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What Obama's community college proposal could mean for Arizona

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PHOENIX -- We don't know yet how President Barack Obama plans to pay for his \$60 billion plan to offer up two years of free community college, but we do know that he wants the states to pick up 25 percent of the tab.

The Maricopa County Community College District says its preliminary figures show

that for its community colleges alone, it would cost the state another \$30 million a year.

As Obama was in Tennessee announcing his plan to make community college free, Kelley Mathison was signing up to start school at Mesa Community College. She had to sell some of her belongings to be able to afford her first classes in 10 years, all so she can become a therapist and try to get her family off economic assistance.

"This is going to give me a new life," Mathison said. "This is going to give me hope for the future."

The president wants to offer two years of free community college for students like Mathison going at least half time with a 2.5 GPA, saving them about \$3,800 a year.

The president told the crowds in Knoxville, "Every American, whether they're young or just young at heart, should be able to earn the skills and education necessary to compete and win."

Although most folks agree college is too expensive, not everyone thinks community college is where the assistance should go.

Back at Mesa Community College, nursing student Laura Petrie says the plan may not be putting the money in the right place.

Petrie said, "3,800 in the scheme of a degree is really not a lot. I would say instead of making community college free, help us at the bachelor's level to encourage us to finish school."

The president has yet to say how he plans to pay for the \$60 billion proposal which would cost the state another \$30 million a year for Maricopa Community Colleges alone.

Chancellor Rufus Glasper said, "We have approximately 60,000 students per semester that, today, would meet that criteria."

But Mathison said with college being a lifeline to success, that's where the priorities should be.

"It's costing the people more money to pay for me to be on AHCCCS, rather for me to have an education and be able to work and pay for it myself and be proud," she said.