

El Camino College students stage walkout, rally over cuts

The Daily Breeze

By Rob Kuznia Staff Writer

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A group of El Camino College students walked out of classes Thursday to protest cuts to counselor hours and general college cutbacks. Students march around campus. (Robert Casillas / Staff Photographer)

A group of about 70 students on Thursday staged a noisy protest at El Camino College to decry, among other things, cuts to course offerings and the college board's recent reduction of counselors' work year.

The rally, organized by a group calling itself "Occupy El Camino," comes in the wake of a Nov. 28 decision by the board of trustees at the Torrance-area campus to impose a contract on the faculty union, effectively putting a unilateral end to nine months of deadlocked bargaining.

It was an especially bitter battle that infuriated the union, because it essentially forced an agreement over faculty's objections.

Chanting slogans such as "No more cuts without a fight!" the students marched across campus and crowded the outdoor entry to the administration building. Much of their rhetoric was reminiscent of the slogans and catchphrases popularized by the Occupy Wall Street movement, with the protesters at El Camino accusing top administrators of pocketing big raises at the expense of the "99 percent."

"Tom Fallo and your administration, we know what you're up to," Robert DeWitz, the organizer of the rally, shouted into a bullhorn at the administration building, referring to El Camino's president. "No longer will you continue to operate in the shadows."

But college officials said the protesters were repeating misleading statistics fed to them by the faculty union. They added that many of the students at Thursday's rally received extra credit from instructors for attending.

Whatever the case, the counselor issue is particularly sensitive to many students, who say they've been forced to endure long lines just to make appointments.

"It's ridiculous - you have to wait in long lines for over an hour," said student Brooke Daos, while watching the protesters from the sidelines.

The student protesters believe that the recent decision to decrease counselors' work year from 12 months to 10 months will worsen the wait.

"A lot of students are just completely turned away," DeWitz said. "This is affecting our transfer rate" to four-year colleges.

While college officials don't deny the lines have been long, they disagree that the reduction of the counselors' work year will exacerbate the situation.

For instance, they say that while the counselors' work year - which will be reduced gradually over two years - will indeed decrease from 12 months to 11 months starting in July, the lost month is a month of paid vacation. Put another way: The counselors will work 198 days this year; next year they'll work 197.

"There is no difference," said Ann Garten, spokesperson for the college.

The competing interpretations exemplify the difficulty of ferreting out the truth in the hyperbolic environment that can surround heated contract talks, as well as the differing ways in which statistics can be presented.

Students and faculty say President Fallo's salary has increased 34 percent in four years, to nearly \$289,000. Administrators counter that all the college's employees received raises for three consecutive years ending in 2007-08, and that Fallo actually declined a proposed \$36,000 pay hike in 2009. They add that 70 percent of employees earning six figures at El Camino are faculty members.

Counselors say the counselor-to-student ratio on campus is a woefully low 1 to 2,300; administrators say it is more like 1 to 950. Students and faculty say the college is sitting on a \$23 million reserve during a time of crisis; college officials say they are deficit-spending prudently, by \$7 million a year.

Amid the noise are some solid certainties.

For one, the students are paying more: this fall, tuition rose from \$26 a unit to \$36.

Also, due to severe cuts to the entire California network of community colleges, classes are tougher to get into.

Student John McNabb, a veteran who is majoring in photography, said the classes he needs are often full, forcing him and others to stand in the back of the room on the first day in hopes that other students will fail to show up, thereby relinquishing their seats.

"I still show up anyway just to get into the class because, even with priority registration (for being a veteran), classes fill up so fast," he said, speaking loudly over the shouts of the nearby protesters. "There are not enough classes to go around."

The number of students at El Camino has dropped in five years to 24,000 from about 30,000, but that's only because state budget cuts have forced the campus to reduce sections. Meanwhile, demand has skyrocketed: the waiting list during that time went from zero to a record-high 31,000 names this fall. (The number is not a reflection of how many students are on the list, because one person can be wait-listed in multiple classes.)

It's also indisputable that counselors will take a pay cut.

Counselor Chris Jeffries said the starting salary for the position will decline from \$77,260 to \$59,426.

"It's two months' less salary," she said. "For most new counselors, it's definitely going to hurt."

Although administrators maintain that cutting the counselors' work year won't harm students in 2012-13, they are less certain about how students will be affected in 2013-14. That year, the counselors' work year will decrease from 11 months to 10. Along with that will fall their number of workdays, from 197 to 175.

Said Jeffries: "If they think the lines are long now, they are going to be doubled."

But administrators say that, for years, the contract has required counselors to spend 26 of their 40 weekly work hours with students. Administrators would like to increase the number of student hours.

"They are getting paid for a 40-hour workweek, and only have to spend 26 of those with students," said the college district's bargaining attorney, Spencer Covert. "Other schools are typically around 30 and 32."

One student watching the protest from afar expressed mixed emotions Thursday.

"I respect that these people are trying, I really do, but I just think it's not going to help," said Kaylen Rozier.



Protesting students march with signs at El Camino College after walking out of classes on Thursday to protest cuts to counselor hours and general college cutbacks. (Robert Casillas / Staff Photographer)

Occupy Someone Else

Inside Higher Ed

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By Kevin Kiley

Their voices have gone hoarse. They've broken windows and clashed with police officers. They've faced pepper spray and attracted national news attention. The story is the same across the country – students, upset about tuition hikes, are protesting.

And while the images may last, the message has not had much impact on the what colleges are charging. At California State University at Long Beach, where hundreds of students joined by union members engaged in a raucous protest that disrupted a meeting of the California State University Board of Trustees, the trustees still approved a 9 percent tuition increase for the system.

In New York, where City University of New York students were joined by protesters from Occupy Wall Street and other universities on a national day of higher education protest, the university's board still voted to increase tuition \$300 a year through 2015.

In a blame game between lawmakers and university leaders about who is responsible for the rising cost of higher education, students have pointed fingers at administrators. But when state lawmakers cut higher education budgets, as many have for the past three years, public university presidents say they have few tools to bring the spending side of the balance sheet in line with revenues in time to pay the bills. While a president's power might look vast to people on campus, administrators tend to view their short-term budget options as a dichotomy: cuts (especially of student and academic services and adjunct faculty jobs), or raising tuition.

And most university administrators believe that raising tuition is the better option for students, since the tradeoff, they say, is deep cuts to essential services, which they believe would harm the education their institutions offer. Cutting programs, faculty members, and services currently on the chopping block would disproportionately affect low-income and first-generation students while tuition hikes, as counterintuitive as it might seem, could place a larger burden on wealthy students – the so-called “one percent” that protesters target – if aid policies are constructed properly.

Higher education leaders say they understand students' frustration, but suggest that students may be arguing the wrong points to the wrong people. If students want to keep tuition low, maintain or improve access, and keep support programs in place, administrators say, they might have more success targeting lawmakers, who have more options regarding how to reconcile budgets and more money to play with, and who are sometimes more responsive to the public. For example, if four California Republican lawmakers had adopted Governor Jerry Brown's budget, which included tax hikes, the

state's university systems would likely have been spared looming cuts of \$100 million each.

“While there needs to be accountability on the part of everyone to keep tuition increases reasonable, clearly I think that students’ focus and blame is over-oriented toward university administration as opposed to states,” said Dan Hurley, director of state relations and policy analysis for the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

"I understand why people are frustrated, but a lot of this energy is misplaced," said Robert Turnage, assistant chancellor for budget at the California State University system, in an interview with The Los Angeles Times. "It needs to be directed at people who have decision-making power over taxes."

No Other Options?

Coping with cuts of the magnitude of those of the past three years has not been an easy undertaking. According to the annual Grapevine report by the Illinois State University’s Center for the Study of Education Policy and the State Higher Education Executive Officers, states spent about \$4 billion less on higher education in 2011 than they did in 2008, while enrollments increased in most states.

In a survey of college presidents conducted by Inside Higher Ed earlier this year, public college and university presidents overwhelmingly listed budget shortfalls and changes in state support as the two most pressing issues facing their institutions. “We’re in territory that we haven’t been in in quite some time,” said Erik Fallis, a spokesman for the California State University system chancellor’s office. “We have not been funded at this level any time in last decade. You have to go back past 1998-99 to find years where we were funded at current level, and we’re now serving 70,000 more students.”

Student protesters, on the other hand, don't necessarily buy that it's the legislature's fault that tuition has to go up. While they don't absolve lawmakers of responsibility, they say their anger about the hikes is the result of years of poor decisions about who manages the university and what they have done with tuition revenue in the past. "This is a narrative that’s been constructed of having the legislature be the main ones responsible for these cuts," said Artem Raskin, a junior political science major at the University of California at Davis, who has been involved in the Occupy Davis protests. "But that hasn’t been the main reason why we’ve seen tuition go up. The main reason is that even before 2009 the regents and the administration have used students' tuition not as a way to benefit students at the university."

Since most states finalize annual budgets in July, colleges and universities do not have a significant amount of time to adapt to cuts, particularly if they do not know ahead of time what those cuts will total. That problem was even worse in 2009 and 2010, when many legislatures missed deadlines for finalizing budgets and did not complete appropriations until the fall, after many colleges and universities were already in session.

Despite their institutions having large operating budgets and diverse revenue streams, university administrators say they do not have many ways to quickly fill budget gaps when state funding disappears. Revenues from research grants, corporate contracts, and auxiliary operations such as dining and housing are earmarked under statute for certain purposes that rarely include undergraduate education. Endowments, which have been targeted by many protesters (and on Thursday by a powerful U.S. senator), are also often restricted. University administrators are reluctant to dip into endowments, as they are designed to support the institution in perpetuity, not cover short-term losses.

Many of the protests that took place over the past few years have focused on university administrators, whose six- and seven-figure presidential salaries have drawn the ire of several groups. But administrative salaries only represent a small fraction of the university's overall budget, and at most public universities the amount of state funding cut exceeds salaries by several orders of magnitude.

At the same time that students are protesting tuition hikes, they have also reproached universities that have tried to be too frugal (in some areas). Students at the University of California at San Diego protested in a closed library until administrators agreed to extend library hours, including keeping the main library open 24/7 during finals.

Administrative services and unwieldy university bureaucracy have also been targeted by protesters and administrators hoping to close budget gaps. But cutting administrative services, while politically palatable, doesn't tend to do the trick. When Cornell University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the University of California at Berkeley all hired Bain and Company, a management consulting firm that commonly works with Fortune 500 companies, to look at where administrative savings could be realized, the savings, while significant, didn't equal appropriations cuts. The changes at Berkeley are expected to save about \$75 million a year – a substantial amount of money, until it's put in the context of the university's \$1.8 billion annual budget.

And implementing such cost-savings initiatives takes time, which institutions don't have when states cut appropriations. Colleges and universities typically have a year to bring their budgets in line, so deep structural change is often infeasible, administrators say. Though proposed savings at UNC-Chapel Hill, UC-Berkeley, and Cornell were identified in 2009, only about half the savings have been realized to date. The State University of New York system is attempting to generate savings by merging administrations at some of its campuses. The system would then reallocate that money to instruction. But that undertaking is still being discussed, and major changes are not scheduled to be put in place for several years.

For two years, universities tried to reconcile budgets by furloughing faculty members, cutting administrative expenses, and reducing expenditures on travel and books and journal purchases. The survey of presidents found that most public institutions targeted specific academic and administrative departments for cuts to cope with funding shortfalls. But most of the easy-to-implement efficiency measures have been tapped out over that time.

The refrain is the same at governing board meetings across the country: there's nothing left to cut without causing significant harm to parts of the university, harm that could have long-term ramifications. "Our options are either cut access severely to bring the university in line with what the state is willing to fund or we sacrifice quality," Fallis said. "And the spiral of sacrificing quality is a perpetuating cycle. If we begin to sacrifice quality, you have a hard time attracting faculty, who don't want to teach at an institution with a reputation problem. It makes the degrees that alumni have have less weight."

A survey of college and university business officers, also conducted by Inside Higher Ed this year, found that less than a quarter of CFOs at public doctoral and master's universities, and about 40 percent of finance officers at four-year and community colleges, say their institutions can "make additional and significant budget cuts without hurting quality."

If it wants to continue making cuts, a university has to target programs and expenditures that be cut quickly and without much hassle. For many institutions, this means cutting adjunct faculty members, who work on short-term contracts and don't have tenure protection.

If CUNY did not vote to raise fees this year, said Michael Arena, a spokesman for the system, said, "Adjunct faculty in particular would have been in jeopardy. Especially given the huge enrollment increases CUNY has experienced over the past 10 years, adjunct faculty are playing a vital role at the university."

Cutting adjuncts either results in tenured faculty members teaching more classes or, more likely, larger classes or fewer sections.

Other programs that can be cut include student and academic support services, such as tutoring centers, academic advising, and counseling services, which benefit underprepared students, many of whom come from low-income backgrounds.

Quality vs. Access

The problem with cutting adjunct faculty members and support services is that doing so will lead to a decline in academic quality, administrators argue. If faculty members at research universities are pushed to spend more time working in the classroom, they have less time to conduct research, which could damage the university's reputation in the long run. If class sizes increase, many argue that the quality of instruction will go down.

Administrators at colleges and universities that have increased tuition over the past three years argue that students, even those who have to pay higher tuition, are better off in the long run paying the extra money than seeing services cut. "One can make a strong argument that access and affordability without quality is meaningless," Fallis said.

Over the past few years, the California State University's system approach has been to make cuts to administration, restrict enrollment, and raise tuition by significant percentages each year. In 2007, the university charged \$2,772 in annual tuition and fees for in-state students. Next year it will charge in-state students slightly less than \$6,000.

“If we were to just open the doors to the university system and not raise tuition whatsoever, given the draconian cuts in state support, students would be getting an education of lesser quality,” Fallis said. “They would not have access to opportunities in research or the equipment they need to know in their future careers. There’s a perception that it’s already harder to find classes. Had CSU not taken action on fees, cuts would be even more extreme than they are.”

While many administrators say that, by this point there is no room left to cut without damaging the academic quality of their institutions, 54 percent of respondents to a 2010 survey by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and Public Agenda said “colleges could spend less and still maintain a high quality of education.” Administrators also hold that greatly increasing the size of the student body would diminish quality, while six in ten survey respondents said “colleges could take a lot more students without lowering quality or raising prices.”

But administrators don't see it that way. In fact, many don't believe most students see it that way. “When you go to the campus and ask the question 'Would you rather pay a little bit more this next fall for a higher likelihood that you can get the class you want and have it be taught by full-time, high-quality professor?,' students are going to answer yes, even the low-income student,” Hurley said.

Administrators might be more concerned about quality, and think about quality differently, than students. While students tend to view academic quality through the lens of classroom experience, administrators incorporate research and service into their definition. And many students might not be greatly affected by changes in class size or the elimination of student support services. But studies show that underprepared students, students who come from low-income backgrounds, or students who are the first in their family to go to college benefit the most from small classes and support programs.

Holding the Needy Harmless

Even as tuition prices go up, it does not necessarily mean most students are paying more. One can make an argument that, rather than oppose all tuition hikes, protest groups in favor of access and affordability should push for a combination of high tuition and high financial aid that could result in a more progressive tuition payment structure.

Higher tuition and access don't have to be mutually exclusive, that line of reasoning goes. Small private colleges, whose tuition prices often run two or three times those of four-year public universities, are often more affordable to low-income students.

They accomplish that feat through a combination of discounting tuition for needy students and providing scholarships and grants. Essentially, wealthy students who pay full tuition subsidize the cost of educating low-income students. At Carleton College in Minnesota, where the sticker price for the 2009-10 school year was \$50,205 in tuition and fees, the college only brought in an average of \$24,680 for each student after financial aid.

George S. Bridges, president of Whitman College in Washington, has argued in columns and speeches that by keeping tuition low, states and public institutions are essentially asking taxpayers to subsidize a high-quality education for a family that can afford it.

Many colleges and universities have policies in place that increase need-based aid as tuition increases. The University of California and California State University systems direct one-third of the new revenues generated from tuition increases to financial aid.

The system also has programs in place to hold needy students harmless from tuition increases. UC students who qualify for financial aid and whose families make less than \$80,000 a year qualify for the university's Blue and Gold Opportunity Program, which covers full tuition and fees through a combination of grants and scholarships. Because the program covers full need, tuition increases won't have an effect on those students.

Other public universities have such systems in place. "At a place that meets full need, there will be that complete cross-subsidization," said Charles Clotfelter, professor of public policy, economics, and law at Duke University, who has studied the economics of tuition policies.

Several critics have poked holes in the theory that you can increase tuition without burdening low-income students. Clotfelter said that only a handful of institutions meet full need for all students, and even those like the UC campuses that try to meet need for low-income student still leave many squeezed in the middle.

"If you want to be as fair as possible, you could charge higher tuition and offer a lot of need-based aid," said Sandy Baum, an economist with the College Board and a professor at Skidmore College. "As a concept it's obviously true, and there are places that do that, but the data in the aggregate shows that it doesn't pan out at most places."

One problem with the model is that many students who might be needy do not qualify for financial aid, such as students whose families make enough but are not willing to help pay tuition, or students whose families have other financial obligations.

Another problem is that by simply listing a higher sticker price, a college or university might prevent a student from applying. "When you compare high-tuition states versus low-tuition states, you find lower rates of participation among key demographics, regardless of what aid in those states looks like," said Jennifer Engle, director of higher

education research and policy for Education Trust. Administrators hope that tuition calculators, required by the federal government, will help eliminate that problem.

“If a low-income student reads the newspaper, they would probably say based on stories ‘Forget it. No way. Not going to college. I can’t afford it,’ “ said Ron Johnson, director of financial aid at UCLA. “We want to communicate and convey to the general public and students who are applying to UCLA, that here at the UC system we are maintaining an avenue that will retain affordability.”

The other problem with the high-tuition, high-aid model, some argue, is that tuition and financial aid decisions are not made in tandem. At most public universities, governing boards set tuition rates, and lower administrators apportion financial aid. So while the price might go up, the financial aid budget might not go up accordingly.

Institutions might also apportion a larger percentage of new revenues to merit aid, rather than need-based aid. In recent years, merit aid has grown faster than need-based aid at four-year institutions.

Raskin, the UC-Davis student, said it's not necessarily the college's job to be redistributing wealth. If more is collected in tax revenue and used to subsidize a low tuition rate, then you avoid problems like students not qualifying for aid or squeezing the middle class. "Redistribution should be happening at the point of taxation, not the point of consumption," he said.

What About Revenue?

There are other options for bringing university budgets in line that don't involve increasing tuition. Several universities, notably flagship public institutions, have worked to attract qualified out-of-state students who pay a higher tuition price and often require less financial aid.

Universities could also try to generate efficiencies by increasing the number of students, which many say won't decrease the quality of the institution overall and could bring in more money. But in a state like California, where state appropriations, despite cuts, still cover about half the cost of educating each student, adding additional students might actually be more costly, particularly if they do not add much in revenue. “To make that work you have to educate the student bringing in half the dollar amount you need,” Fallis said.

None of this is to say that public university administrators want to follow a high-price-strategy education that more closely resembles private institutions. Many say they are pursuing the strategy reluctantly, as the only way to maintain quality in the face of cuts.

So leaders have to play hardball with state government, an opportunity to help turn the protests in a new direction. In Arizona and California, university leaders publicly backed

proposed ballot measures to increase tax revenue. While the measure passed in Arizona, the California measure never made it onto the ballot.

Several universities and systems have pledged to keep tuition increases down if lawmakers are willing to return higher education funding to pre-2008 levels. An abandoned plan proposed by the president of the University of California system earlier this year would have split annual increases over the next five years between tuition and appropriations increases. The state could provide whatever it wants, but the system will make up the rest in tuition increases. It is a strategy that worked for the system in the past, though under a very different state budget picture.

The recent protests could actually benefit administrators if they can direct the protesters' anger toward lawmakers, not higher education institutions. Whereas in past recessions university administrators might have been reluctant to criticize lawmakers, knowing that the budget picture would stabilize, many of those niceties have been abandoned. Now, Hurley said, administrators are "well past the point of sugar-coating the situation."

He said colleges and universities will likely employ students in the next round of budget talks. The strategy came up as a major theme that emerged from the group's recent meeting. "One of the overarching themes was that colleges absolutely need to involve student voices in legislative relations," he said. "Their voice is remarkably important. Lawmakers are often more likely to listen to them than university leaders."

What should teachers unions do to remain effective and relevant?

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By [forum](#)

Today we launch “Yes, but...”, an engaging conversation among California’s leading thinkers in education. We’ll feature a new topic regularly, if not weekly, and bring together policymakers, teachers, scholars, and advocates for a spirited dialogue.

We begin with thoughts on the future of teachers unions. Our sages are Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa; California Teachers Association President Dean Vogel; consultant and researcher Julia Koppich; special education teacher KC Walsh, who’s a board member of the CTA and the National Education Association; Stephen McMahon, president of the San José Teachers Association; and Los Angeles high school English teacher Lisa Alva Wood. We’re asking our contributors to check comments during the week to continue the discussion.

Our next topic, to be published next week, will address the topic, “How should we measure our schools, if not by current API scores?”

Antonio Villaraigosa: Unions should advance agenda for change



Antonio Villaraigosa

As a former teachers union organizer, I have seen firsthand the dedication and long hours that teachers put in to ensure their students’ success. Thanks to that hard work and commitment, we have seen a steady increase in student achievement in California – including recent gains here in Los Angeles.

But despite these gains, California’s education system still faces enormous challenges. Our eighth graders rank 46th in math on national assessments and California is ranked 46th in per-pupil funding. And here’s the figure that should keep us all up at night: 1,000,000. That is the number of additional college graduates we need by 2025 to keep our economy afloat.

Education is arguably the most important issue facing our state, and the relevancy of teachers and their union on this issue is without question. I appreciate this opportunity to weigh in with TOPed and its thoughtful community on this topic.

For real change to occur at our schools, teachers' voices need to be heard loud and clear. Without teacher input, we will not be able to build the education system that will place California among the best in the world. Teachers know what works and what doesn't. And it is through their unions that these teachers' voices will be raised at the negotiating table, the legislative floor, and the ballot box.

California's schools need more funding to restore and expand early education, arts, music, and physical education and to bring modern technology to our classrooms. To successfully run these programs, we need not only to restore the teaching positions we've lost – we need to take the lead in offering competitive salaries that will help attract top talent from around the country and keep quality teachers in the classroom.

But we won't improve our schools with money alone. Funds must be linked to progressive efforts such as robust data systems, Common Core standards, and aligned assessments. They also must be linked to a multiple-measure evaluation system that ensures accountability, compensation, professional development, and career opportunities for teachers. Lastly, California needs a more transparent funding system where money follows the student and where allocations are weighted, so we are putting our dollars where they are needed most.

As a mayor, and as a parent, it is my hope that unions will advance an agenda such as this to improve our schools by working with leaders in Sacramento, parents, and local school administrators. If they do, teachers and their unions will not only stay relevant, they will lead California to a state of education excellence.

Since becoming mayor of Los Angeles in 2005, Antonio Villaraigosa has made education a priority. Working to elect and re-elect pro-reform candidates for Los Angeles Unified School Board, he helped to advance Public School Choice. In 2007, he founded The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, a school turnaround project serving more than 20,000 students across 22 schools. Its goal is to transform LA's lowest-performing schools and create a model for district-wide change.

Dean E. Vogel: Fight for future of neighborhood schools



Dean Vogel

Teachers believe in opportunity for all children, not just a few. And we believe quality public education is essential to building better communities and a better future for America. This is the mission and work of the [California Teachers Association](#) (CTA).

Founded in 1863, today's 325,000-member CTA is one of the strongest advocates for educators in the country.

Our effectiveness as a democratic organization is a [matter of record](#) – from billions of dollars secured for renovating and building new schools, to the landmark passage of the 1988 minimum school funding law. These resources made things better for our students. CTA also backed innovative reform with the landmark [Quality Education Investment Act](#) (QEIA) of 2006, which provides \$3 billion over eight years to at-risk schools for proven reforms like smaller class sizes, collaboration, and more counselors. These at-risk students are making good progress. When we improve the learning conditions for our students and the teaching conditions for educators we create sustainable progress. This is part of union work, and CTA is a vital part of the union movement.

But current economic conditions challenge our schools daily. A [new report warns](#) that California ranks 46th in per-pupil spending and dead last in teachers and librarians per student. That's why our union work includes urgent community coalition discussions about a progressive ballot measure for next year to generate new revenues for schools and all essential public services.

We are also working more with coalitions to expose the billionaire reformers like Bill Gates and Eli Broad who seek to privatize public education. We are demanding that corporations [pay their fair share of taxes](#). And we are asking Congress to rewrite the federal No Child Left Behind law based on [CTA principles](#) that would protect students and schools from being labeled by test scores.

CTA and its members are driven by learning, not by profit. We are the classroom experts and we know what works. Stopping those wealthy few who would [silence our political voices](#) will be key in the months and years ahead in the ability of public education unions to protect neighborhood schools, rebuild the middle class, and help provide a rebirth of the American Dream.

Dean E. Vogel is the president of the California Teachers Association, which is affiliated with the 3.2 million-member National Education Association.

Julia E. Koppich: Listen to voices of new teachers



Julia Koppich

Teachers unions are education's favorite punching bag these days. Books and blog posts sound the theme: Teachers unions stand in the way of higher student achievement.

It makes good copy. But there's not much empirical evidence to support it. Research shows that the evidentiary base for concluding that unions hinder (or for that matter, help) student achievement is thin.

Nevertheless, teachers unions' influence is undeniable. Teachers are the most important in-school influence on student learning. State and federal education policy agendas focus on better teacher evaluation and new forms of pay – both negotiable – as central to ensuring teaching effectiveness. Union impact made manifest.

Yet change must come. Too often unions just say “no” when it comes to reform. This serves neither their members nor, more importantly, the students their members teach. What should unions do?

1) End the siege mentality. In the face of attacks, unions have hunkered down. Not surprising, perhaps. One reaction to attack is to head for the bunker. But the attack on unions is part of a broader attack on public education. In this fight, union and management are on the same side. They need to fight the forces arrayed against them, not each other.

2) Mind the demographics. The future of unions hinges on its members. Just a few years ago, the average teacher had taught for at least 15 years. Now it's fewer than 10. This is a different population.

Research shows that these new teachers want a union (many say they worry about arbitrary district actions), but they want a different kind of union, one that helps them get better at their jobs. And these teachers like differentiated pay and more rigorous evaluations (though they're not keen on using test scores for these purposes). Unions need to catch up to them.

3) Make improving teaching effectiveness the union agenda. We have examples of putting this precept into action in California. My colleague, Dan Humphrey of SRI, and I recently completed a study of Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) in Poway (San Diego County) and San Juan (near Sacramento). Skilled teachers provide intensive support to then evaluate the performance of colleagues. A joint union-management governing board oversees the program.

Unions are integral to PAR. They don't shy away from tough decisions. PAR support is intense. But if support isn't enough, the union has no qualms about recommending dismissal. These unions have taken labor-management collaboration to a new level. Union and management act as partners. Agreements center on high stakes issues. Improving teaching effectiveness to improve student learning is union work.

No magic bullet will cure what ails California's schools. Problems are complex and multifaceted. Unions can be part of the solution by adopting new mental models, implementing new ways of acting, and being more open to new ideas, even – maybe especially – those that challenge long-held traditions and assumptions.

Julia E. Koppich is president of J. Koppich & Associates, a San Francisco-based education consulting firm. Her work focuses principally on teacher effectiveness and education labor-management relations. She recently completed (with Dan Humphrey of SRI) a study of peer assistance and review in California, serves as technical assistance lead for the federal Teacher Incentive Fund, and is working with the Memphis City Schools to redesign their teacher evaluation and tenure review systems. Dr. Koppich holds a Ph.D. in education policy analysis from the University of California Berkeley.

Lisa Alva Wood: Tone down rhetoric and reorganize



Lisa Alva Wood

Earlier this year, in Los Angeles, teachers from various schools met with some representatives from the federal Department of Education. Two teacher-fellows and the facilitator shared the Dept. of Ed's "vision" for the teaching profession. The main thrust was to "professionalize" teaching by having us work "professional" days, weeks, and hours (250 days vs. the 180 we work now) and to front-load the income-based rewards; newer teachers could earn up to \$65,000 per year upon earning tenure, and master teachers could earn up to \$100,000 per year for exemplary performance. So, the idea is that we save for our own retirements, saving the government millions of dollars in pension costs. Yes, but... what does that say about the perceived futures of our unions?

Younger teachers only know that the union has not protected them in time of pink slips; unions, in their minds, are the guardians of older teachers who coast through semesters on the cushions of sinecure. Mid-term teachers who have come halfway through their career spans see their unions as bastions of bombast, feeling alienated by the old-school fire-and-brimstone organizers who took cuts in pay and actually walked out on strikes. The senior teachers are frustrated by charter schools bleeding away membership – in Los Angeles this year our union membership numbers 30,000, down from 44,000 ten years ago. As troubling as this is, it's not nearly as worrisome as the federal government seemingly planning for the demise of the teachers unions, as appears to be the case. What do they know that we don't? (That was a naive question.)

Pundits and columnists are fond of saying that the Los Angeles teachers union is one of the largest, most powerful lobbies in the state, that together with the California Teachers Association, we control enough votes and influence to keep things exactly as we want them. Yes, but our own leadership in Los Angeles embarrassed us by terming out and then taking a principal's position with "the enemy," a charter school.

Some of us mid-career teachers have formed our own caucus to tone down the rhetoric. We are trying to convert more teachers to the cause, encouraging them to participate, build the faith and strength in our union that the future will require. Without a revival, we stand to fulfill the government's prophecy: every man for himself. We cannot let this happen.

Lisa Alva Wood has been teaching high school English for 15 years, the last 10 at Roosevelt High School in East Los Angeles. She has been on the Board of Directors for the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools and spearheaded many school-based projects. She is a National Board Certified Teacher.

KC Walsh: Organize parents and fight for proven reforms



KC Walsh

Educators and their unions have been subjected to an incredible amount of scapegoating lately – ranging from [biased movies](#) like *Waiting for Superman* to multimillion-dollar foundations that think they know how to teach children better than the educated professionals in our classrooms. California leads the nation in education cuts — slashing more than \$20 billion from our public schools and colleges in the past three years.

Noted labor leader Pat Dolan says unionism begins with a moral imperative to provide a voice for those who don't have one. Our students benefit when we use our collective teacher voices as a union to fight for the quality education they deserve. To remain effective at this, teachers unions must listen to and organize more colleagues, parents, and communities in this mission. And we must continue our fight for proven reforms, like smaller class sizes, which [studies show](#) actually work in our classrooms.

From my vantage point in Silicon Valley, one major difficulty is that educators are not being listened to, but are being handed unrealistic mandates from the federal government. We are speaking out to Congress about flawed efforts like [No Child Left Behind](#) and Race to the Top that are handcuffing educators from preparing tomorrow's creative workers with their single-minded focus on standardized testing, rather than fostering creativity and critical thinking.

The [California Teachers Association](#) and the [National Education Association](#) are leading voices in education reform. CTA led passage of legislation that focused \$3 billion over eight years toward helping at-risk schools; the [Quality Education Investment Act](#) of 2006 is making a difference for those students as test scores have increased and achievement gaps have narrowed. California teachers are working with administrators and parents to focus curriculum and professional development to improve student learning. NEA is working in a similar fashion to assist schools across the country to implement best practices. CTA is developing [teacher evaluation systems](#) that will help educators improve.

Changes are needed in education, and teachers unions will continue to work with parents and others in the school community to ensure that kids come first in that debate. As the leading voices in this conversation, CTA and NEA will remain relevant – and vigilant about the battles ahead.

KC Walsh is a special education teacher on leave from Bernal Intermediate School in Oak Grove Unified in San Jose. She is also on the board of directors for the California Teachers Association and the National Education Association.

Stephen McMahon: We're leading the classroom transformation



Stephen McMahon

As president of the San José Teachers Association (SJTA), I experience the whole spectrum of public education on a daily basis, from the breathtaking to the reprehensible. I constantly think about the role of teachers unions in all that is public education. I also constantly think about district offices, boards of education, county offices, county boards, state departments of education, the U.S. Department of Education, publishers, consultants, advisers, contractors, researchers, and everything else that consumes the well over \$500 billion annually invested in educating our nation's primary and secondary students¹. Among those institutions, teachers unions are far and away the most critical for anyone who genuinely puts students first.

The justification for teachers unions is straightforward. The magic of education happens in the classroom. It is all about teachers and students. No citations, research, or position statements are necessary to confirm that teachers and the work they do in the classroom are paramount. Yet only 58% of California's K-12 education expenditures make it to the classroom². Teachers know that the bureaucracy does not educate children – teachers do. Teachers know that the system does not inspire children – teachers do. Teachers know that the more than 40% spent outside the classroom does not change lives – teachers do.

SJTA's mission is to “empower teachers to educate, inspire, and change lives through public education.” We in San José Unified are leading the way on: implementing a transformational evaluation process, offering different methods for compensating teachers for the work they do, exploring nontraditional approaches to the student instructional day and year, delivering instruction to students in a manner that reflects the dynamic and innovative environment of Silicon Valley, and how we measure and validate the success and achievement of both our students and our workforce. We are also transforming what it means to have strategic stakeholder partnerships that support all students.

SJTA is the natural leader in all of these areas because the daily work of its members is teaching and learning. That unmatched knowledge base has the teachers of SJTA primed with ideas, solutions, and willingness. We are taking progressive actions because we are committed to ensuring that every student receives the finest educational opportunities and experiences. We are a beacon for what is possible when the collective voice of more than 1,700 teachers is valued and respected.

All of the institutions within public education have things to be proud of and each is responsible for changes that must be made. When student learning and achievement are at the forefront, nothing exceeds the classroom in importance. Teachers are the heart of the classroom. A teachers union is its teachers. That places working with teachers unions at the top of the list for anyone seeking to truly enhance public education.

Stephen McMahon is president of the San José Teachers Association. SJTA represents the more than 1,700 teachers in Santa Clara County's largest school district.

Cal State campuses overwhelmed by remedial needs

By Matt Krupnick

Contra Costa Times

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Wracked with frustration over the state's legions of unprepared high school graduates, the California State University system next summer will force freshmen with remedial needs to brush up on math or English before arriving on campus.

But many professors at the 23-campus university, which has spent the past 13 years dismissing students who fail remedial classes, doubt the Early Start program will do much to help students unable to handle college math or English.

"I'm not at all optimistic that it's going to help," said Sally Murphy, a communications professor who directs general education at Cal State East Bay, where 73 percent of this year's freshmen were not ready for college math. Nearly 60 percent were not prepared for college English.

"A 15-hour intervention is just not enough intervention when it comes to skills that should have been developed over 12 years," Murphy said.

The remedial numbers are staggering, given that the Cal State system admits only freshmen who graduated in the top one-third of their high-school class. About 27,300 freshmen in the 2010 entering class of about 42,700 needed remedial work in math, English or both.

By requiring the Early Start courses, the university is trying, in part, to cut down the number of students kicked out for failing to complete remedial classes their first year. College-level math and English are required for many other Cal State courses, so students who are ineligible for entry-level classes in one or both subjects have a significant disadvantage.

The courses may be taken online, at a Cal State campus or at some community colleges.

Few instructors believe the 15-hour Early Start courses will ease the burden for remedial students or the university, said Jim Postma, a Cal State Chico chemistry professor and chairman of the systemwide Academic Senate.

If half the students eligible for the Cal State system are unable to handle college work, he said, California is in bad shape.

"It's a terrible indictment of the K-through-12 system," Postma said. "If a factory was building cars and the lug nuts kept falling off the tires, you would do something pretty dramatic about it. We keep adding the lug nuts back to the tires rather than trying to figure out what the problem is."

The remedial problem is hardly confined to California. Schools across the country have puzzled over how to better prepare students for college and what to do with those who are not ready.

But budget cuts have staggered the Cal State system's ability to teach childhood math and English skills to tens of thousands of students every year. One solution would be to do a better job figuring out exactly what kind of help students need to focus remedial education, said Linda Wong, executive director of the University of Southern California's Center for Urban Education.

"There have been a lot of problems with the assessment tools that colleges use," she said. Because of that shortfall, "it's very difficult to customize the curriculum to address specific needs of the students."

The Cal State system's remedial pressures have, for the past few years, led many students to take basic classes at community colleges. That influx has, in turn, made it more difficult for full-time community college students to get into classes they need to prepare for four-year schools.

Budget cuts also have hurt the community colleges: Thousands of classes have been cut the past few years on the state's 112 two-year campuses.

"We're all trying to figure out how to handle these students who are woefully unprepared," said Mark Wade Lieu, an Ohlone College instructor who directs remedial education for the state's community colleges. "The greatest fear is we're going to lose a generation of students."

Colleges Mine Data to Tailor Students' Experience

December 11, 2011

The Chronicle of Higher Education

By Marc Parry

Cambridge, Mass.

Educators have long held that the interactions between students and professors defy simple reduction. Yet in several areas of campus life, colleges are converting the student experience into numbers to crunch in the name of improving education.

Think of it as higher education meets Moneyball. In the movie, Oakland A's General Manager Billy Beane reinvents his struggling baseball team by analyzing statistics in new ways to predict player success. In education, college managers are doing something similar to forecast student success—in admissions, advising, teaching, and more.

In one Harvard calculus class, even who you pair up with for group discussion is determined by a computer, one that tracks how well students are doing on the material.

The software records Ben Falloon's location in the back row and how he answers each practice problem. Come discussion time, it tries to stir up debate by matching students who gave different responses to the most recent question. For Mr. Falloon, the system, called Learning Catalytics, spits out this prompt: Please discuss your response with Alexis Smith (in front of you) and Emily Kraemer (to your left).

Getting data down to frontline students and instructors like this marks a shift for an industry that often focuses on pushing numbers up to accreditors and trustees, says Mark Milliron, formerly of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which backs college data-mining.

"I know more about my 11-year-old son's sixth-grade basketball team than the average college faculty member knows about their incoming class, in terms of key variables that are going to make them successful or not successful," he adds. "It is a sin that that is the case."

Today, half of students quit college before earning a credential. Proponents feel that making better use of data to inform decisions, known as "analytics," can help solve that problem while also improving teaching.

But skeptics worry that data-mining fosters a factory-line approach to education, one that wrings efficiency out of the existing system rather than reinventing it in a digital era.

One analytics tactic—monitoring student clicks in course-management systems—especially worries critics like Gardner Campbell, director of professional development and innovative initiatives at Virginia Tech. He sees these systems as sterile environments where students respond to instructor prompts rather than express creativity. Analytics projects that focus on such systems threaten to damage colleges much like high-stakes standardized testing harmed elementary and secondary schools, he argues.

"Counting clicks within a learning-management system runs the risk of bringing that kind of deadly standardization into higher education," Mr. Campbell says.

Educational data-mining also presents ethical questions. How much should students be told about the behind-the-scenes computer analysis that manipulates their educational experiences? And how far should colleges go in shaping those experiences based on data patterns?

Better Choices

When you buy a book on Amazon, you get a shopping experience tailored to your personal tastes. One piece of the college data puzzle is figuring out how to bring that customization to important educational decisions. Decisions like which courses to take, which major to pursue, and which college to enroll in.

Think of the problem in terms of a supermarket cereal aisle, says Tristan Denley, provost of Austin Peay State University, in Clarksville, Tenn. You find every choice known to man. But unless you've opened the box, you have very little information to judge what's inside. How do you pick one?

Part of the answer, he says, is technology that can look at people like you who have made such decisions in the past, and see whether those decisions worked out. In April, Austin Peay debuted software that recommends courses based on a student's major, academic record, and how similar students fared in that class.

Some professors fretted about students misinterpreting the Netflix-like tips as commands, but the Gates Foundation quickly ponied up \$1-million to refine the software so other colleges can adopt it.

Now Austin Peay plans to expand on its work with a new tool that offers tips for making a more important decision: picking a major.

The feature, to be rolled out this spring, focuses on two problems: students who don't know which major to pick, and students who thought they knew, but ended up with a bad fit. A human adviser might be at a loss to suggest an alternate path, Mr. Denley says. But data could offer concrete possibilities.

For example, students often start climbing the ladder to become a nurse or a doctor, perhaps because they have relatives in those professions. Yet early on it's clear their grades won't carry them up to those goals. The data robot might suggest another health

field. It might also suggest something totally different, like graphic design, because a student displays a pattern of grades similar to others who flourished in that direction, Mr. Denley says.

Similar ideas are flourishing in the world of admissions. One company getting buzz is ConnectEDU, sometimes described as an eHarmony for college matchmaking. Its founder, Craig Powell, dreams that students won't even have to apply to college "because an algorithm will have already told them and the schools where they would fit best," as *The Atlantic* reported recently.

Mr. Powell hopes to make that happen by plugging high schools and colleges in to an online platform that feels a lot like Facebook. And like Facebook, its news feed and customized recommendations hinge on vast amounts of information: over 250 data points for each student, including high-school academic records, standardized test scores, financial circumstances, career ambitions, and geographic locations. So far, 2.5 million high-school students have ConnectEDU profiles.

Say one of those students enjoys working with his or her hands and aspires to live a middle-American lifestyle. But the student has marginal grades and no college plans. The software might suggest a program at a local community college that qualifies the student for laying ground wire.

For colleges seeking prospective students, meanwhile, the algorithms get flipped. Privacy laws prevent Mr. Powell from giving kids' names and addresses to college admissions officers. But what he can offer is anonymous demographic information on potential applicants that might interest them, such as a first-generation African-American male who lives in Miami and makes straight A's in a rigorous math curriculum. When a college wants to single out a kid, it pings the student in the ConnectEDU system with a message that resembles a friend request. If the student accepts, his or her profile gets exposed, and the college can cultivate that student, Mr. Powell says.

"The colleges can be informing instead of direct-mailing and mass marketing," he says. "And you actually build relationships at the end of this, as opposed to working leads."

Classroom 'Clickstreams'

Another set of data-driven experiments involves how to teach those students once they start taking college classes, such as the one here at Harvard where the computer picks study partners.

That Learning Catalytics system grew out of technology developed in Eric Mazur's physics class. It marks the latest effort in the Harvard professor's long campaign to perfect the art of interactive teaching. Science instructors around the world have adopted his Peer Instruction method, and the technique helped popularize the classroom-response devices known as "clickers."

Mr. Mazur argues that his new software solves at least three problems. One, it selects student discussion groups. Two, it helps instructors manage the pace of classes by automatically figuring out how long to leave questions open so the vast majority of students will have enough time. And three, it pushes beyond the multiple-choice problems typically used with clickers, inviting students to submit open-ended responses, like sketching a function with a mouse or with their finger on the screen of an iPad.

"This is grounded on pedagogy; it's not just the technology," says Mr. Mazur, a gadget skeptic who feels technology has done "incredibly little to improve education."

The pedagogy that informs Learning Catalytics dates to 1991, when Mr. Mazur arrived at a painful revelation: his method of instruction, the lecture, was ineffective. The trigger came part of the way through a course at Harvard, Mr. Mazur recalled in a 2009 Science article headlined "Farewell, Lecture?" The professor decided to test students' comprehension of one of the first topics they had covered, the Laws of Newton. But he didn't give traditional problems. Instead, he asked the students basic conceptual questions, like comparing "forces that a heavy truck and a light car exert on one another when they collide."

They struggled. The reason: They memorized the information, rather than assimilating it.

So Mr. Mazur began teaching through questioning. In class, his students now work on conceptual problems. Then they pair off with peers who have different answers and try to convince each other that they're correct.

Those on the right track should prevail by force of reason, Mr. Mazur says. And they should be more likely to persuade classmates than the professor. That's because they still understand the obstacles in their peers' heads, whereas the material is so clear to Mr. Mazur, and has been for so long, that he doesn't get why somebody would have no clue.

But how do you group students? Ask them to turn to their neighbors, and chances are they're sitting next to a friend who won't be too helpful. Dysfunctional groups form. Instructing students to find classmates with a different answer doesn't always improve things; some just ignore the order.

So Mr. Mazur and his team set to work on their high-tech matchmaking venture. They asked students to fill out a 20-question survey about their study habits, attitudes toward science, and confidence in their abilities. The research group is now crunching these data to understand which questions are good indicators for pairing students. Already, though, they've found substantial improvement just by matching people with right and wrong answers, says Brian Lukoff, a Learning Catalytics co-founder and postdoctoral fellow who teaches calculus at Harvard.

On a recent Tuesday morning, Mr. Lukoff demonstrates the system in his math class. As students file in, they log on to the software from whatever device they carry, be it a

laptop, tablet, or smartphone. Then they check in to their seats; the site helps out with a map similar to what you'd see buying an airplane ticket.

Today's lesson focuses on finding the area under a curve. Mr. Lukoff cues up a problem, which appears on students' screens, and gives them a few minutes to solve it.

Mr. Falloon, a sweatpants-wearing freshman from Chicago, chews on the eraser of his mechanical pencil. He scribbles in his notebook.

"If you don't know, just guess," says Mr. Lukoff, 29, who looks like a student, with jeans and sideburns.

Mr. Falloon, uncertain, selects an answer on his laptop: "C."

"OK, so now what I want you to do is talk to the person who your screen says to talk to, and try to convince them that you're right."

Mr. Falloon's laptop flashes the name of Emily Kraemer, a freshman from Florida. She thinks the answer is "A," which gets them arguing—exactly what the matchmaking algorithm intended. Meanwhile, Mr. Lukoff's screen displays a map of how everyone answered the question, data he can use to eavesdrop on specific conversations.

But, at least in this problem, the robot's pairing fails to spark calculus harmony. Their chat over, she still seems to believe the answer is "A," and he sticks with "C."

He's right.

"Oh man," Ms. Kraemer sighs.

Still, students express enthusiasm for Learning Catalytics' matchmaking, even if they appear a bit oblivious as to how the software selects partners.

"It's not someone you actually always interact with," says Alexis Smith, 18, a freshman from Alabama. "So it mixes it up."

"And then you know their name, too," says Mr. Falloon. "So if you forgot, it's less awkward."

Signals for Success

Classroom data-mining isn't just taking off at rich universities like Harvard. In a community-college sector racked by budget cuts, one Arizona institution sifts through data on student behavior in online courses to figure out who is at risk of underperforming or dropping out—and how to help.

By the eighth day of class, Rio Salado College predicts with 70-percent accuracy whether a student will score a C or better in a course.

That's possible because a Web course can be like a classroom with a camera rigged over every desk. The learning software logs students' moves, leaving a rich "clickstream" for data sleuths to manipulate.

Running the algorithms, officials found clusters of behaviors that helped predict success. Did a student log in to the course homepage? View the syllabus? Open an assessment? When did she turn in an assignment? How does his behavior compare with that of previous students?

The college translated that analysis into a warning system that places color-coded icons beside students' names in the course-management system. Shannon F. Corona, a seven-year online teaching veteran who is faculty chair of the physical-science department at Rio Salado, says the alerts improved her outreach. Before, she knew which students were doing great. She also knew which had tuned out. But she had a harder time pinpointing those in between, struggling yet still trying.

Now, when Ms. Corona logs in to her Chemistry 130 course, she takes students' temperature with a glance. The software flags them as green (likely to complete the course with a C or better), yellow (at risk of not earning a C), and red (highly unlikely to earn a C). If she hovers her mouse over the color, she gets more details. For one student flagged as yellow, for example, the system reports that he is doing an excellent job logging in to the class and a good job engaging with lessons, but falling behind when it comes to the pace of assignment submissions.

That might be the online equivalent of a student who shows up to class but struggles with the content, she says. Ms. Corona e-mails yellow-tagged students asking if they'd like her help or a tutor's.

"Especially for online students, they sometimes feel isolated," she says. "And a lot of instructors, just because of how the system is set up, you might miss it. You don't really know where they are, how they're doing, because they haven't asked you any questions."

But can you change a student's trajectory? The college has experimented with various intervention strategies, so far with mixed results. For example, early data showed students in general-education courses who log in on Day 1 of class succeed 21 percent more often than those who don't. So Rio Salado blasted welcome e-mails to students the night before courses began, encouraging them to log in.

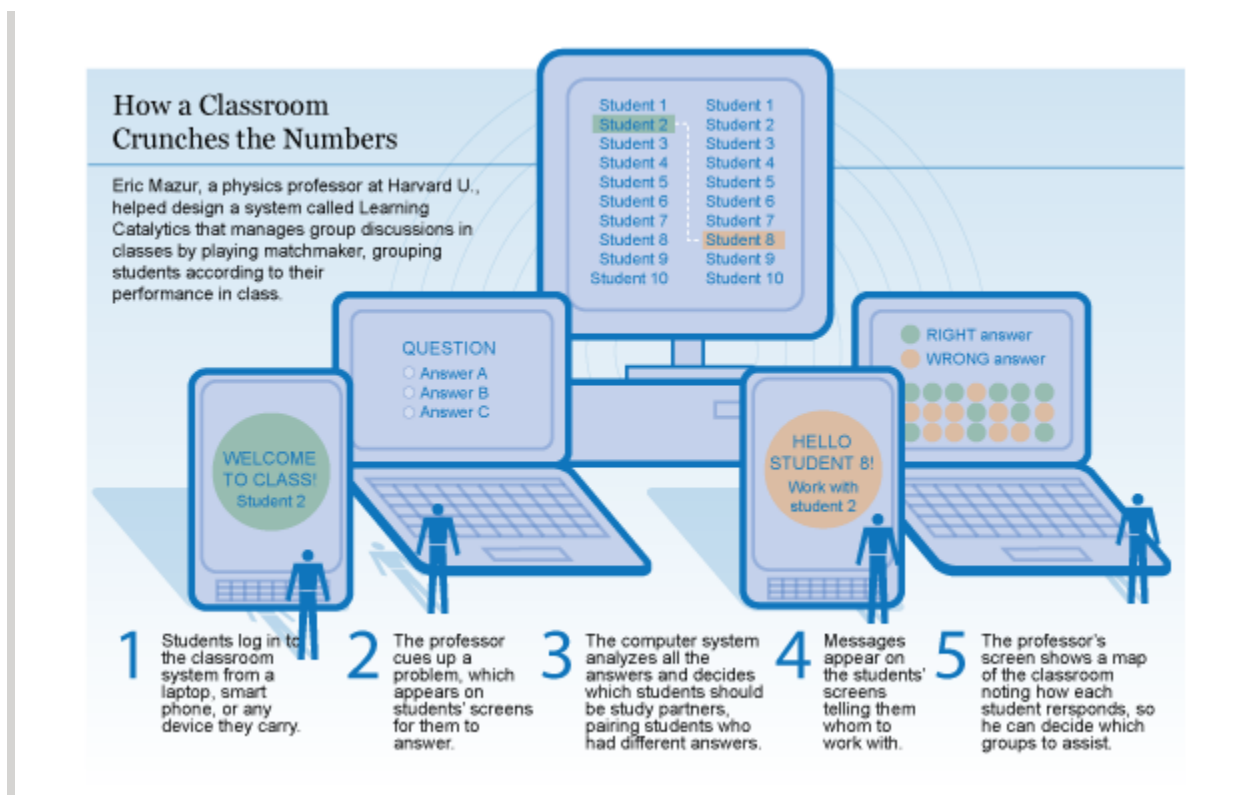
The next step is a widespread rollout of the color-coded alerts, one that will put the technology in the hands of many more professors and students. The hope, Ms. Corona says, is that a yellow signal might prompt students to say to themselves: "Gosh, I'm only spending five hours a week in this course. Obviously students who have taken this course before me and were successful were spending more time. So maybe I need to adjust my schedule."

No one quite knows where education's analytics revolution will lead, but it's a safe bet that today's experiments will seem crude compared with what's coming.

Fast-forward a few years, and data-sharing choices could be part of starting college, like roommate assignments. Students may have a "buffet-like dashboard" that allows them to select which data to expose to their university, says George Siemens, an analytics expert at Canada's Athabasca University. That might include high-school courses, social-media profiles, library usage, demographic details.

Colleges will push for more and more info, Mr. Siemens speculates. "It'll be like, 'Oh, if you give us your socioeconomic data, we can target the best learning materials for you, or the best help resources,'" he says.

The result may be that if 100 students take introductory calculus, the computer will do much more than just predict those at risk of failing. It will customize a different learning experience for every student.



Local colleges, schools roll with state budget cut punches

By Rob Kuznia and Barbara Jones Staff Writers
Posted: 12/13/2011 07:41:25 PM PST
Updated: 12/13/2011 07:59:06 PM PST

The South Bay's two largest stand-alone public colleges likely will dig into reserve funds to offset state budget cuts announced Tuesday by Gov. Jerry Brown.

El Camino near Torrance will take a \$1.9 million hit and California State University, Dominguez Hills, will lose \$2.6 million, according to preliminary estimates.

Both expect to bridge the shortfalls with their rainy day reserve, meaning no changes are in the offing for students in the spring semester.

El Camino spokeswoman Ann Garten attributed the lack of necessary cuts at that campus to sound fiscal planning.

"We haven't had furloughs, we haven't had salary reductions, we haven't had full-time employees laid off," she said. "I don't know of any other community college districts that haven't had some or all of those things."

However, students at El Camino have felt the sting from the down economy in the form of limited course offerings, rising tuition costs and long lines to visit academic counselors. Tuesday's announcement will exacerbate that pain, as tuition at El Camino and all of California's community colleges will rise from \$36 to \$46 per unit beginning in the summer. That's on top of a \$10-a-unit increase that went into effect this fall.

The cuts may also exacerbate a trend in which El Camino has been forced to accommodate fewer full-time students. In 2009-10, the college served the full-time equivalent of 20,533 students. That number has fallen to an estimated 18,000 this year. Tuesday's action cuts state funding for an additional 400.

Meanwhile, although K-12 schools will not be forced to reduce the length of the current school year, as initially feared, the public school system's busing system will be hard hit. Brown's plan calls for reducing home-to-school transportation funding by nearly \$250 million statewide. This has infuriated John Deasy, superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Charging that the cut will wipe out its \$38 million busing program, LAUSD officials plan to file a lawsuit today challenging the state's trigger cuts.

Deasy got authorization for the suit during a closed-door session with the school board.

"We will file a lawsuit that supports our students and will seek a (temporary restraining order)," Deasy said. "The district cannot tolerate another single, solitary cut."

In its lawsuit, the district will argue that the loss of the home-to-school transportation money will mean the end of voluntary busing to scores of magnet schools that are the backbone of its court-ordered desegregation program.

In addition to the 35,000 magnet students, about 13,000 pupils also are bused on a daily basis under federal mandates to serve special-needs students - those with behavioral, physical and developmental disabilities.

Deasy's remarks followed pleas by several students from the Bravo Medical Magnet in Los Angeles to retain the bus routes for them and their classmates.

"We will no longer accept attacks on education," said Maria Martirosyan, 18 a senior at Bravo. "Students are being infringed upon, and these cuts infringe on our quality education. ... These are direct attacks on our own students and are extremely shortsighted."