

Dan Walters: Democrats may be Jerry Brown's big hurdle on budget

By Dan Walters
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Gov. Jerry Brown and his fellow Democrats in the Legislature settled on a hastily revised state budget last June – after Brown had vetoed legislators' first version – and pronounced it to be balanced and timely.

"My colleagues and I have voted on a responsible budget," Assemblyman Roger Dickinson, D-Sacramento, told constituents in a newsletter, adding, "While we have projected additional revenues, we have also identified further tough cuts if these revenues are not realized. We are charged with the responsibility to pass a balanced budget on time. Democratic lawmakers have done so."

Dickinson wasn't alone in crowing to constituents about the budget. But it wasn't on time, nor was it balanced, as Capitol insiders suspected then and we know for certain seven months later.

The quickly revised budget hinged on a sudden, even miraculous, projection by Brown's bean counters that the state would receive another \$4 billion in revenue. But in December, they acknowledged that more than half of the windfall won't show up, thus triggering some spending cuts, although not enough to offset the missing income.

If anything, the situation has deteriorated.

Last week, Controller John Chiang revealed that revenue is falling \$2.6 billion short while spending is running \$2.6 billion over budget. It means that this supposedly balanced budget will be somewhere between \$4 billion and \$5 billion in the red by the end of the fiscal year on June 30.

It's about half of the \$9.2 billion deficit that Brown says his new budget will cover – but only if voters agree to temporary increases in sales and income taxes next fall.

But there's more to the budget equation than taxes.

Even were the new taxes approved, Brown's new budget would continue the rapid shrinkage of health and welfare services to the poor that he first proposed last year. And Democrats are beginning to balk.

They've stiffed Brown on the mid-year cuts he seeks to shrink the year-end deficit, and the initial legislative responses to the budget are highly critical of "safety net" reductions. The Assembly staged one hearing last week to focus on their effects on poor women.

The pushback may reflect a realization that Brown doesn't see shrinking health and welfare services, including a much tighter limit for welfare payments, as a temporary response to budget woes, but rather, as he said a year ago, "a retrenchment" of the state's historically generous benefits.

"They (the cuts) look permanent to me," he told reporters in January 2011. "The money isn't there."

A year later, his intent is sinking in, and one of his most difficult chores will be to persuade a Legislature dominated by liberal Democrats to do to social services what conservative Republicans have only dreamed of doing.

Dan Walters: Community colleges face change in California

By Dan Walters
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California's 112 community colleges, the nation's largest higher education system, may change a lot if Gov. Jerry Brown has his way.

Brown, who entered politics nearly a half-century ago as a Los Angeles community college trustee, and state community college Chancellor Jack Scott, a former college administrator and state senator, want the system to refocus on students with firm career or higher education goals.

If enacted, it would ration access to consciously discourage, or even ban, attendance by casual students who lack the requisite goals. It would be the biggest cultural change since 1907, when the system was born with authorization for local high schools to offer "postgraduate courses of study."

"This is a comprehensive plan that will result in more students completing certificates and degrees and transferring to four-year institutions," Scott told legislators last week. "Completion matters. It matters for students – whose earnings increase as they become more educated – and for our state as a whole."

It also matters to Brown's hopes of fixing the state's chronically imbalanced budget, which has borne the major cost of the 1.7-million-student system for the past 34 years, ever since voters passed the Proposition 13 property tax limit.

Simply put, if the system serves fewer students, it will cost less. And that makes it a significant component of Brown's ambitious plan to shrink state spending commitments even as he asks voters to raise taxes.

Brown's new budget ties community college financing to meeting performance goals, such as preparing students for transfer to four-year colleges.

The parameters of the change are found in draft legislation, dubbed "Student Success Act of 2012," from Scott's office to implement a task force's recommendations. Overall, it would shift the system from open access to goal-oriented education and targets some state financing to those goals.

One section of its synopsis says, "As a condition of receipt of (student success) funds, requires districts to implement common assessment and student success scorecard"

Another would waive community college fees, now done for all students below certain income levels, only for students who "identify a degree, certificate, transfer or career advancement goal (and) meet academic and progress standards, including a maximum unit cap"

The "maximum unit cap" would be aimed at weeding out perpetual students or those who take classes for personal enrichment, rather than careers or qualification for four-college transfer.

Will it happen?

There's much in the plan for particular interest groups to dislike. But it reflects the oft-ignored reality that state government can't provide everything to everyone and that we are in, as Brown was once fond of saying, "an era of limits."

CalSTRS funding gap widens, so does solution

The CalSTRS board last week adopted a lower earnings forecast, making it more likely that a century-old tradition of underfunding at one of the nation's oldest public pension funds is likely to continue.

Closing a wider funding gap, the result of expecting less money from future investment earning, would require nearly doubling the current annual payments to CalSTRS if the goal is to reach full funding in the usual 30 years.

But a half dozen ways to increase CalSTRS funding shown to the board last week seem to suggest that reaching full funding in three decades is now impractical, if not politically impossible.

Only one of the scenarios would get CalSTRS to 100 percent funding — but not until 2085. The other five scenarios never get the California State Teachers Retirement System to full funding, ranging from 32 to 14 percent funding after 75 years.

“They don't necessarily result in full funding,” Ed Derman, CalSTRS deputy chief executive, told the board. “But we wanted to sort of test the ability of those approaches to allow us to pay benefits for at least the next 75 years, without having a massive infusion of money from a source because we run out of assets.”

The notion that full funding is not the target differs from the current rules of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board, which expect pension debt or “unfunded liability” to be paid off in 30 years.

The small change in the earnings forecast, from 7.75 to 7.5 percent, adds an estimated \$500 million to the additional \$4 billion a year already said to be needed for CalSTRS to be fully funded in 30 years.

The new funding gap, \$4.5 billion, moves closer to equaling the total \$5.3 billion currently being paid into the CalSTRS pension fund from all sources: teachers \$2.4 billion, employers \$2.3 billion and state \$600 million.

As contributions flowing into the CalSTRS pension showed little change last year (the rates are set by legislation), pension payments going out to retirees increased to \$10.1 billion, up 7.8 percent.

What makes CalSTRS unusual is not a low funding level, about 70 percent of assets needed for future obligations. Most pension funds, hammered by recession and a market crash, had big losses in investments expected to pay two-thirds of future pensions.

The CalSTRS fund, said to be nearing \$150 billion last week, is still well below its peak of about \$180 billion in the fall of 2007. The California Public Employees Retirement System was at \$234 billion, below its 2007 peak of \$260 billion.

Unlike CalPERS and other pension funds, CalSTRS lacks the power to set annual contributions paid by employers, needing legislation instead. The state general fund that provides most school funding continues a decade-long struggle to close huge deficits.

Some of the competing tax initiatives aimed at the November ballot are intended to reverse a decline in per-pupil spending in schools, not cover a gap in assets needed to pay teacher pensions decades from now.

The funding scenarios prepared by CalSTRS staff and actuaries, after talks with legislative staff and teacher unions, would not begin slowly phasing in a funding increase until 2016, when the state budget is presumably healthier.

Derman said the easy-to-change scenarios are a “framework” for discussion. They were requested by a legislative committee considering, among other things, Gov. Brown’s 12-point pension reform plan, which did not include the CalSTRS unfunded liability.

In addition to needing more money from a state budget awash in red ink, CalSTRS also faces limitations from teachers, who currently contribute 8 percent of their pay to the pension fund.

CalSTRS regards the teacher contribution as a vested right, protected under contract law by court decisions, that can only be increased if teachers are given a new benefit of equal value.

The maximum increase for current teachers in the scenarios is 2 percent of pay, bringing the total to 10 percent. The increase would be offset by guaranteeing a 2 percent annual cost-of-living adjustment, now routine but not required under current law.

The scenario projected to reach 100 percent funding in 2085 assumes that new teachers, not vested like current teachers, would eventually contribute 14.2 percent of pay.

Since CalSTRS members do not receive Social Security, the contributions of the new members would be similar to the contributions of most state workers in CalPERS: 8 percent of pay to pensions and 6.2 percent to Social Security.

The powerful California Teachers Association reportedly dislikes “two-tier” pension systems where members, working side by side, would be paying sharply different amounts to receive the same pension benefit.

A little more than a year ago, the CalSTRS board agreed with the go-slow recommendation of the CTA and two other unions, lowering the earnings forecast in December 2010 from 8 to 7.75 percent, not 7.5 percent as recommended by actuaries.

The forecast had last been lowered in 1995, dropping from 8.5 to 8 percent. The unions said a lower forecast could reduce member benefits, apparently referring to the cost of purchasing annuities, service credits and other impacts listed in a staff report.

Last week the only opposition to lowering the forecast to 7.5 percent came from a board member, Pedro Reyes, a representative of the Brown administration's Department of Finance that must propose balanced state budgets.

The CalPERS board, despite a recommendation of 7.5 percent from actuaries, decided last March to leave its forecast at 7.75 percent. Because of its rate-setting power, a lower CalPERS forecast could increase employer costs.

Some experts think even a 7.5 percent earning forecast is too optimistic. One of two new Brown appointees on the 12-member CalSTRS board, Paul Rosensteel, said the actuary report seems to make the case for a forecast of 5.8 to 7.3 percent.

Nick Collier, a Milliman consulting actuary, told Rosensteel it was a "tough call and it's one we definitely battled." He said the actuaries thought about recommending an earning forecast of 7.25 percent.

"If we set it as a conservative assumption and then you go to the Legislature and ask for money," said Collier, "they say, 'You're telling us this number based on an assumption you yourself said is conservative.'"

In the 1970s the CalSTRS funding level was about 30 percent. A decades-long stock market boom and legislation increasing state contributions resulted in CalSTRS briefly reaching 100 percent funding around 2000.

Then CalSTRS joined CalPERS and UC Retirement in what public pensions tend to do when reaching full funding — lower contributions and increase pension benefits, making future funding problems more likely. (See "State pension funds: what went wrong," Calpensions 10 Jan 11)

When CalSTRS was formed in 1913, teachers were given retirement credit for past years of service. But no contributions were required from employers or employees to pay for the prior service.

"This caused the retirement plan to have an unfunded obligation from the beginning," said a CalSTRS Overview published last year.

Reporter Ed Mendel covered the Capitol in Sacramento for nearly three decades, most recently for the San Diego Union-Tribune. More stories are at <http://calpensions.com/> Posted 7 Feb 12

Should California community colleges prioritize enrollment to help students graduate earlier?

Posted on 2/21/12 • Categorized as [Community Colleges](#), [Revenue and taxes](#), [State Budget](#)

By [forum](#)

By the end of this week, the [Student Success Act of 2012](#) should be officially introduced in the Legislature, launching the debate on how to improve success rates at California's community colleges. The Act is necessary to implement some of the 22 recommendations of the [Student Success Task Force](#), which spent the last year developing the proposals and soliciting feedback at dozens of public hearings across the state.

California's community colleges enroll about 2.6 million students at 112 campuses and have a broad mission. But the completion rates for students seeking associate degrees, certificates and transfer credits is disappointing. Less than 54 percent of degree-seeking students ever reach their goals, and the rates are much lower for African-American and Latino students, and the vast majority of students who have to complete basic skills courses.

Although the Community College Board of Governors approved the task force recommendations, some of proposals remain divisive, particularly the plans that give priority enrollment to students who move more quickly through community college and, conversely, push the other students to the end of the line.

We have four commentaries on this issue from people who have been closely involved in the process over the last year. Community College Board of Governors member Peter MacDougall served as chair of the Student Success Task Force. Michelle Pilati gave testimony at many of the hearings as President of the California Community Colleges Academic Senate, as did Michele Siqueiros, Executive Director of the Campaign for College Opportunity, and Emily Kinner, the President of the California Community College Association of Student Trustees. We welcome your thoughts on the issue.

Peter MacDougall: New enrollment priorities necessary and fair



Peter MacDougall

The question that is posed is one that the Student Success Task Force studied in great detail as it developed recommendations designed to help California community college students succeed and achieve their educational goals on time.

It used to be that community colleges could serve almost anyone who wanted to enroll in a wide offering of courses – whether the goal was to get a degree or certificate, transfer to a four-year institution, or take enrichment courses. However, severe budget cuts have substantially reduced the number of courses colleges can offer. Yet enrollment policies remain in place throughout much of the system that allow hobbyists and students who have accumulated large numbers of units to register ahead of first-time students seeking certificates, associate degrees in career and technical fields, and transfer preparation.

This is not acceptable; hundreds of thousands of first-time students, recent graduates of California's high schools, have been turned away because they could not register for a single course.

The task force, recognizing that financial constraints have forced colleges to limit their educational offerings, concluded that a new set of priorities is needed to guide enrollment. The proposed policies will give priority to students seeking courses that address the core mission of our colleges: career technical education, completing lower division transfer requirements, and basic skills and English as a second language. These students will also be expected to take a diagnostic assessment, participate in orientation, and develop an education plan.

All students will need to identify a program of study within three semesters or they will lose their registration priority. In addition, students who accumulate more than 100 units, not including English as a second language and basic skills courses, would lose their enrollment priority.

Research shows that students who develop an education plan and identify a course of study early in their academic careers are more likely to succeed. Students, of course, will be able to change their course of study should their interests and goals change.

Given the substantial increase in the expense of pursuing both a four-year degree and career and technical training programs, it is imperative that California ensure low-cost access to the high-quality educational opportunities provided by our community colleges.

Altering enrollment prioritization is an efficient way of encouraging successful student behaviors and ensuring that we intelligently ration classes. While these policy proposals may have been born at a time of financial crisis in our colleges, they are fair and sensible reforms that should be made regardless of budget considerations.

Peter MacDougall, Ph.D., is chair of the California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force and is a member of the California Community Colleges Board of Governors. He served as superintendent and president of the Santa Barbara Community College District from 1981 to 2002. Prior to that, Dr. MacDougall served as dean of students at Los Angeles Pierce College and director of educational services for the Los Angeles Community College District. From 1968 to 1975, he was associate dean of students and a professor of counseling psychology in the graduate school of education at Rutgers State University of New Jersey.

Michelle L. Pilati: Deciding who's worthy conflicts with mission



Michelle Pilati

Prioritization is not a simple “do we do it or not” option; it is a multidimensional tool that can be used in effective and ineffective ways. The notion of using prioritization as a means to “enable students to graduate earlier” is simplistic at its best and fundamentally flawed at its worst. In addition to the implication that “graduation” (i.e., degree completion) is our only mission, the factors that lead students to take “too long” are complex and, often, institutional. Unit accumulation need not reflect a student “wandering” or engaging in avocational pursuits. Students may accumulate “excess” units as they strive to identify their goals, enroll in classes that do not apply towards their goal due to an inability to get into needed classes, or find a particular faculty member is so engaging that they want to learn more from him or her.

Putting aside the idea that proper prioritization will force students to establish a goal and stick with it (college grads out there – how many times did you change your major?), could we use prioritization as a means of helping students to attain their goals? Of course we could, but how do we go about this in an equitable way? Who is more “worthy”: a veteran, a new student, a student with two classes left to complete a transfer degree, a student with four classes left to complete a certificate in automotive technology, or a new immigrant who wishes to learn English? While the focus of conversation about this topic has often been about who should *not* have priority, no one has considered the universe of students who have worthy educational needs but have goals that may not be consistent with the quantitative definitions of success that we are compelled to work with.

Ideally, students would have priority access to the courses that are consistent with their goals; the student who needs a given class in order to graduate would trump the one who is taking it for pleasure, and the English-language learner would have priority for those classes to help her attain her goal. The conversation about prioritization has yet to really begin.

Michelle L. Pilati, Ph.D., is the president of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC) and a professor of psychology at Rio Hondo College, where she has been full-time faculty since 1999, and served as Distance Education Coordinator and Curriculum Chair. At the national level she has pursued her interest in online education, serving as an editor for MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching) and co-editor of the MERLOT peer-reviewed journal, JOLT. Prior to her current position, she served as a visiting professor at UC Irvine, conducted postdoctoral research at UCLA’s Drug Abuse Research Center, and worked as an academic counselor in UCLA’s Department of Psychology. She completed her doctorate in psychology at UCLA.

Michele Siqueiros: Prioritizing fulfills promise of college opportunity



Michele Siqueiros

Students are taking longer and longer to graduate from community college, and that's due to several factors, including devastating budget cuts that forced the system to eliminate thousands of courses and turn away an estimated 200,000 students last fall. For those who do get in, researchers in our 2010 [Divided We Fail](#) report found that after six years, only three in ten degree-seeking students obtained a vocational certificate, earned an associate degree, or transferred to a four-year university.

We must continue to demand adequate funding for higher education, but we can also be smarter with the resources available. Prioritizing course offerings is one way to do that. There are daily stories about community college students unable to get the classes they need for their major or program. In a year when more than 20,000 course sections were cut – including basic skills, transfer-level English and math, career pathway courses, and ESL – the following were still available: *Playing the Ukulele for Older Adults*; *Ceramics: An Option for Friday Night*; *Latin for Lifelong Learners*; *Reminiscing*; *Reclaiming Joy: Meeting Your Inner Child*; and *Finding Buried Treasure: Organizing Your Clutter*. You get the picture.

California no longer has the resources to subsidize students attending community college for recreational purposes. Prioritizing enrollment for students with a goal and a plan to complete it is smart. They will finish community college faster, freeing up spaces for the next class of high school graduates who can't find a spot at a UC or Cal State campus, can't afford the higher fees, or simply prefer the preparation, flexibility, and location of their local community college.

Under the current system, some students are forced to enroll in courses they do not need in order to keep their financial aid and/or their unit count high because the system rewards the accumulation of units with registration priority instead of prioritizing students who are trying to transfer, get a degree, or earn a vocational certificate.

The community college system has an opportunity to reengineer itself with the recent Student Success Task Force recommendations. The recommendations include prioritized enrollment and aligning course offerings. They move us toward a core value many of us believe: that the promise of college opportunity is fulfilled only if students are successful at getting through college. Prioritizing our enrollment and course offerings is one way to start students off right and prepare them to cross the finish line.

Michele Siqueiros is the executive director of the Campaign for College Opportunity, a nonprofit organization that works to expand access and success in higher education for California students by promoting policy solutions with the support of a broad-based, bipartisan statewide coalition. She was recently appointed by Governor Jerry Brown to the California Student Aid Commission. She is a board

member of the Institute for Higher Education Policy and the Alliance for a Better Community and serves on the core planning team for the Latino Student Success initiative led by Long Beach City College.

Emily Kinner: Plan could force out neediest students



Emily Kinner

The Student Success Act currently being drafted is of deep concern for many community college students. The legislation is modeled on the Student Success Task Force recommendations recently approved by the California Community Colleges Board of Governors.

While we believe many of the recommendations would bring positive changes, the California Community College Association of Student Trustees (CCCAST) has voted to oppose this package because, contrary to its stated focus on improving student success, we believe it will have the unintended consequence of pushing out students who are less likely to succeed, therefore superficially improving the success statistics of our system.

The proposed changes to the Board of Governors' fee waivers are one example. In order to continue to qualify for a waiver, students would have to identify a degree, certificate, transfer, or career advancement goal; meet institutional satisfactory progress standards; and have no more than 110 units, not including basic skills and ESL courses. This could make community college unaffordable for our most underserved students, who may take longer to get through college because they have to take time out from school to work in order to support their families. These students end up taking classes they don't need in order to keep their financial aid, but could wind up with more than 110 units as a result. Without the fee waivers, we are concerned that many of these students will drop out for good. At a recent hearing of the Joint Committee on Higher Education in Sacramento, Assemblymember Marty Block, a Democrat from San Diego, called the recommendation the "death penalty" for some of our neediest students.

During this time of fiscal crisis, with the toll it has taken on public education in the state of California, we appreciate the need for a reevaluation of how to better serve California Community College students. We also understand that there are greater problems with our government's fiscal structures that can't be addressed within the context of the Student Success Task Force.

We respect the efforts and dedication of the task force members during their yearlong deliberations regarding student success, as well as their attempts to remedy the fiscal problems of our community college system. We appreciate that our voices have been heard and have helped in the more positive

changes since the first drafts. However, we feel more time is needed to consider proposals in order to make sure we protect our most vulnerable populations because, ultimately, student success will be achieved only when the goal is student access.

Emily Kinner serves as Student Trustee for the Foothill-DeAnza Community College District and President of the California Community College Association of Student Trustees (CCCAST). She is a Rapaport Intern at the DeAnza Institute for Community and Civic Engagement. Since 2011, she has led the DeAnza EcoPass Campaign for affordable transportation and served as Coalitions-Coordinator for the "NO on PROP 23" CalPirg campaign. She is currently an organizer for the "Occupy for Education at DeAnza" project, advocating for access, equity and affordability in the California Community College System

Redrawn El Camino College district boundaries may change board makeup

By Rob Kuznia Staff Writer dailybreeze.com

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Trustee boundaries in the El Camino Community College District were changed this week for the first time in at least 60 years - a move that increases the likelihood a Latino will soon be elected to its board.

The board's 4-1 decision Tuesday night to approve a new map recommended by a seven-member panel will affect every voter in the South Bay, as it permanently alters how elections will be held.

Beginning in 2013, residents will vote only for candidates in their trustee areas, as opposed to at large, meaning voters in Torrance, for instance, will no longer have any say in who represents Inglewood and vice versa.

Officials say the new boundaries will also correct an inequity that has long been inherent in the El Camino district: Tiny areas with small populations and sprawling areas with large populations are equally represented. Under the current setup, for example, El Segundo and Inglewood are each represented by one trustee, even though the former district is home to 16,000 residents and the latter 110,000.

In the new system - which takes effect in November 2013 - the population of every trustee area is about 108,000.

The systemic overhaul will have political ramifications for certain board members, which perhaps explains the lone dissenting vote of Maureen O'Donnell.

O'Donnell, who currently represents Trustee Area 5 in Torrance, will effectively be pushed out of office in 2013 unless she moves to another part of town.

The same is true for Trustee Ray Gen, who currently represents Area 4 in El Segundo, but he voted for the plan anyway.

"I thought (the board-appointed redistricting committee) did a great job," said Gen, whose second term will expire in 2013. "There's only so many ways you could carve up the district."

He added that he isn't sure if he will run again in 2015.

"If I don't, I think I've served well and I enjoyed the process," he said. "But you never know."

The board's action changes the fundamental nature of how the trustee areas are divvied up. As is, the areas are oriented around locations of high schools. But the new map is based on a more complicated formula that takes into account several factors, such as population size, racial makeup and city boundaries.

The new configuration increases the likelihood of a Latino board member because Area 2 - which now takes in Hawthorne, Lawndale and Lennox - will shrink to include only the vast majority of Hawthorne and all of Lennox.

That area is currently represented by Lawndale resident Mary Combs, who is white. If she opts to run for re-election in 2015, she will be forced to compete in Area 4 representing both Lawndale and the eastern half Torrance. In 2013, meanwhile, there will be an election for the new Area 2, which is 63 percent Latino.

The idea of redrawing the boundaries has long been championed by board President Bill Beverly, who in November was elected to his sixth term.

But it wasn't until other California community colleges started getting slapped with lawsuits over issues of racial equity a couple years ago that the effort in El Camino began to gain traction.

In October, for instance, Cerritos Community College - facing a legal threat from a group concerned about the voting power of Latino residents - moved to change its elections process so trustees are elected by trustee area instead of at large.

Beverly, who noted he began urging the board to go this route a decade ago, said the El Camino board voted to make the changes for all the right reasons.

"We weren't sued," he said. "It was just the right thing to do."

He added that the board already is a diverse body, noting that it includes an Irish Catholic woman, a Jewish woman, a black man and an Asian man - although there are no Latino members.

As for O'Donnell, she presented her objections in technical terms, but it appears she suspects at least some level of political maneuvering against her.

O'Donnell took exception to the way in which the proposed new districts are numbered - her new district will be No. 4 instead of No. 5. She also raised questions about the legality of the motion to approve the recommended map as is, over her objections. The motion was made by Josh Casper, the student member of the El Camino board. The student trustee has an honorary presence on the board, so any votes cast by such board members are strictly symbolic.

"We as representatives are elected by the public to vote, make motions, etcetera," she said. "Not somebody sitting there as a student adviser."

She added that Casper is the son of faculty members at the college. In November, the faculty union made a concerted but unsuccessful effort to unseat Beverly, who was supported by O'Donnell.

Beverly sided with the board majority over his ally.

"I could see no logic to changing it to protect an incumbent," he said, "and as much as I would like to do that for a person I consider a friend, I believe that would be inappropriate grounds for rejecting the recommendation of the committee."

Despite her objections, O'Donnell - a former Torrance city councilwoman - said she long ago decided against running for re-election in 2013.

O'Donnell added that she is in favor of the overall goals of the plan.

"I favor a system that allows voters to select people with whom they are acquainted rather than strangers in other parts of the district," she said.

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Cost of ignorance -- Ill-prepared students a burden for colleges

The Daily Breeze

Editorial:

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The days of free or low-cost higher education for California students are long gone. Budget constraints are making it even more of a challenge for students to get a college education.

There isn't much that today's students -- or their parents, if they pick up the bills -- can do about tuition costs that have skyrocketed in the past decade. But future students -- and their parents -- can do something to help keep costs down: make sure they are adequately prepared for college.

Budget cuts have forced California's public colleges and universities to make tough choices about how to continue to serve students. They are cutting back on classes, limiting enrollment and raising tuition. And one reason is the cost of the remedial education they have to provide.

For example, fully 90 percent of students who enter Long Beach Community College need remedial classes in math and English. That dismal number comes despite efforts by the Long Beach Unified School District, which does more than most to ensure students' success, and its partners at CSULB and LBCC to prepare students for college.

Called the Long Beach College Promise, the program guaranteed LBUSD graduates admission to California State University Long Beach if they met the minimum requirements for college. Now, under a plan being discussed by CSU officials, the bottom 10 percent of those students would have to take remedial courses at LBCC before they could be admitted.

Given the elimination of tens of millions of dollars in funding for CSU and UC schools, the days of guaranteeing the lowest performers a place in the classroom could be over, and rightly so.

CSULB isn't alone in adopting higher standards for admissions. Other CSU campuses, including Fullerton, already have similar admissions guidelines that demand higher grade-point averages and test scores for entering freshmen, along with additional prerequisite coursework at the community college level before a student could transfer to a CSU school.

That is placing a huge burden on community colleges, where tuition is a fraction of the amount charged by CSU and UC schools.

LBCC, facing millions of dollars in budget cuts itself, would have to limit admissions from high schools outside of those served by the Long Beach school district. On a positive note, it would offer more courses toward a student's major, easing the burden on CSU and UC schools.

Those changes have an added benefit: Students, who would take more prerequisites at community colleges, would graduate faster while paying less. Tuition and fees at CSULB total about \$6,200 a year. Community colleges charge \$36 a unit -- one of the biggest bargains in higher education.

The reality of higher education is that less money is available as more students compete for scarce spots. The other reality is that far too many high school graduates can't read and write and do math. That puts an unnecessary burden on community colleges, which have to offer far too many remedial classes.

Dan Walters: Jerry Brown's budget plan looks like a pipe dream

By Dan Walters
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For the past two months, Gov. Jerry Brown has been selling the concept that were the Legislature to approve his proposed budget and voters to approve his tax increase, the state's fiscal house would be repaired.

It's turning out to be more a pipe dream than a realistic plan.

The courts and the Obama administration are stalling, perhaps permanently, many of the spending cuts that the 2011-12 budget had assumed.

A Legislature controlled by Brown's fellow Democrats is refusing to jump-start more health and welfare reductions in his 2012-13 budget.

Controller John Chiang has reported that spending is running \$2.5 billion above budget estimates in the current fiscal year and revenue is running \$2.5 billion below expectations.

Already, then, Brown's budget scheme is billions of dollars short of closing the state's chronic operating deficit – and the situation got a lot worse Monday.

The Legislature's budget analyst declared that revenue for the remainder of this fiscal year and all of the next is likely to be \$6.5 billion short of Brown's expectations, even with the proposed tax increase and even counting a \$2 billion windfall from Facebook's big stock sale.

It's a big number – ironically, just about as big as what Brown has hoped to realize from the sales and income taxes he'll put before voters next November – and shatters the scenario that Brown has been peddling for weeks.

That scenario has been that he and Democratic legislators would produce, by June 15, a budget that's balanced on the assumption that the voters approve the new taxes, with automatic "triggers" that would slash spending further, especially school spending, were the tax hikes to fail.

Legislative Analyst Mac Taylor's revenue report would, if followed, force Brown and legislators to cut much, much more deeply into the spending side of the budget ledger to produce a balanced budget – even with the assumed new taxes – by June 15 and that

would mean, most likely, whacking money for K-12 schools and health and welfare services.

And were those cuts to be made, it would leave precious little to include in the automatic trigger cuts.

The alternative for Brown, et al., would be to ignore the analyst's forecast and base a new budget on a rosy income assumption – which is exactly what they did last June to produce a budget that was balanced on paper, thereby allowing legislators to collect their paychecks, but that quickly fell apart when the phantom revenue didn't materialize.

Another phony budget, however, would not escape notice in the media and would undercut the image of tight-fisted financial prudence Brown has been trying very hard to cultivate.

It also would hand opponents of his tax increase a ready-made argument that he's not to be trusted.

How 'Flipping' the Classroom Can Improve the Traditional Lecture

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By Dan Berrett

Andrew P. Martin loves it when his lectures break out in chaos.

It happens frequently, when he asks the 80 students in his evolutionary-biology class at the University of Colorado at Boulder to work in small groups to solve a problem, or when he asks them to persuade one another that the answer they arrived at before class is correct.

When they start working together, his students rarely stay in their seats, which are bolted to the floor. Instead they gather in the hallway or in the aisles, or spill toward the front of the room, where the professor typically stands.

Mr. Martin, a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology, drops in on the discussions, asking and answering questions, and hearing where students are stumped. "Students are effectively educating each other," he says of the din that overtakes his room. "It means they're in control, and not me."

Such moments of chaos are embraced by advocates of a teaching technique called "flipping." As its name suggests, flipping describes the inversion of expectations in the traditional college lecture. It takes many forms, including interactive engagement, just-in-time teaching (in which students respond to Web-based questions before class, and the professor uses this feedback to inform his or her teaching), and peer instruction.

But the techniques all share the same underlying imperative: Students cannot passively receive material in class, which is one reason some students dislike flipping. Instead they gather the information largely outside of class, by reading, watching recorded lectures, or listening to podcasts.

And when they are in class, students do what is typically thought to be homework, solving problems with their professors or peers, and applying what they learn to new contexts. They continue this process on their own outside class.

The immediacy of teaching in this way enables students' misconceptions to be corrected well before they emerge on a midterm or final exam. The result, according to a growing body of research, is more learning.

While the idea is not new, the topic of flipping has consistently cropped up during discussions at recent conferences about teaching and learning—and often when the

subject turns to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, or the STEM disciplines.

The recent interest is driven by the convergence of several trends.

The first is technological innovation, which has made it easier to distribute lectures by the world's leading instructors. Some faculty members wonder whether it still makes sense to deliver a lecture when students can see the same material covered more authoritatively and engagingly—and at their own pace and on their own schedule. The supply of such offerings, at low or no cost, is increasing, as demonstrated by recent news of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's founding of MITx and a Stanford University professor's start-up of Udacity.

At the same time, policy makers, scholars, advocacy groups, and others who seek to improve higher education want to see more evidence that students are truly learning in college. As pressure mounts to graduate more students, and as cognitive psychology produces new insights into how students learn, these observers say professors can no longer simply pump out information and take it on faith that students understand it.

Adding to these forces is economic reality. Strained budgets make it difficult for colleges to decrease class sizes and create more seminars in which low student-to-professor ratios allow a high degree of personal attention. Even advocates for new approaches to teaching concede that the lecture is not going away. The lecture model—putting dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of students in a room with a professor—endures because it makes economic sense.

Flipping allows colleges, particularly large research institutions with big classes, to make the traditional lecture model more productive, says Harrison Keller, vice provost for higher-education policy at the University of Texas at Austin, which held a recent seminar on course flipping for its faculty. "If you do this well, you can use faculty members' time and expertise more appropriately, and you can also use your facilities more efficiently," he says. More important, "you can get better student-learning outcomes."

Those forces are coming together to prompt a rethinking of the faculty member's role in the classroom. "I see a paradigm shift, and it's coming soon," says Michael S. Palmer, an associate professor of chemistry and assistant director of the Teaching Resource Center at the University of Virginia. "Content is not going to be the thing we do. We're going to help unpack that content."

Identifying Key Concepts

Professors have flipped courses for decades. Humanities professors expect their students to read a novel on their own and do not dedicate class time to going over the plot. Class time is devoted to exploring symbolism or drawing out themes. And law professors have long used the Socratic method in large lectures, which compels students to study the material before class or risk buckling under a barrage of their professor's questions.

The way STEM disciplines are traditionally taught makes them particularly ripe for change, Mr. Palmer says, because of their "long tradition of very didactic teaching, which involved disseminating content." By contrast, he says, the humanities and social sciences have been about exploring ideas.

Still, flipping has been adopted in isolated precincts of STEM disciplines, particularly physics. Some of the most notable examples illustrate the different forms the technique can take.

At the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, for example, the math department has flipped its teaching of calculus since the mid-1990s, says Karen Rhea, a lecturer and director of the introductory mathematics program.

Michigan offers up to 60 small sections of introductory calculus, with a maximum of 32 students in each class, which meet for 80 minutes three days a week. Faculty members receive intense training: a weeklong course at the end of August, followed by weekly meetings and regular classroom visits throughout the semester from more-experienced instructors.

Consistent with the flipping model, students at Michigan do their reading before class. The instructor gives a brief lecture, asks them about the reading, and goes through an example from the textbook. Students take turns going to the board to present their answers or working in groups, which might be followed by another short lecture.

As the students work on the next problem, the instructor circulates. Rather than sending students home to struggle with a new concept, the instructors can hear—and correct—misunderstandings as they arise. "We're asking them to solve problems that are not template problems," Ms. Rhea says. "In your presence they're learning how to think, and we're learning what they're struggling with."

Class size is not the most important factor in teaching this way, Ms. Rhea says. What's more critical is teaching and testing a set of basic principles of differential calculus that are articulated in a test called a calculus concept inventory. This 22-question test focuses not on whether students can run through calculations but on whether they understand the underlying concepts.

"It's easy to measure if they can take derivatives out the wazoo," Ms. Rhea says, "but it's kind of harder to see what they're getting underneath."

Research by Ms. Rhea and two colleagues suggests that Michigan's teaching methods have led to greater gains in conceptual understanding. The techniques have been lauded by the Association of American Universities, among others.

In 2008, Michigan gave concept inventories to students before they started calculus and after they finished, and calculated the difference relative to the maximum gain they could

have made. Students in Michigan's flipped courses showed gains at about twice the rate of those in traditional lectures at other institutions who took the same inventories.

The students at Michigan who fared worst—a group of 12 who were at risk of failing the course—showed the same gain as those who demonstrated the largest increase in understanding from traditional lectures elsewhere.

A View From the Lecture Hall

Michigan's program did not randomly assign its own students to courses using different teaching models, as conventional education research would dictate. But the gains in learning that were observed at Michigan correspond with similar findings about teaching methodologies in physics, which have been documented by Richard R. Hake, a professor emeritus of physics at Indiana University at Bloomington.

In fact, the project at Michigan was modeled on similar work by physicists, who have been among the most innovative STEM scholars in trying new approaches to teaching and testing the results.

One of the most outspoken physicists is Eric Mazur of Harvard University. He has been flipping courses for 21 years using a method he calls "peer instruction," in which students work in small groups to answer conceptual questions during lectures. Mr. Mazur recently established a network of practitioners in the technique.

He began to use peer instruction after testing his own students on the force concept inventory, which predates the calculus concept inventory, and which tests understanding of the foundations of Newtonian mechanics. Despite his consistently high ratings from students, Mr. Mazur saw that they were not learning as much as he thought they were.

"We put a lot of emphasis on the transfer of information," Mr. Mazur said at a recent conference at Harvard on teaching and learning. But that model is making less sense as sources of information grow more plentiful. "Simply transmitting information should not be the focus of teaching; helping students to assimilate that information should."

At the conference, he demonstrated how his methods help students absorb information and transfer concepts. He briefly explained an aspect of thermodynamics: When molecules are heated, they move away from one another.

After asking if there were any questions on this concept, he told the attendees to pick up their electronic "clickers" to answer a question. It was not a simple test of comprehension; he asked people to apply the concept to a new context.

Imagine a rectangular sheet of metal with a circle cut out of the middle, he said. What would happen to the diameter of the circular gap if the metal were to be heated uniformly? Would the diameter of the hole get bigger, stay the same, or shrink?

The attendees entered their answers on their clickers. Mr. Mazur told them to find someone sitting near them who had chosen a different answer and try to persuade them that their answer was correct. The room quickly grew noisy.

I answered that the gap would get smaller, figuring that the material would melt and the hole would start to close. Behind me, a psychologist explained how he thought it would remain the same because the interplay between the expanding metal and the air in the middle would balance each other. We went back and forth, failing to change the other's mind.

Mr. Mazur ended the discussion and began to move on to a new point when people in the audience started protesting. As it turns out, both my neighbor and I were wrong: The hole would expand, as happens when a jar's metal lid is heated.

"Once you engage the students' minds," Mr. Mazur said, "there's an eagerness to learn, to be right, to master."

Active Learning

But such eagerness is not much in evidence on students' evaluations, says Melissa E. Franklin, chair of Harvard's physics department. While she does not defend the traditional lecture and lauds Mr. Mazur for advancing the cause of teaching, she views flipping with some skepticism.

Harvard colleagues have tried flipping, Ms. Franklin says, but few have stuck with it. It demands that faculty members be good at answering students' questions on the spot, even when their misconceptions are not yet clear because they are still processing the information.

It can also be very labor-intensive for faculty members who do not have teaching support, she adds, if it requires a professor to read questions that students submit before class (which is characteristic of just-in-time teaching). "For a normal, straight-ahead professor, there's a steep learning curve," Ms. Franklin says.

But her chief critique is based on the intensity of students' responses. The average score on a student evaluation of a flipped course is about half what the same professor gets when using the traditional lecture, she says. "When the students are feeling really bad about required courses, it doesn't seem like a good thing."

Mr. Mazur concedes that some students resist participating to the extent his technique demands. Many students have done quite well receiving information and spitting it back out, he says. But while some come to embrace the flipped classroom, others never do.

Liking the class is ultimately beside the point, Mr. Mazur says. He says his results from using peer instruction show that, on the force concept inventory, nonmajors who take his class outperform physics majors who learn in traditional lectures.

"You want students to like class, but that's not the goal of education," Mr. Mazur says. "I could give them foot massages and they'd like it."

Matt C. Hudson, a senior who is double-majoring in physiology and evolutionary biology, learned to appreciate the flipped classroom while taking Mr. Martin's class at Colorado, just as Mr. Mazur says his students sometimes did in his classes at Harvard.

"I really was caught off guard at first," says Mr. Hudson, who was initially adamant that students taking a lecture class should be lectured to. About three weeks into the course, his view changed. Mr. Martin split the students into small groups to discuss the heritability of beak sizes in finches, and how that trait related to a bird's chance of survival.

When a fellow student explained the relationship to him, the link became clear. "Having six or seven ways to think about a problem is better than just having your own way to think about a problem," Mr. Hudson says.

As both Mr. Mazur's and Mr. Martin's classes indicate, the cognitive strain that flipping imposes on students accounts for much of its success—and the resistance it engenders. Ultimately that strain is what is most important, not whether the course is flipped, says Carl E. Wieman, associate director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. He has documented gains when relatively inexperienced physics graduate students and postdoctoral researchers lecture hundreds of students but stop intermittently to quiz and give feedback on the students' understanding of key concepts.

Whatever method a faculty member attempts, Mr. Wieman says, he or she should start by defining the underlying concepts to be taught and the learning outcomes that will be demonstrated. And it is not enough, he says, to simply declare that the learning outcome is to cover the first four chapters of a textbook.

"It's a whole different paradigm of teaching," says Mr. Wieman, likening the professor's role to that of a cognitive coach. "A good coach figures out what makes a great athlete and what practice helps you achieve that. They motivate the learner to put out intense effort, and they provide expert feedback that's very timely."