

No tuition hike after Maricopa colleges' funding eliminated



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(Photo: Photo by: Mary Beth Faller/The Republic)

The Maricopa County Community College District will not raise tuition and property taxes, even though a new state budget proposal eliminates all state funding for the district's 10 schools. But hiring more full-time faculty may be put on hold.

On Wednesday, Gov. Doug Ducey and Republican legislative leaders reached a budget deal that would eliminate the \$4 million in 2015-16 funding to the district that Ducey had originally proposed in January. The proposed state budget also would eliminate funding to the community colleges in Pima and Pinal counties, for a total cut of \$19 million.

This year, MCCCCD received about \$8.8 million from the state, less than 1 percent of the district's total revenue.

The cut was a surprise, according to Debra Thompson, vice chancellor for business services for the district, which has schools throughout the Phoenix metro area.

"We had some initiatives we wanted to move forward with, and we'll have to think about our ability to move forward on those," she said Thursday.

Thompson said MCCCCD will still hold the line on tuition and property taxes for 2015-16. Both were increased this year. The governing board voted in February to keep the \$84-per-credit tuition rate for next year. The board will vote on the tax rate in May.

Thompson mentioned the "student success initiative" as a possible target for cuts. With that program, the district is trying to increase the retention and graduation rates by hiring more full-time faculty, among other moves. But final decisions on the budget, including programs, are weeks away, she said.

The removal of state aid may be permanent, according to a budget bill introduced Wednesday night. House Bill 2679 would make all community colleges in counties of more than 350,000 ineligible for state funding.

Smaller community-college districts, such as Coconino in Flagstaff, still would get state funds.

The impact would be widespread. About one out of 18 Arizona residents attends a community college at some point during a year, according to a new study on the community colleges' economic impact.

The Pima Community College District received \$6.1 million in state funding this year, and Ducey's original budget proposed \$3 million for next year.

Lee Lambert, Pima's chancellor, said in a statement that he is "extremely disappointed."

"These proposed cuts to our funding will do irreparable damage to PCC in the near term, especially at a time when operational costs are rising, and the overall impact of such a precipitous reduction is impossible to calculate," he said in the statement released Thursday afternoon.

He did not say whether the cuts would lead to tuition or tax increases.

Daniel Scarpinato, Ducey's spokesman, said Thursday that the budget proposal "protects taxpayers."

"We can't spend money we don't have, and the governor is committed to protecting taxpayers by balancing the budget," Scarpinato said. "This is a values-based budget that puts the state on a stable fiscal path."

Thompson said she hopes the Legislature will reconsider.

"We believe a continued investment by the state will be helpful to our district to support our students. And as our students move into the work world, there is an impact," she said, referring to a report released Thursday that found that the MCCCCD colleges contributed \$7.3 billion to the state's economy last year.

The \$7.3 billion was the accumulated contribution of former students employed in the regional workforce in 2013-14, according to the report, which was released by the Arizona Community College Coordinating Council, a non-profit group.

The report, conducted by Economic Modeling Specialists International, said the state's two-year colleges contribute about \$14.5 billion total to the state's economy — with half of that coming from MCCCDC colleges.

The report also found that:

- For every dollar contributed by taxpayers to MCCCDC, \$4 in benefits is returned to taxpayers.
- For every dollar that a student spends on an MCCCDC education, that student gets back \$4.20 in higher future income.
- Students who moved here to attend community college in Maricopa County added about \$240.6 million in revenue during the 2013-14 fiscal year.

Find the report, "Demonstrating the Economic Value of Arizona Community Colleges," at <https://asa.maricopa.edu/departments/institutional-effectiveness/reports/maricopa-economic-impact-study> (<https://asa.maricopa.edu/departments/institutional-effectiveness/reports/maricopa-economic-impact-study>)

Five ways community college pays off

The Maricopa County Community College District recently released a report about the economic impact of its students.

The report, called "Demonstrating the Economic Value of Arizona Community Colleges," can be found here: <https://asa.maricopa.edu/departments/institutional-effectiveness/reports/maricopa-economic-impact-study> (<https://asa.maricopa.edu/departments/institutional-effectiveness/reports/maricopa-economic-impact-study>)

Here are five ways that students from the 2013-14 fiscal year paid off personally and for the community, according to the report:

- On average, Maricopa's students will receive a cumulative \$4.20 in higher future income for every \$1 they invested in their education.
- Average annual incomes increase as students attain higher levels of education. On average, those who complete an associate's degree in Maricopa County will earn \$45,300 at the midpoint of their careers — \$10,400 more than someone with a high school diploma.
- For every \$1 of public money spent on the Maricopa Community Colleges, taxpayers receive a cumulative return of \$4 over the course of students' working lives in the form of higher tax receipts and public-sector savings.
- Students enjoy better employment opportunities as a result of their education, making them less likely to require income assistance and less likely to commit crimes. These effects translate to a present value of \$1.5 million in unemployment-related savings and \$90.5 million in law-enforcement savings to society as a whole.
- The Maricopa Community Colleges and its students added \$7.3 billion in income to the county economy, approximately equal to 3.8 percent of the gross regional product.

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