



Florida Association of
Community Colleges
PERCEPTION
A Legislative Update for FACC Members



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COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM SURVIVES ADDITIONAL BUDGET CUTS FOR CURRENT YEAR

“No surprises!” That was the reaction from community colleges leaders across the state, regarding the budget reduction recommendations for the current fiscal year. In anticipation of the budget cuts, each college had already held back four (4) percent, or one (1) percent per quarter. Legislators convened in Tallahassee this past week and reached agreement quickly on confirming the four (4) percent reduction for community colleges. According to Senate Conference Bill number 2-A, a total of \$38M was reduced from the Community College Program Fund which comes from General Revenue. An additional \$5M was reduced from the Educational Enhancement Trust Fund (Lottery). Total individual college reductions ranged from \$250K to over \$7M, depending on each school’s percentage of the total funding.



Democratic Leader pro tempore Rep. Geraldine Thompson, D-Orlando, questions proposed budget cuts as the full Appropriations Council on Education & Economic Development meets Wednesday, Jan. 7, 2009, in Tallahassee.

This past week, **Florida College System Chancellor Dr. Willis Holcombe and IRSC President Dr. Ed Massey (Council of Presidents Chair)**, in testifying before legislative committees, commented on how community colleges are being affected by the budget reductions, but they are looking at every possible way to keep their doors open and service levels high. They both reminded legislative members of how community colleges help people in times of economic distress. While the cuts were expected, it was hoped they would be minimized, particularly given the role community colleges play in workforce development, which moves the economy forward. Moreover, community college enrollment continues to rise, even as the economy and unemployment worsens.

The tight fiscal situation has been endured now for over a year and a half. It is expected to continue through the 2009 regular Legislative session as legislators try to find ways to address the projected \$3.2 billion shortfall in the 2009-10 state budget. Many colleges have had to put programs on hold and are concerned about how much more they can absorb, considering the constant increase in enrollment.

In approaching the 2009-10 fiscal shortfall, FACC's leadership and lobbying team will emphasize the message to legislators to "let the money follow the students." In addition to high school graduates, community colleges are welcoming students now being turned away from universities, because of their closed door and because of countercyclical enrollment; and those recently unemployed individuals, returning to school to upgrade their skills. President Massey told members of the Senate Higher Education Appropriations Committee that access is our main issue, and nothing is more central to the community college system mission than, "...getting students into college and getting them educated." At the moment, some students may not be able to enroll because some institutions may lack the funds to add needed classes and sections. The number of students affected is unfortunately undeterminable.

Moving forward into 2009-10, the system's leadership challenge is to convince legislators the importance of keeping to a minimum the cuts to colleges. As stated by one college president, "The less the cut, the more classes colleges we will be able to offer to enroll more students from universities, and from laid off workers who need to be retrained for new jobs to help the economy turn around again."