While Legislature Debates, Districts Prepare for Cuts

The Senate and Assembly both passed midyear cut packages this week, and the two houses expect to reconcile the differences between the two plans in the next week. The Senate’s plan cuts $141 million in the current year, while the Assembly plan cuts $132 million, but also defers $105 million from the June cash payment to districts until July. College advocates oppose the deferral, fearing that it only increases the magnitude of cuts in the 2003-04 state budget.

The other differences between the two plans are the Assembly’s plan to cut enrollment growth by $4.2 million and to fully fund the Basic Skills supplemental apportionment. While the Senate’s version is closer to the Working Group’s proposal, League staff has sought to find a way to avoid cutting the Basic Skills supplemental apportionment to address concerns of the Assembly. The Working Group proposed reducing the Basic Skills supplemental apportionment because of the one-time nature of the funding, and because the Funding Formula Task Force and the Board of Governors last July proposed to end the program by folding the funding into each receiving district’s base.

Community colleges and others had a significant victory this week when the Assembly wrote their reduction bill in “prose,” a technical method that analysts believe protects from deeper line-item vetoes by the Governor. Although this is a legal gray area, advocates feared that the Governor, who has repeatedly called for deeper cuts than proposed by the Legislature, could further cut the Legislature’s work product. The only “new” appropriations in the Assembly’s bill are the Reversion Account appropriations—$33.3 million for Partnership for Excellence (a Reversion Account swap in addition to the $30 million cut), and $8.8 million each from Telecomm. and Tech. and Economic Development.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Contact your Assemblymembers and Senators Monday, Feb. 3. Urge them to contact their leadership and request:

- No deferral – it simply increases the budget cuts for community colleges next year.
- Assembly bill language – protect community colleges from the Governor’s “blue pencil.”

Colleges Across California Present Budget Consequences

Moving from a stage of shock and grief, community college leaders moved to action this week and began to aggressively inform their communities about the impact of the Governor’s $1 billion 18-month cut to community colleges. This week’s activities marked the formal launch of the League’s Advocacy Plan, after it was shared with (and encouraged by) the system’s Consultation Council and endorsed by the CEOCCC and CCCT boards.

On Thursday, Santa Ana College hosted a press conference to announce the findings of the League’s enrollment loss projections, which were developed using the only published methodology. College presidents from each of the Orange County community college districts spoke at the press conference, in addition to two current students (one who’d be hit by both the disabled students and EOPS cuts) and a high school student planning to attend Santa Ana College this fall. In Sacramento Thursday, approximately 150 Sierra College students rallied at the Capitol, capturing headline television coverage in the Sacramento media. On Thursday evening, several L.A.-area single-college district presidents gathered to talk about impacts of the budget cuts and advocacy strategies with Assembly Members Carol Liu (Chair, Assembly Higher Education) and Mervyn Dymally (Chair, Assembly Select Committee on Community Colleges).

Representatives of Bay Area community college districts gathered Friday at DeAnza College to discuss the budget situation and mutually plan advocacy and operational issues. Before convening the meeting, the group held a press conference to discuss student impact. League staff presented the enrollment projections, followed by detailed comments by six college chancellors and presidents. Additionally, the student body president from Chabot College and a representative from the Silicon Valley business community testified to the impact of the cuts and denied access on students and the business community. The event captured the attention of several print, radio, and television media outlets, and was broadcast live via the Internet and provided to the Community College Satellite Network. The archived video stream is expected to be available Monday at: http://www.deanza.edu/news/dabudget/.

At this weekend’s Trustee Workshop and Legislative Conference, college representatives will be able to create a letter to their legislators through a database system developed by League staff. Several different varieties and letterheads will create the appearance of personally written letters, providing greater impact with legislators. Attendees will also be provided the latest information on the budget situation, and will help League staff craft the implementation of the League’s Advocacy Plan.