

Bredt: In favor of Proposition 92

Contributed by Mark Bredt
Sunday, 13 January 2008

I am compelled to speak up in favor of Proposition 92.

For several years state legislators have rattled their swords regarding the governance of community colleges – the proposal has been to develop a state board to oversee the community college system eliminating local control of the individual districts. The founding premise of the COMMUNITY college system is to provide local supervision of the college system and responsiveness to the needs and ambitions of the community that supports it. The community college is charged with providing educational support and assistance in partnership with community government and local business. Rural California colleges would suffer most under a centralized state governance. Proposition 92 guarantees a stable system of independent college districts.

The California Community College system is under funded, the current apportionment of funds, set by Proposition 98 dictates that 11 percent of education funding be directed to community colleges and 89 percent be directed to the K-12 system. Historically the legislature has been very cavalier in suspending this agreement – over the past 10 years funding for community colleges is in arrears over \$4 billion. Proposition 92 separates the Community College system from the K-12 system and sets minimum levels of state funding based on COMMUNITY COLLEGE growth instead of being indexed as a percentage of K-12 population. California ranks 45 out of 49 states in support per full-time student revenue.

In the 2003-2004 budget legislators doubled student enrollment fees for community colleges as a source of revenue for state budget deficits. Funding to community colleges was also decreased by a similar amount. Student enrollment dropped by more than 300,000 students statewide. Our college district fared better than most due to effective management and planning but, we were forced to layoff faculty and staff and cut programs to balance our budget. While students paid twice as much to attend college we were forced to provide fewer classes, less supportive services, fewer opportunities. Proposition 92 will stabilize funding, secure student access, and allow our local governing board to be proactive in planning programs that support our community needs. That is far better than the current process of holding our breath, each year, wondering if we're going to receive funding.

A healthy community college system helps to grow California's middle class and bolsters the state's economy, offering every California resident an opportunity to attend college. California community colleges provide an education for 2.5 million students compared to the 180,000 students in the University of California system and 380,000 students attending California State Universities.

California's community colleges partners with labor to provide 160 apprenticeship programs – 250,000 apprentices on 35 campuses. Forty colleges, including the Yuba Community College District, provide Police Officers Standards and Training (POST) academies. Another 64 colleges offer fire technology programs to train our firefighters. Nearly three quarters of registered nurses in California received training through their community colleges.

A healthy California Community College system supports diversity and offers higher education to students who might otherwise be unable to afford college. There are 463,000 Latino students, 118,000 African-American students, and more than 250,000 students of other minorities attending community colleges. This represents a higher minority population than the UC and CSU systems combined.

Proposition 92 lowers the current fees to attend a community college to \$15 per unit, placing a college education in the reach of every Californian. It limits increases in student fees to cost of living adjustments. It provides stable funding indexed to student enrollment. The California Postsecondary Education Commission is projecting that there will be 375,000 to 525,000 additional applicants to the community college system over the next three years. We need to be funded and prepared for this surge.

Vote YES on Proposition 92.

Mark Bredt is District 4 (Lake County) Representative on the Yuba Community College District Board of Trustees. He lives in Clearlake Park.

{mos_sb_discuss:4}