special for The Republic)

"I think (Linda) Thor, who is replacing John Heep, is the ideological same as Doyle Burke, who's leaving. And I think Laurin Hendrix, who's replacing Doyle Burke's seat, is the same as John Heep's philosophical bent. I don't see any difference. It's still going to be a 4-3 majority with the progressives in charge."

The district is readying a push this upcoming legislative session to recover some of its state funding, but the board is expected to discuss – as it routinely has in recent years – the prospects of raising either tuition or property taxes to deal with the budget cuts.

The board also will decide at an upcoming meeting whether to adopt a resolution that would give the chancellor authority to restructure the entire community college system.

That would likely include personnel adjustments such as "redeployment of staff, reductions in force, early retirement offerings or other voluntary separation options" and "updates to employee manuals to achieve the successful implementation of change," according to a draft of the "transformation" resolution.

**ELECTION RESULTS:** [Vote tallies from top Arizona races, including Maricopa County \(http://results.azcentral.com/\)](http://results.azcentral.com/)

## 'Gratified' by vote

Thor won her seat overwhelmingly by a 2-1 ratio.

She touted her experience as a community college administrator for more than 40 years and said she would bring a "unique" perspective to the governing board as she's worked from both sides of the relationship.

"I'm really gratified that so many people persevered down to the bottom of the ballot to vote for the community college board," Thor said.

"That tells me that a growing number of people recognize not only what an asset these colleges are, but what a critical election this was for the community college district."

Hendrix, who did not participate in any of the candidate forums leading up to the election, did not respond to a request for comment.

## Still divided?

Gutierrez said leading up to the election that the current board was "deeply divided" and that it is at "an existential moment in the life in the colleges."

The Maricopa County Community College District is one of the largest community college systems in the nation with 120,000 students and 10 campuses spread across the Valley.

But the system has been affected by enrollment declines with the trajectory seemingly trending downward. The colleges no longer receive any state funding.

This has led to tuition rises three times since 2012 to \$86 per credit hour and gradual rises in local property taxes – the system's two main sources of funding.

The low enrollment numbers at one point this year threatened the closure of Mesa Community College's Red Mountain Campus.

Some of the members on the board's conservative bloc, most of whom won their seats in 2014, criticized the hiring process of the chancellor, Maria Harper-Marinick, earlier this year.

Gutierrez said it remains to be seen how the new board will mesh compared with the current one, but expects there's "going to be some tough decisions because of funding cutback and declining enrollment" surrounding the adoption of the system's 2017-18 budget.



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- Valley elections: [Sheriff \(http://www.azcentral.com/stc/county-sheriff-joe-arpaio-paul-penzone-election-results/93169028/\)](http://www.azcentral.com/stc/county-sheriff-joe-arpaio-paul-penzone-election-results/93169028/) | [Phoenix council \(http://www.azcentral.com/stc/\)](http://www.azcentral.com/stc/)

Thor said "we're anticipating lots of 4-3 votes on things," but added she hopes to help find "some common ground in the two viewpoints that are currently represented on the board."

As the board begins to ramp up funding discussions, McGrath said the board should work to eliminate wasteful spending and reduce property taxes.

"I wish that they would pay more attention to the needs of the taxpayers," McGrath said.

"I don't know when they're going to start remembering that the taxpayers are paying for three-fourths of this and reduce some of the spending."

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