Title: Overview of 2014-15 Budget Workgroup Meeting

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Background

The 2014-15 Budget Workgroup met on June 7 to begin planning for the California Community College system’s 2014-15 budget request. The Budget Workgroup is comprised of various California Community College stakeholders, approximating the diversity of the Consultation Council.

The initial discussion allowed participants in the Budget workgroup to present their priorities and highlight those areas in need of funding. The workgroup agreed that the system should consider a balanced approach as we start to rebuild after the severe cuts to our system over the last several years. Participants in the workgroup expressed the need to focus on the quality of services provided to students, not just the quantity, as we strive to maximize the quality of the programs, services, and education provided.

It is also important that we be cognizant of the governor’s priorities, and to the extent possible, consider those priorities in order to achieve the best possible budget outcome. To the extent the system request includes funding not aligned with the governor’s priorities, a careful argument will need to be articulated.

Summary of Discussion

Participants acknowledged that the passage of Proposition 30 and the state’s more hopeful economic outlook has put us in a different position than in previous years, and that we should use this opportunity to address long term priorities. The Budget Workgroup discussion focused on the following:

- One priority for the system that all participants agree on is the need for a continuous appropriation. The lack of a continuous appropriation means that districts are sometimes left with a hole in their budget when estimates of property taxes, fees, Proposition 30 funding fall short of budget estimates. Proposition 30 adds to the unpredictability of revenues as the revenue generated by the increase in sales tax and income tax is hard to gauge. Having a continuous appropriation would provide stability and predictability that is vital to allow community colleges to plan their spending for the year.

- COLA was another item identified as a high priority. With no cost of living adjustment received since 2007-08, colleges have lost over 16 percent in purchasing power as costs have continued to increase. Many participants agreed that COLAs give districts maximum flexibility, allowing them to backfill categorical and other programs as needed in their district. Given this, many voiced the view that the California Community Colleges should ask...
for funding well above the statutory COLA, so that we could make progress toward restoring
the purchasing power lost in recent years.

- Access was also identified as a top priority for the system. It was mentioned that the need to
  restore access to college courses was one of the primary arguments for the passage of
  Proposition 30, and should remain a primary focus as Proposition 30 revenues are coming
  in.

- Participants expressed a need for funding that could be used for professional development,
  stating that professional development is necessary to provide quality services to students
  and to carry out the recommendations of the student success task force. Funding for
  deferred maintenance and instructional improvement was also identified as a priority. Many
  districts have been forced to put off maintenance, in the effort to focus limited dollars on
  higher system priorities. These items were also identified as good targets for one-time
  funding.

- Funding for instructional and library equipment was supported. These items have not been
  funded in the budget for several years. Libraries and teaching labs are vital in assisting
  students in completing their courses and working toward a degree or transfer to a for year
  college. This would also be a good target for one-time funds.

- Participants cited the need to rebuild categorical programs that have seen major cuts over
  the last five years. Some of the categorical programs mentioned include: EOPS, DSPS, CARE,
  the academic senate, and part-time faculty office hours and health insurance. In working to
  restore these programs we need to consider the needs of the colleges today, instead of
  simply referring to funding amounts received in the past. Additionally, restoration should
  happen as equitably as possible so that categorical programs are not competing with each
  other for funding.

- Funding for the Student Success and Support Program was mentioned as a priority. The
  Administration and the Legislature seem to be supportive of funding student success and it
  will remain a priority for the system going forward.

- The fund for student success was also brought up as a priority, participants stated that the
  fund for student success needs to be funded to allow colleges to benefit from the federal
  match funding available. Cuts to the fund for student success are magnified by the fact that
  colleges not only loose the state dollars but also lose the ability to leverage federal dollars
  for these services.

While there are many priorities and needs throughout the system for increased funding to make
up for cuts seen in recent years, it is important to be realistic in our request to the Department
of Finance. If we put forth a request for an exorbitant or unrealistic amount of funding, we are
failing to communicate a true sense of our priorities. Also, arguments for funding are best
 couched in terms of how the funds serve the needs of student today. Asking for a certain level
of funding simply because a program was funded at the level in the past is not an effective
argument given the reductions faced by virtually all programs in recent years.