

Limited Confidence in Boards

Inside Higher Ed

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By Ry Rivard

College presidents, particularly at four-year public institutions, harbor doubts about the effectiveness of members of the governing boards, according to a new survey by Gallup and Inside Higher Ed.

About three-fourths of college presidents said they were confident their institutions were well-governed by their boards, but answers to other questions suggest that confidence is limited at best.

A surprising number of all presidents would change things if they could and are dubious of some board members: 40 percent of college presidents -- including 68 percent of public four-year college presidents -- said they would replace board members if they could, and 11 percent of college presidents clearly disagree that their institutions are well-governed at the board level.

Presidents' view of other institutions' boards is quite dim: only 3 percent of college presidents are strongly confident American colleges are well-governed by boards.

The results come from an online survey by Gallup of 523 presidents at a variety of higher ed institutions, including public and private four-year institutions, community colleges and for-profits. Survey topics included affirmative action, the Obama administration's existing "scorecard" for rating colleges, campus safety efforts, colleges' cooperation with K-12 schools, and governance at the board level.

Within the results about board governance, there was a stark difference between the attitudes of presidents at public and private four-year colleges. The 102 four-year public college presidents surveyed were for the most part more negative about their board members than the 197 private four-year college presidents.

For instance, 45 percent of the four-year private college presidents strongly agreed they were confident their institution was well-governed by its board. Only 20 percent of public four-year college presidents thought that.

"I think the difference in how the board members are chosen goes a long way to explaining these findings," said Ronald Ehrenberg, the director of the Cornell Higher Education Research Institute. Most public boards are appointed by governors or other state officials, or are elected, while most private boards are self-perpetuating.

While 68 percent of four-year public college presidents would pick new board members if they could, the exact opposite was true for four-year private college presidents. Sixty-seven percent of private college presidents said they would not select different board members, even if given the choice.

John Casteen, president emeritus of the University of Virginia, said the survey's findings are "consistent with what I would describe as the consensus in the business."

He said some public college boards can end up populated by board members with a history of political donations to the governor who does the selecting rather than because of any higher ed experience. He said there is nothing in the board member appointment system in some states that tells board members they need to be looking out for the public trust.

"At least in Virginia, the Legislature has simply not wanted to get involved in decisions about who gets to sit on the board," Casteen said. "That results in a situation where board members are much less well-prepared to do their work."

He said the survey points to what happens as a result.

"If I were a governor trying to do a good job, I would read that and say 'Uh-oh, I need to figure this out,'" Casteen said.

The poll comes as board action has attracted an unusual amount of attention, including high-profile disputes involving boards at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Virginia.

Most of the questions about board governance asked presidents to use a five-point scale to describe their thoughts. On the scale, 1 represented strong disagreement with a statement while 5 represented strong agreement.

Brandon Busted, who leads Gallup's education work, said the polling firm has found that a 5 – the strongest level of agreement -- means what it says. After that, though, a 4 often means "maybe" and a 3 is a "soft no," he said.

By that measure, 11 percent of presidents are not confident their own institution is well-governed at a board level, while 14 percent gave a "soft no." Of the rest, 74 percent of presidents said they were confident their institutions were well governed by boards, but 36 percent ranked their confidence as 4 and 38 percent ranked it as a 5.

Because presidents rarely say anything negative about their boards in public, Busted said he was surprised by what the presidents said in private.

"It's only a third that say they've got a solid board, which, to me, is a pretty pathetic approval rating," he said.

In a separate but recent survey, Gallup looked at the relationship between public school superintendents and school boards. Superintendents have roughly the same attitudes as college presidents, but Busted said that was surprising given that superintendents are dealt a hand by voters in school board elections that is more unpredictable than the constituencies that pick college board members.

Peter Eckel, the vice president for programs and research at the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, the longstanding organization of governing board members, said he was encouraged by the results. He noted the 74 percent of board members who agreed they were confident their board was doing a good job.

“I think it’s a great finding. I think it shows that the clear majority of presidents work to create constructive relationships with their boards and they are doing the hard work that boards are supposed to be doing,” he said.

Eckel said his organization is working on a more detailed survey of college presidents’ relationship with boards. It will be released later this fall. He said he expects to see differences in attitudes among public and private college presidents as well as differences between more and less experienced presidents.

About half of all the presidents in the Inside Higher Ed/Gallup survey said they strongly agreed they and their boards were in agreement on most decisions, a figure that includes community colleges and four-year institutions. But there was a big distinction again between the attitudes of public and private four-year college presidents: 63 percent of private four-year college presidents strongly agreed they saw eye-to-eye with their boards most of the time. Only 27 percent of public four-year college presidents said the same.

In an astonishingly low figure that resembles the adage that Americans love their congressional representative but hate Congress, only 3 percent of the presidents in the Gallup survey strongly agreed with the statement, “I am confident that higher education institutions in the U.S. are well-governed at the board level.”

Eckel said the low number was due in part to governance issues that have placed boards in a bad light over the last year and a half, including the tussle at the U.Va., in which the board ousted a popular president and was forced to reverse itself amid a campus revolt. He also said presidents are likely to only share problems with each other rather than successes, so presidents form their vision of other institutions through horror stories rather than victories.

“Rarely do you get a phone call from a colleague that says, ‘I had a great board meeting!’” Eckel said.

Anne D. Neal, president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, which urges boards to take a more active role to make decisions about curriculums and to control costs, noted that just 41 percent of college presidents strongly agreed their board

members were very knowledgeable about higher ed issues. Part of this is presidents' own fault, she said.

"The president has information and controls access to it," Neal said. "So if the trustees are not well-informed, certainly some of the blame has to be placed at the foot of the presidents, or it certainly represents a failure of communication between the presidents and lay board members who are, at the end of the day, volunteers."

The Inside Higher Ed/Gallup survey was conducted from mid-June to early July. Its margin of error is plus or minus 4.3 percentage points.

Among its other finding:

About a fourth of the presidents said their campuses had armed security guards or police. Of those, a third said their institution has considered adding more and 54 percent of presidents reported recently increasing the security and safety budget on their campuses.

Only 1 percent of presidents said President Obama's College Scorecard was effective and 51 percent also said it does not accurately reflect their institution. A scorecard is at the heart of Obama's recent proposal to curb college costs by tying federal financial aid to a rankings system. But the current scorecard will need to be modified before and if that ever happens. The poll was conducted before the president made his new plans public.

A tenth of college presidents believe minority enrollment would decrease on their campuses if new limits are placed on affirmative action.

Half of college presidents said their institutions have strong working relationships with K-12 school districts and 67 percent of presidents said their institutions grant prior-learning credits.

San Bernardino bankruptcy ruling is a blow to CalPERS

By Dale Kasler
dkasler@sacbee.com

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Over objections from CalPERS, a judge last week declared that the city of San Bernardino is eligible for bankruptcy, paving the way for a historic showdown over the sanctity of public employee pensions.

The ruling by U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Meredith Jury means San Bernardino officials will now negotiate a payment plan in the coming weeks with CalPERS and other creditors. Experts say the city is expected to develop a plan that would “impair,” or reduce the amount of money paid to CalPERS. That would translate into lower pension benefits for retirees and current employees – shattering decades of precedent over public pensions in California.

“The feeling is they’re going to have to impair pension obligations because that’s their largest liability,” said Karol Denniston, a San Francisco lawyer and expert on municipal bankruptcies. Any plan ultimately will require the judge’s approval.

A similar fight is brewing in Stockton, which filed for bankruptcy protection in spring 2012, a few months before San Bernardino. At the same time, officials in California are closely watching Detroit’s largest-ever municipal bankruptcy, which could well result in reduction of pension benefits, Denniston said.

The state-appointed emergency manager for Detroit has raised the possibility of slashing pensions by 90 percent, and while a more moderate reduction is likely, that is likely to influence the outcome in the two California cities, Denniston said. Although the Detroit case was filed just recently, the case is being fast-tracked by the bankruptcy judge and a resolution is likely to come sooner than in the California cases.

“That’s going to shift the dynamic,” said Denniston, who is representing a group of Stockton taxpayers in that city’s bankruptcy case.

At stake is whether bankruptcy trumps state law. The California Public Employees’ Retirement System has said the pension benefits promised to employees and retirees represent a legal obligation guaranteed by state law. The sanctity of pensions is one reason employees enter the public sector, particularly in cities like Sacramento.

Stockton officials have continued making their regular contributions to CalPERS, triggering a court fight with the city’s Wall Street bond creditors. That dispute remains unresolved.

San Bernardino took the opposite tack, temporarily halting payments to the big pension fund after filing for Chapter 9 bankruptcy protection in August 2012. The city resumed payments in July of this year – but still owes CalPERS about \$14 million from last year and has indicated it wants to restructure its relationship with CalPERS to reduce payments going forward. San Bernardino is supposed to pay the pension fund \$24 million a year, said CalPERS spokesman Brad Pacheco.

CalPERS and San Bernardino have been butting heads for months. The pension fund tried to sue the city last fall but was denied permission by the bankruptcy judge.

Last week, at a hearing in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Riverside, lawyers for CalPERS argued that the city wasn't eligible for bankruptcy. Michael Gearin, an attorney for CalPERS, told the judge that it would create "a dangerous precedent" to let San Bernardino remain in bankruptcy. He said other cities with financial difficulties would be tempted to flee to bankruptcy court to take advantage of the legal buffers created by the Chapter 9 municipal bankruptcy laws.

But the judge said it was clear that San Bernardino was deserving of bankruptcy protection. "I can't see anything other than dissolving the city if they can't file under Chapter 9," Jury said, according to an account in the Riverside Press-Enterprise.

In a statement issued last week, the big pension fund said it's considering an appeal.

"We are disappointed with the judge's ruling but CalPERS will continue to participate in the bankruptcy process in good faith. CalPERS will also continue to work with the city of San Bernardino so it can hopefully resolve its financial problems and also deliver promised benefits to their city employees and retirees," the fund said. "However, CalPERS must and will continue to aggressively pursue all past due contributions ... These payments are statutorily required and necessary to deliver on the pension benefits promised to San Bernardino employees as a form of deferred compensation. They have worked for and earned these benefits."

Denniston, however, said it's likely CalPERS will have to accept lower payments, given San Bernardino's pressing financial problems.

"It's kind of crazy to say, 'Pay us 100 percent, we don't care what happens,'" the bankruptcy law expert said.

Schools chief Don Brann sees a new day for Inglewood Unified

By Rob Kuznia, The Daily Breeze

POSTED: 09/04/13,

Looking at La Tijera K-8 Academy of Excellence Charter School, the new leader of the troubled Inglewood Unified School District doesn't see last year's test scores. He sees shiny potential.

The school's state-of-the-art building is brand new — the result of a \$30 million rebuild — the students are crisply dressed in uniforms, the school has a new academic mission and all of the rooms are fully outfitted with wireless technology.

School started there and across the district on Wednesday, and Don Brann was on hand to tour the facility. It was his first time inside, and he was impressed.

"I just get the sense that everything is very professional here," he said, "because of the way people are dressed, because of the high quality of the interior, because of the technology ... everybody seems to be giving good customer service."

To Brann, the school of 700 students is emblematic of the fresh start that's needed across the entire school district, where an exodus of students to charter schools and elsewhere has fueled a financial debacle that now has the district deficit-spending to the tune of some \$18 million.

In June, Brann was appointed to the post by state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson. Brann, who came out of retirement to take the job, is the third administrator to lead the district since last fall, when Inglewood Unified became the ninth district in the history of California to be taken over by the state.

As the administrator, he acts as the one-man replacement to the five-member board that lost its legislative powers and the local superintendent who lost his job as part of the takeover, which came with a \$55 million loan.

Brann is hoping to accomplish in Inglewood Unified what he pulled off in the Wiseburn School District in Hawthorne. There, he reversed a steep drop in enrollment by successfully floating construction bonds to build new schools, and then using those new schools to attract families from all over the Westside.

In this sense, La Tijera's brand-new campus is a page out of his playbook.

Brann notes that major upgrades to other campuses in Inglewood are on the way. In November, to the surprise of many school watchers, Inglewood residents approved a \$90 million construction bond by a wide margin.

At La Tijera, the rebrand seems to be working. In addition to having a gleaming new structure, the school has a new configuration: this year it became a district-run charter school, rechristening what was once La Tijera School into La Tijera K-8 Academy of Excellence Charter School.

(This essentially means that the school in Ladera Heights admits students from outside the attendance boundaries, though locals still get first dibs.)

The move proved popular. At a pre-enrollment meeting this summer, so many parents showed up that the principal, Ugema James, had to cut it short for fear of violating the fire code.

“The community was really, really excited,” said James, who has worked in the district 21 years but is only beginning her second year at La Tijera.

Brann is under no delusions about why parents flooded the gates.

“‘Charter’ is just a magic word in America these days,” he said. “We know we need to do much more than just have the name ‘charter’ in our title and a beautiful campus because it’s what happens inside the rooms that makes the difference at the end of the day.”

As for test scores at the school, they’ve been dismal in recent years. At 668, the school’s Academic Performance Index rose by 16 points this past year, but it remains the lowest of the district’s elementary schools. In May, rankings released by the state showed that La Tijera fell in the bottom 10 percent of all schools statewide. The school’s low ranking even held true when stacked against schools of like demographics.

Brann believes better times are coming.

“We’re not going to be down in the doldrums,” he said. “We’re going to turn the lights on, and open the windows and go for it here.”

For L.A.'s school board, full-time pay for full-time jobs

By The Times Editorial board

September 11, 2013

Running the schools was a lot simpler before there were federal standards and accountability tests and a commitment to closing the achievement gap for disadvantaged students. Back then, the Los Angeles Unified school board oversaw the district in much the same way as, say, the Police Commission now oversees the Police Department. Education experts — the superintendent and administrative staff — directed the day-to-day operations of the district, while school board members put the stamp of approval on budgets, contracts, new hires and new curricula and got directly involved in particularly gnarly issues.

A spot on the school board required relatively little time or expertise in those days. But now, that's no longer the case.

L.A. Unified grapples with every major issue confronting education: Feeding hundreds of thousands of hungry children. Raising graduation rates. Parceling out a \$6-billion budget. Carrying out the biggest public construction project in the nation. Teaching more than 200,000 students for whom English isn't their first language. Dealing with charter schools and "parent triggers" and teacher evaluations. Overseeing this district is no longer a part-time job for amateurs.

L.A. Unified's seven board members are elected by district; constituent service to those districts has also become a major part of the job. Board members guide parents, fight for resources for their schools and even mediate conflicts at individual campuses. Former board member Nury Martinez saved the district's adult-ed school for aviation mechanics at Van Nuys Airport in her district. The task required jumping through bureaucratic hoops with the Federal Aviation Administration.

Board members should — and mostly do — work full time. They are just not paid like it.

In 2006, a compensation panel made a confused decision to allow board members to work part time, in which case they earn \$26,347 and can keep their outside jobs. Or, it decided, they can forgo outside employment, work full time and be paid \$45,637 a year. (That number was tied to a first-year teacher's salary). That's hardly a compensation decision at all. It's more of a failure to make a decision.

Right now, Tamar Galatzan is the only part-timer; she also is an assistant city attorney. Board members have at times relied on family or pensions to see them through. Others struggle. The system is particularly hard on L.A. Unified teachers who run for the school board, such as Steve Zimmer. For conflict-of-interest reasons, they can't retain their old jobs, but their new ones pays far less than they earned in the classroom.

The cost of fixing this for seven people is minimal. Although school board members don't need to earn the nearly \$200,000 that City Council members do, they deserve to be decently paid for the work they perform. It's time to pay a full-time salary for a full-time job.

Students at City Honors Charter High in Inglewood protest lack of leadership

By Rob Kuznia, The Daily Breeze

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Chanting “respect our charter!”, a group of students at City Honors Charter High School in Inglewood held a demonstration Thursday to protest the lack of leadership at their school ever since the principal who was hired to take the helm stopped showing up after two days on the job.

The false start on the part of Armando Mena — principal and founder of the Lennox Math, Science and Technology Academy — followed a tough year at City Honors, whose prior leadership change left the school without a coherent master schedule for this fall. That made it difficult for students to get the classes they needed, among other things.

“It seems like our voices haven’t been heard,” said Calvin Peary, a senior at the school who is running for student-body president. “Quite honestly, I’m about ready to check out.”

The rocky opening at the Inglewood Unified School District’s top high school was directly related to a drama that has been unfolding next door in Lennox.

Mena had resigned in Lennox largely over differences he was having with the Lennox School District, which has control over the academy. Immediately after submitting his two-week notice, he began working at City Honors. Mena stresses that he performed those first two days on the job in Inglewood as a volunteer.

“I wasn’t scheduled to start until Sept. 16th,” he said. “I gave up Labor Day weekend to try make sense of the master schedule, which was really bad. It was a big mess; the schedule hadn’t been done. I did the best I could to try to fix some of those things, once again on a volunteer basis.”

But he returned to Lennox amid outcry from the Lennox community. Teachers at the academy he founded 11 years ago swiftly put together an application to secede from the Lennox School District. It was enough to persuade Mena to come back, and City Honors — where school started Sept. 4 — was suddenly a ship with no captain in troubled waters.

“He got us really excited about a lot of things,” Peary said. “Then he just left and didn’t come back.”

The turmoil illustrates how consequential the false start of a principal can be for a school — especially one in Inglewood Unified, which is still trying to regain its footing as an organization after being taken over by the state a year ago.

City Honors, which built a strong reputation over the course of its first seven years in existence, had a tough year during its eighth year, which ended this summer. That’s

partly because the leader who last fall took the reins from the popular founder, Thelma Brown, wasn't as well received by the school, sources say. That leader, Joy Bramlette, has been reassigned to an administrative position in the district office.

Many students and teachers at City Honors have communicated a desire for Brown to return this year, launching a letter-writing campaign to that end.

When the deal with Mena fell through, Don Brann, Inglewood Unified's new state-appointed administrator, decided it would be a good move to hire Brown. He asked her to come out of retirement to lead the school. She obliged and is scheduled to start Monday.

"We are not satisfied with how that school has opened," Brann said. "It's the only problem of any size I've had within this district so far. This one because of a lack of leadership, and you know why. We're trying to square it away, and we'll get it."

Joining Brown will be a co-leader, Penny Fraumeni, a retired middle-school principal from the Hacienda-La Puente Unified School District in the San Gabriel Valley. Fraumeni was named California's National Distinguished Principal in 2011.

"She's good, and I think she'll bring order to this," Brann said.

Peary said he also is upset with how the district has not honored a protocol that requires a committee of stakeholders from the school to vet principal candidates. That said, he had kind words for Brann.

"I love Don Brann; he's been working with us really well," he said. "You can't fix problems overnight. I think he's doing the best job that he can."

Mena, meanwhile, said he feels bad about what happened at City Honors.

"They are really good kids," he said. "I think Dr. Brann is doing everything he can. I feel bad because I think I placed him in a difficult position. Nothing was intentional; it was a result of this community (in Lennox) coming together. I couldn't walk away."

Dan Walters: Unions held whip hand in California Capitol

By Dan Walters
dwalters@sacbee.com

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When the Legislature's 2013 session began nine months ago, a giant question mark hung over the Capitol.

What would be the effect of having so many new members – nearly half of the Assembly – and of new districts created by an independent commission for the first time, of the first-ever use of a top- two primary election system, and of having two-thirds Democratic supermajorities in both houses?

We now know the answer: Unions, particularly those representing public employees, tightened their already strong grip.

Dozens of measures that unions wanted to enhance their members' incomes, fringe benefits, bargaining positions and procedural rights were enacted, albeit not always as extensively as they wished.

Just as consistently, legislation that unions opposed fell by the wayside, even when it had broad public support, or even when Gov. Jerry Brown, their on-again, off-again ally, wanted it. An overhaul of the California Environmental Quality Act was the most conspicuous example.

Two bills, both dealing with sexual abuse of children, illustrate the syndrome.

Lawmakers pushed to pass Senate Bill 131, inspired by scandals in the Catholic Church, to open a new window to allow victims of sex abuse to sue employers of their alleged abusers.

Democrats lined up to denounce sex abuse and shed figurative tears for its victims, saying that simple justice demanded that they be given more time to seek redress, and passed the bill.

The measure also happened to exempt public agencies, including schools, from liability.

But they took a different tack on Assembly Bill 375, which purported to improve dismissal processes for teachers, especially those who sexually abuse children.

In 2012, inspired by a truly shameful incident in Los Angeles in which an abusive teacher was paid off rather than fired, legislation to give school trustees more power to dismiss such cretins was passed by the Senate. But it died in the Assembly due to pressure from the California Teachers Association and other unions.

The backlash from that cowardice cost at least one legislator her seat in the 2012 elections, so the CTA and other unions ginned up AB 375, which superficially changes some dismissal procedures but falls well short of what should be done. It would even limit the number of abused children whose testimony could be used against a teacher.

School trustees and administrators opposed the bill as inadequate, but the unions' sycophants in the Legislature – who had expressed such concern for abuse victims on SB 131 – passed it anyway.

If the unions can have their way on child abuse, they can have their way on anything in the current Legislature.

Chaos, dysfunction and the L.A. Unified school board

By The Times editorial board

September 17, 2013

During a special meeting Tuesday, the Los Angeles Unified school board will try to figure out how the district should spend more than \$113 million in one-time funding to get teachers and students ready for the Common Core curriculum, the new standards in English and math that are to go into effect next year and that emphasize critical thinking over rote memorization.

Great idea. Or it would be a great idea if the board hadn't spent more than an hour last Tuesday discussing the minutiae of the very same issue and reaching no conclusion. And if it hadn't already tackled the same issue a couple of months before that.

The problem goes far beyond prepping for a new curriculum; the newly configured school board is at risk of falling into chaos and dysfunction if it doesn't quickly figure out its proper role. The pro-reform board majority cobbled together by former Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa has dissolved; its two staunchest believers now speak with obvious irritation and frustration about the board's doings, but they have little power to change anything. Their union-friendly opponents on the board sound as though they are trying to create jobs programs for employees rather than educational opportunities for students. The less ideologically defined board members meander through painfully convoluted discussions of their concerns.

In other words, the board isn't acting like a board. It seems eager to meddle in the district's day-to-day operations but ignorant of how to do so. Many times at last week's meeting, both Supt. John Deasy and his deputy, Jaime Aquino, asked the board for direction on what it wanted the administrative staff to do. None was forthcoming. By the end of the week, Aquino had resigned, citing the board's micromanagement as well as its move away from the reform agenda.

At a meeting over the summer, the board was dissatisfied with Deasy and Aquino's plan for Common Core funding, which called for elevating more than 100 high-performing teachers to coaching positions in which they would train other teachers in the new curriculum. The board wanted to put more money directly into schools' hands so that principals and teachers could spend it according to their own priorities. That was reasonable, and Deasy followed through, so the board should have been ready to vote on the plan last week. Instead, the superintendent was showered with a series of new, nitpicky questions.

A period of adjustment for the new L.A. Unified board was almost inevitable. It is less in sync with Deasy, a committed reformer, than the last one was. Also, after Villaraigosa super-ally Monica Garcia's ham-handed years as president, the members who weren't part of her "in" group are clearly reveling in their new power. That's not necessarily a bad

thing. And the new president, Richard Vladovic, no doubt needed a bit of time to figure out his role.

But that period must end now. Action on the Common Core transition spending is overdue. The board needs to pass the plan, which reasonably balances money for individual schools and a centrally run training program. It must entrust the superintendent, who overall has been doing an excellent job of moving L.A. Unified's creaky bureaucracy forward, with the job of carrying it out. And the board must do that without looking over Deasy's shoulder to monitor every hire and every word of the job descriptions.

As noted, this isn't just about Common Core. The pattern of micromanagement — accompanied at board meetings by long-winded, self-aggrandizing monologues — is spilling into other areas, including the district's operating budget of more than \$6 billion. Vladovic should pull the board back on track before this behavior becomes a habit and a troubling hallmark of his leadership.

Earlier in the summer, the board majority was unhappy with how Deasy was planning to spend new funds that were coming from the state after years of financial drought. In theory, that's fine. Setting priorities for the expenditure of new money is a key board responsibility.

But that's not what the board has been doing. Instead, resolutions have been popping up randomly. At last week's meeting, one would have funded some uncertain level of "sequential" arts education; the wording was confusing, and it wasn't clear how much money was involved. Another resolution called for beefing up physical education in elementary schools.

That's not how coherent budgets are born. The board needs to figure out its priorities, because even with new funding, the district won't have anything close to the money needed to fulfill each member's dreams. The board also needs to take Deasy's concerns and advice into consideration; that's why it has an expert running the district. Even though hiring staff and expanding programs are more fun, the district has to set aside at least some money (as Deasy has proposed) to reduce its structural deficit. Then it should direct Deasy to devise a budget for its approval that reflects the board's priorities.

The California School Boards Assn. runs training courses for board members, and L.A. Unified's board should sign up. Fast. Members need to learn how to listen to the superintendent at the same time that they question some of his proposals, lest Deasy also quit in frustration. They need to do their homework, organize their thinking, put forth well-reasoned and researched resolutions, treat one another with respect and cultivate a board culture of efficiency. This is School Board 101.

Bill allowing higher fees for high-demand college classes advances

LOS ANGELES TIMES, September 23, 2013

Backers say the two-tier fee system would help students transfer or graduate faster, but foes call it unfair to low-income students.

www.latimes.com/local/la-me-college-fees-20130924,0,3259345.story

By Carla Rivera

As Long Beach City College officials see it, a state plan allowing two-year schools to charge more for high-demand classes would help move students more quickly toward transfer and graduation.

Students at the campus, however, argue that such a move would be unfair, and they have launched a statewide petition drive and video campaign to block the legislation.

"Long Beach City College has one of the largest populations of poor students in the state," said Andrea Donado, the student trustee in the Long Beach Community College District. "This bill will create two classes of students, those who can pay and finish and those who can't. It's not the mission of a community college to be like a private college."

Legislation that has passed both the state Senate and Assembly would create a pilot project allowing colleges to charge all students non-resident tuition — as much as \$200 per unit — for high-demand classes during summer and winter terms. Those classes include transfer-level English, algebra and history, which typically have long waiting lists.

The bill is on the desk of Gov. [Jerry Brown](#); a spokesman said Brown would not comment on pending legislation.

"This gives our college one more tool to use to open up access to courses in high demand and will materially impact the ability of students to transfer and get a higher degree," said Long Beach City College President Eloy Oakley.

The controversy is a replay in many respects of an [attempt](#) by [Santa Monica College](#) last year to offer high-priced core classes in a summer extension program alongside regular state-funded courses. The effort was abandoned after the statewide community college chancellor said it violated education codes. The proposal roiled the campus; student protesters were pepper-sprayed at a college board meeting.

The legislation, sponsored by Assemblyman [Das Williams](#) (D-Santa Barbara), has also created friction between traditional allies and threatens to upend decades of open enrollment policy.

It's unclear, however, whether the project would get off the ground, even if approved. The legislation says the program is voluntary, but its intent is that six specified campuses should offer the courses by July.

Two of the campuses, Oxnard College and Pasadena City College, however, said that they were unwilling draftees and that they have no intention of participating. Solano College in Fairfield

and College of the Canyons in Santa Clarita are ineligible to participate immediately because they had not met enrollment requirements, the chancellor's office said.

Crafton Hills College in Yucaipa wants to hear from students and faculty before deciding, a spokeswoman said. Only Oakley in Long Beach said he was ready to move forward, possibly as soon as January.

Williams said that students willing to pay the higher fees would be able to get classes needed to transfer or graduate, opening up space during the regular academic year for students who would still pay the current fees of \$46 per unit. He pointed to the example of California State University campuses that offer summer extension programs without problems.

"I believe students should be able to make the choice for themselves and don't believe faculty or other students have the right to say they can't take these classes," Williams said.

Supporters say the two-tier plan is also justified as a way to repair years of enrollment and class cuts precipitated by severe budget shortfalls.

"Community colleges are supposed to be open access for everybody, but it's hard to say it's anything like that when we're turning away thousands of students," said Michael Kramer, former student government president at College of the Canyons. "More students might be able to keep what's supposed to be a two-year education closer to two years."

But opponents question the need for such a drastic policy shift.

The California community college chancellor's office recently reported that most of the state's 112 schools are increasing enrollment and adding classes this fall after an infusion of funding from Proposition 30, Brown's measure that temporarily raised some taxes for education and other purposes.

Many students in the nine-campus Los Angeles Community College District, the largest in the state, would be at a disadvantage, officials said.

"The vast majority are on some form of financial aid or receive scholarship assistance," said Adriana Barrera, the district's interim chancellor. "We have a student population that's scraping for every penny, and the economics of having to pay \$1,000 for a single course would be beyond their ability to even contemplate."

The pilot program would require a third of the fees collected by districts to be set aside for financial aid, and the program would end in 2018. But many on both sides see the legislation as a door that once opened would not be easily closed.

At a meeting of the community college Board of Governors recently, Chancellor Brice W. Harris called the bill "horrible" public policy. The measure would be a public betrayal after educators worked to pass Proposition 30 with the promise of no new fee increases, he added.

"And now here we are with a bill that would create a 200% fee increase on some students," Harris said. "It would provide some students with access to the highway of education who have money and leave some students behind."

Pensions, rising costs to pressure California school budgets -Fitch

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SAN FRANCISCO, Sept 23 (Reuters) - Bigger payments to California's pension fund for teachers and other rising costs will challenge school district finances despite an increase in education spending by the state, a report released by Fitch Ratings said on Monday.

"Fitch views California school districts' credit quality as confronting considerable pent-up cost pressures after years of service reductions, wage stagnation and substantial pension underfunding," the report said.

"These pressures in some cases could neutralize or overwhelm recent state funding improvements and potential outyear gains," the report added.

It noted some solutions proposed for improving the California State Teachers' Retirement System's funding "could result in substantially increased costs to school districts if implemented."

California school districts also face additional pension spending for workers covered by the California Public Employees' Retirement System, which has raised contribution rates, the ratings agency said in its report.

Spending by the state's school districts is also seen rising due to parents calling for restoring services that were dropped amid cost-cutting measures in recent years.

Additionally, teachers and school employees will demand pay increases. "Some school districts have begun to implement wage hikes for the first time in several years, a trend that Fitch expects will be exacerbated as state funding increases given rising pressure from labor groups," the report said.

Fitch expects ratings for California school districts to stabilize over the near-to-medium term as the state's revenue improves. But the ratings agency projected "significant costs pressures" that could weigh on the ratings over the longer term as temporary tax increases approved by voters last year expire.

Cal State trustees say needs far exceed state funding

Adolfo Guzman-Lopez | September 24th, 2013

Jockeying for next year's state funding is already picking up speed - at least in the California State University system, where trustees on Tuesday told the governor that the proposed budget increases for next year aren't nearly enough.

"The cost of doing business is just going up. We are down in resources, we are down in people," said Cal Stat Chancellor Tim White.

Cal State administrators said they need extra money to keep up with enrollment, building maintenance, and other demands. They debated requesting an extra \$335 million for the 2014-15 fiscal year - bringing the budget up to \$4.4 billion. That's more than double the \$142 million increase Gov. Jerry Brown currently plans to give the university in the fiscal year beginning next July.

In an unusual occurrence, Brown was there to respond. He attended the meeting as the trustees' ex-officio president. He said he showed up to start the budget dialogue early, for his and Cal State administrators' benefit.

"There's a whole bunch of other people asking for more money," Brown told the trustees. "In fact one of them happens to be the federal judiciary, who's threatened to hold me in contempt of court if I don't reduce the prison capacity."

Cal State's budget chief, Robert Turnage, said the 23 campus university system should have a place near the front of the budget waiting line.

"We are a very critical piece of California's social ecology and unlike many programs in state government, what we are able to do for Californians in this university, in a very powerful way builds towards the future," he said.

Frustration among some of Cal State's 44,000 employees over this year's raise also bubbled over at the meeting.

"We cannot be happy and content with a 1.34 percent increase to our salaries when inflation is expected to be 2 percent in California this year and again next year," Mary Kay Statham-Doyle, president of Academic Professionals of California, the university counselors union, said during public comment.

Labor unions representing campus police and graduate students joined in. Jeff Solomon, President of the Statewide University Police Officers Association, said campus police cannot retain good officers at this rate.

"We're 37 percent behind what the U.C. police officers make," he said.

Colleges Join the Ed-Tech Revolution by Nurturing Young Companies

The Chronicle of Higher Education

September 23, 2013

By Andy Thomason

The next so-called disruption poised to remake higher education may soon be born at a university near you. That is thanks to a growing number of colleges' creation of in-house education-technology incubators that they say could turn them a profit while letting their students and faculty members in on the ground floor of the next innovation.

In one of the largest efforts of its kind to date, the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education has announced the creation of a \$2.1-million incubator specifically geared toward education start-up companies. The University of Virginia and George Mason University are among a handful of institutions nationwide already operating similar programs or planning to open them in the near future.

Such programs follow the lead of education-focused business incubators and accelerators that have sprung up across the country, including LearnLaunchX in Boston and Socratic Labs in New York City. Their aim is to help start-ups survive by providing mentorship and the opportunity to collaborate with one another.

Universities are looking to capitalize on the role they can play in familiarizing would-be innovators with the landscape of education. Many ed-tech entrepreneurs have made money in successful technology start-ups and are looking to be part of a more mission-based operation, said Bobbi L. Kurshan, executive director of academic innovation at Penn's school of education and leader of its ed-tech project. "The problem is, they don't speak the language of education, and they don't understand it," she said.

A university can help by providing the research necessary to get an idea off the ground—for a price. For faculty members in Penn's education school, for example, using their research to be a consultant for an ed-tech company—and thereby having a stake in the business—can be a more lucrative prospect than simply publishing the work. If a business takes off under the incubator model, the school itself will also get a cut of the profits.

"This is a potentially large revenue stream if the companies do well," Ms. Kurshan said.

'Two-Way Conversation'

Beyond financial incentives, consulting with start-ups is a way for universities to get a closer look at what's in the works, said David W. Andrews, dean of the School of Education at the Johns Hopkins University, which has begun consulting with start-ups.

"It's a revenue source at one level, and it allows us to be aware of some of the most cutting-edge technologies that are coming out," Mr. Andrews said.

For the start-ups, an incubator means a better chance of survival. Chris Vento got his start in educational technology about 12 years ago as Blackboard's chief technology officer, and now serves as entrepreneur in residence for LearnLaunchX. "By banding together at the early stages in a segment like ed tech, there is some efficiency as a small company," he said.

For example, incorporating pieces of another start-up's business model or sharing the same office resources temporarily can cut costs, Mr. Vento said.

LearnLaunchX, like many other incubator programs, prides itself on its intensive nature, said Eileen Rudden, one of its founders. The incubator, which formed this year, offers a small cohort of companies a three-month residential program in Boston. Even after the companies pitch to investors, some of them may stay in the space for several months, Ms. Rudden said. "You can't just throw seeds on the ground and water them and come back two months later," she said.

Penn's incubator, called Education Design Studio Inc., will have participants come to Philadelphia one week per month for six months and stay in contact for more than a year after that, Ms. Kurshan said. Another key component will be involving the school's faculty, she said, because Penn is a research institution.

"Our professors are looking to get their work out there more than just in a traditional research journal," she said. They are very interested "in looking at new things that will have an impact in teaching and learning."

Involving faculty members in business incubation is also in line with the mission of the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education, which plans to open a program in the coming months, said its dean, Robert C. Pianta. "We view this as really an incredible opportunity for this two-way conversation between industry" and the kind of experience and knowledge that the faculty, "and increasingly the younger faculty," brings to bear, he said.

Mr. Pianta said Virginia's program was not aimed at creating disruption through a new, industry-changing company. Maybe some of what the program produces "will be disruptive to higher ed, but in some sense we hope it is constructive to all of ed," he said.

'On Dual Tracks'

A constructive relationship between educators and entrepreneurs would have been less likely about a decade ago.

Mr. Vento said that when he started at Blackboard, the idea of increased technology in education was met with skepticism. "Faculty were completely threatened by technology

taking over," he said. "There's still some of that," he acknowledged, but now faculty members and students realize that because technology is all over their lives, "it's just inevitable."

George Mason's new program, called the Education Design Lab, will be less focused on technology, attempting to innovate not by supporting ideas proposed by entrepreneurs but by starting with an educational problem and designing a solution in collaboration with industry, said Kathleen M. deLaski, leader of the effort. She is also president of the deLaski Family Foundation, an organization based in Washington, D.C., that is providing initial funds for the program.

Universities must seek out ways to actively disrupt themselves, Ms. deLaski said, while also continuing to "deliver the package" of an education.

"Universities have to think about themselves as solving the issues that are creating what some people are calling the broken system," Ms. deLaski said. "And that requires a lot of entrepreneurship. You almost have to think about it as if you're on dual tracks."