



The Web Site of The Sacramento Bee

This story is taken from [Sacbee](#) / [Politics](#).

New initiative on Prop. 98

Community colleges qualify ballot measure to guarantee fund level.

By **Judy Lin - Bee Capitol Bureau**

Published 12:00 am PDT Thursday, April 26, 2007

A coalition of community colleges and teachers is asking California voters to change how the state calculates Proposition 98 funding so they can get what they say is their fair share of education dollars.

The measure also proposes to lower community college fees to \$15 per unit from the current \$20 rate. Future increases would have to be tied to cost-of-living adjustments and approved by the Legislature.

The secretary of state's office on Wednesday verified enough signatures to place the California Community College Initiative on the February 2008 statewide ballot after an initial random sampling count had failed to qualify the measure.

While the initiative has no formal opponents yet, taxpayer groups say they are concerned about dedicating an estimated \$700 million of general fund money over the next three years to one cause when the state's financial outlook isn't so bright.

"Obviously with the May (budget) revise coming out shortly, we predict it will show a grim state of affairs for California's finances," said Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association. "They might have a tough time convincing voters to pay for a larger slice through the general fund."

The initiative, which is being backed by the California Federation of Teachers and the Community Colleges League of California, among others, establishes a separate funding guarantee for the state's 109 community colleges under Proposition 98 -- the state law that sets minimum education spending for K-12 and community colleges.

Currently, Proposition 98 funding is tied only to the enrollment changes in K-12. Advocates of the measure say that's caused the two-year community colleges to lose out. Last year, K-12 enrollment remained flat while community colleges saw a 3 percent gain.

Proponents say the state would be better off calculating the community colleges' share of Proposition 98 funding to fluctuations in the college-age population.

"Community colleges are having to provide education with less money," said Dennis Smith, secretary-treasurer of the California Federation of Teachers. "What this will do is provide stable funding to the system."

If approved by voters, the ballot measure would also make classes more affordable and grant the community college system more autonomy.

Meanwhile, the system would be treated equally like its public higher education counterparts -- the University of California and California State University systems -- under the state constitution.

"It's basically incorporating the status quo into the constitution," said Scott Lay, president and chief executive officer of the Community College League of California. "Chancellors would have the authority to hire vice chancellors who are now political appointees."

The California Community College System serves 2.5 million students annually and comprises 109 campuses operated by 72 districts that are governed by locally elected boards of trustees. In 2005-06, roughly 94,000 students transferred to other colleges, a majority of them to the California State University system.

The Legislative Analyst's Office projects that the measure would increase state education spending by \$135 million in the first year, \$275 million in the second and \$470 million in the third.

Reducing the fee to \$15 per unit would result in a \$71 million loss in revenues for community colleges annually, the analyst's office estimated.

Proponents, who plan to wage a low-budget campaign in the \$2 million range, are hoping for little opposition. Supporters of the initiative campaign so far have spent \$1.36 million on signature-gathering in 2006.

"We are a bargain," Smith said. "I think employers understand that. We provide them with trained workers. There's no increase in taxes and the funding is modest when you look at the whole budget."

Go to: [Sacbee](#) / [Back to story](#)

This article is protected by copyright and should not be printed or distributed for anything except personal use.
The Sacramento Bee, 2100 Q St., P.O. Box 15779, Sacramento, CA 95852
Phone: (916) 321-1000

[Copyright](#) © [The Sacramento Bee](#)