



## SB 659 – Student Fee and Direct Support Flexibility

As Amended April 5th, 2021

### IN BRIEF

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SB 659 seeks to 1) provide greater flexibility to local community college districts to waive fees for eligible students and 2) provide greater flexibility to community college districts to use funding to assist students with “total cost of attendance” and increase the number of students participating in the College Promise programs. This bill does not seek additional state funding or resources, simply the flexibility to use existing local resources of community college districts to support student *needs*.

### BACKGROUND

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Prior to 1985, California’s Community Colleges charged no tuition or enrollment fees. Today, students are charged an enrollment fee of \$46 per unit per semester. For a full-time student, costs can reach as much as \$1,500/year.<sup>1</sup> Along with enrollment costs, the cost of other fees, books, technology, transportation, food, rent, and living expenses can exceed \$15,000 per year.

To address these cost of attendance issues that frequently present a barrier for students to enroll in, progress through and/or complete degrees and certificates at the San Mateo County Community College District (and other districts throughout the state), the SMCCCD is seeking (1) greater flexibility in the requirement to collect fees, and (2) the ability to use local funds (unrestricted general fund) to provide direct support to students. Unrestricted Funds may be used for any lawful purpose and are not restricted by any exterior funding source. However, there are certain items that the funds may not be spent on, given they are public funds and cannot be used as a gift to employees, students, or the public.

Currently, if the District wishes to provide fee waivers, it must use other funds. The other funds available include grants that specifically allow for these costs such as AB 19 (Santiago, 2019), the District’s Foundation, and its Auxiliary Services funds. Additionally, AB 19 has its own restrictions, being limited to first-time, full-time students (12 or more units per term including summer) for up to two years.

SMCCCD currently waives enrollment fees for students according to state rules (for the California College Promise Grant; CCPG – formerly BOG Fee Waiver). SMCCCD does not get backfilled for the fee waiver by the state, as they would if they were a revenue limit district. Currently, Education Code restricts districts from waiving fees for other students.

Separately, the SMCCCD has current student needs that cannot be met with existing resources made available through AB 19 funds and with greater flexibility in the use of unrestricted general funds could supplement AB 19 funds with local funds to provide for allowable expenditures (i.e. textbooks, etc.) under AB 19.

### THE PROBLEM

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Some of the expenses associated with supporting students’ basic needs cannot be provided from the unrestricted general fund per state law and regulation. SMCCCD is interested in exploring the permissibility of allowing greater flexibility in the use of general fund dollars to support student basic needs contained within total cost of attendance, such as:

- Waiving student fees.
- Providing laptops, books, or other learning aids.
- Providing basic need support for food, housing, and/or transportation

Additionally, under current law, many community college districts can only fund a portion of the total number of students eligible for the California College Promise Program. At SMCCCD they can only fund 2,000 Promise Scholars under the funding constraints in existing law even though they have 6,000 students who qualify.

### THE SOLUTION

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SB 659 does the following:

- Grants community college districts, like SMCCCD, the option of waiving enrollment fees based on policies adopted by respective boards of trustees.
- Provides greater flexibility to community college districts to meet the needs of students’ total cost of attendance (food, transportation, housing, mental health services, technology, family care, etc.) and to increase student enrollment in California College Promise Programs such as the SMCCCD Promise Scholars Program (PSP).

### THE SOLUTION

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San Mateo County Community College District  
San Mateo Chamber of Commerce

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<sup>1</sup> California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Tuition Cost: [cccoco.edu/Students/Pay-for-College](http://cccoco.edu/Students/Pay-for-College)