

# Wanted: A new community college model for Arizona

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*Our View: Maricopa Community Colleges wisely takes a tuition increase off the table. But now how will it sustain itself?*



(Photo: Patrick Breen/The Republic)

Maricopa Community Colleges leaders made a wise decision this week. Skipping the normal formalities of four months of discussion and votes, they swept any consideration of tuition or property-tax increases off the table ([/story/news/local/phoenix/2015/01/27/maricopa-community-colleges-consider-whether-hike-tuition/22445013/](http://story/news/local/phoenix/2015/01/27/maricopa-community-colleges-consider-whether-hike-tuition/22445013/)).

It was smart for a number of reasons.

Like their colleagues at Arizona's four-year colleges, the Maricopa County Community College District increased tuition multiple times through the Great Recession to make up for cuts in state support. The district also has raised the property tax, an option not available to the four-year colleges.

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Gov. Doug Ducey proposes cutting higher-education spending again. The university presidents have all said they won't raise tuition this time, but they will seek a new business model and relationship with the state. It was the proper response.

Community college leaders hadn't committed. But on Tuesday night, Maricopa County district administrators told their elected board they will recommend no increase in tuition or taxes. State support now amounts to less than 1 percent of the budget, so another cut is little more than a rounding error.

Taking the same stance as the universities was the proper thing to do. Shifting more responsibility to students and taxpayers is tempting a backlash.



Rufus Gasper (Photo: handout)

It was also the political thing to do. Three new members of the board campaigned on a platform of reducing tuition. No good would come from testing their resolve this early.

But as with the universities, the Legislature needs to consider redefining the state's relation with community colleges to match Arizona's reduced support. Chancellor Rufus Gasper told the board the colleges should be allowed to become more "entrepreneurial."

That takes in a lot of territory, but it's a discussion worth having. The ideal of state-supported higher education is becoming a distant memory. Tuition increases have been stretched to the maximum. If state leaders must set higher education adrift, they should at least provide a paddle.

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