

## An open letter...

### EDITOR'S NOTE:

Responding to Gov. Jerry Brown's request for the development of options for a fully online college, the California Community Colleges on November 13 announced three options and belatedly asked for comment from stakeholder groups.

**Option 1** would use an existing campus to create a statewide delivery system with campus faculty and instructional designers creating content. College employer partnerships would be used and new ones developed statewide.

**Option 2** would use an existing district to host a consortium of colleges that opt in, with faculty coming from the participating colleges. The host district would employ or contract with instructional designers as well as develop employer relationships.

**Option 3** would create a new community college district that would operate under the Chancellor's Office. Selected faculty would work with the new district's instructional designers, and customize student services.

At right is the response from the CFT Community College Council.

### Community College Council of the California Federation of Teachers

November 22, 2017

**To: Governor Jerry Brown  
Community College Chancellor Eloy Oakley  
Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges**

We are writing in response to your request for feedback regarding your proposed options for a fully online college. We soundly reject all three options and this new initiative in general for the reasons stated below.

**The underlying assumption for the proposal — that California needs a new, fully online college — is flawed.** We see this initiative as duplicative of what the community college system already provides to our community college students. Through the State Chancellor's Office Online Education Initiative, students from anywhere in California can currently take classes at any California community college. This current program is already 100 percent online, including counseling and tutorial services.

**The new initiative will hurt students.** The students this initiative is purported to help are typically the demographic of students who perform worst in online courses. Funding a "new" initiative based on helping a student demographic which is least likely to succeed makes no sense from either a pedagogical or policy viewpoint, and runs counter to the important student equity work currently underway.

In addition, it appears this initiative is going in the direction of "correspondence courses" from decades ago: Use formulaic lesson plans created by private instructional designers and then "test" the students as they progress to grant access to the next module. Teaching, not testing, must remain the central mission of our community college system.

It also appears that this new "online college" would fall outside of accreditation, and perhaps even outside of current collective bargaining statutes. What credibility would such a college, degree or certificate have? Again, it seems as though this proposal is more of a mechanism to enrich private investors, or at best wishful thinking that quality education can be done online on the cheap, rather than about actually meaningfully educating our students.

**The process that led to this problematic proposal lacked stakeholder participation and transparency.** The workgroup formed to develop the options for carrying out this proposal lacked representation from a broad cross section of stakeholders. All participants were handpicked by the chancellor rather than selected by the various stakeholder organizations as has been customary. Furthermore, based on our discussions with some members of this workgroup, we understand that the workgroup's recommendations were not even brought forward, but were replaced by the recommendations of the out-of-state consultants who are driving this project.

For the above reasons, we soundly reject the governor's proposal for a fully online college. It is noteworthy that both the UC and CSU systems have also independently reached this same conclusion.

If the governor is truly interested in increasing the success rate of our community college students, then he should include additional funding in his next budget for community colleges earmarked to allow the system to hire more full-time faculty and classified staff, as there is ample documented evidence that doing so would increase both the retention and success rates of our students.

Sincerely,  
**Jim Mahler, President**  
Community College Council of the California Federation of Teachers



## ...CFT *rejects* fully online college proposal

### The promise of free college only awaits funding

JIM MAHLER COUNCIL PRESIDENT

**Tuition has not been free** for community college students since 1985 and that is about to change.

Gov. Brown signed Assembly Bill 19 (Santiago, D-Los Angeles) that allows first-time students to attend community college tuition-free for the first year if they are enrolled in at least 12 units.

At \$46 per unit — less than \$1,400 annually for a full course load — California's community colleges are one of the country's best bargains. Educational and living costs, however, are often too steep for students, especially from low-income families. About half of the system's 2.3 million students already receive fee waivers because of financial need.

Implementation of the California College Promise, however, awaits the Legislature al-

locating funds in next year's budget. The program is expected to cost more than \$30 million in its first year.

Once funded, the College Promise will provide the opportunity for more California students to get started on their higher education goals. It has always been the CFT's position that tuition should be free for all of higher education.

