

California community colleges push for financial aid reform in budget

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SEPTEMBER 18, 2019 **MICHAEL BURKE**

The California Community Colleges Board of Governors on Tuesday voted to ask for about \$780 million in additional state dollars for the 2020-21 budget year, which would be a 7.5 percent increase over its [current budget](#) of about \$10.3 billion.

[The request](#) includes more than \$250 million for financial aid reform and about \$426 million in extra spending through Proposition 98, which sets the minimum amount of California's budget that must be spent on K-12 schools and community colleges.

The request serves as the beginning of negotiations between the California community college system and the state, which will finalize its 2020-21 budget in June.

Christian Osmeña, vice chancellor for finance and facilities planning, said Tuesday at the meeting that the budget requests are meant to advance the "Vision for Success," Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley's roadmap to improve the system's ability to prepare students for further education or work.

Osmeña also said the community college system's needs "remain significant," noting that the system receives less in per-student spending than the University of California and California State University systems.

"We serve more students generally," he said. "We have more colleges and campuses. We serve more low-income students and more students of color. I think we have a lot of work to do around how we talk to legislators and the administration about the needs of our system."

The system's request for about \$250 million for [financial aid](#) reform reflects the first-year cost of [SB 291](#), proposed legislation that aims to [create](#) debt-free college for students. The bill would create the California Community College Student Financial Aid Program, giving aid to community [college](#)

[students](#) to cover the total cost of attending college, including living costs, books, transportation and other non-tuition costs.

Proponents of the bill say that it is necessary because, for many students, the total cost of attending a community college far exceeds the cost of tuition.

The California community college system [earlier this year backed the bill](#).

The legislation stalled in the Assembly and is now a two-year bill, but the Board of Governors is still advocating for the changes proposed in the bill. The author of the legislation, Senator Connie Leyva, D-Chino, has said she will work with Assemblyman Jose Medina, D-Riverside, to integrate SB 291 with Medina's [AB 1314](#), which would reform Cal Grant programs and eliminate eligibility barriers to receiving Cal Grants.

"We know that oftentimes the biggest barrier to students is not being able to pay for that full cost of attendance," Osmeña said Tuesday.

The system's budget request also includes an additional \$297 million, through Proposition 98, for the Student Centered [Funding](#) Formula, the new method for supporting the system's colleges that gives more money to schools with higher numbers of low-income students and to colleges with better graduation and transfer rates.

Also included in the request is \$100 million to support the system's pension costs and about \$76 million for the implementation of recommendations brought forth by the Vision for Success Diversity, [Equity](#) and Inclusion Task Force, which recommended a number of budget proposals, including \$40 million for full-time faculty hiring, \$15 million to create a fellowship program to increase the hiring of diverse faculty and \$20 million to improve equal employment opportunity (EEO) practices.

Other proposals in the budget request were \$10 million to make textbooks more affordable, \$15 million for faculty and staff professional development, an extra \$10 million for programs that support part-time faculty, \$10 million to support formerly incarcerated students and a \$20 million increase for the Student Equity and Achievement Program, which finances academic programs that support students with the greatest needs, such as foster youth, students with disabilities and low-income students.