

Start New Community College Chancellor Off on the Right Foot

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This spring, for the first time in a century, the University of California regents hired an outsider to lead the 10-campus, 200,000-student system. To lure Mark Yudof from the University of Texas, the regents doubled the president's salary package to more than \$800,000. Yudof's arrival was heralded on the front pages of our state's newspapers.

Similar attention needs to be paid to the arrival of another education leader, one who will influence the lives of far more students. In his new position as incoming chancellor of California's community colleges, state Sen. Jack Scott, D-Altadena, will assume responsibility for the education of 2.6 million students at the 110-college system.

It's not just that the vast majority of Californians who go to college attend a community college. It's also that unlike the California State University system, which admits the top one-third of students, or UC, which enrolls the top one-eighth, community colleges are open to the top 100 percent. They serve the students least prepared to complete college with the fewest resources per student. Furthermore, they enroll large numbers of ethnic minorities: The Los Angeles district alone has nearly four times as many African American students as the entire UC system.

The job of ensuring that those students can succeed is as complex as it is important. The colleges' next leader must marshal talented educators and unify policy leaders around this mission in the face of severe state budget constraints. Fortunately, Scott brings with him more than just Sacramento savvy. A former college president, he understands well the educational challenges.

But his job may be more difficult than Yudof's for another reason: Unlike UC's president, the chancellor's job has traditionally been relatively powerless. It pays just \$198,000, a fraction of the UC president's earnings, and less than many of the district chancellors. And to represent those 2.6 million students, the chancellor has a staff of just 130 people — fewer than UC's information technology office. Before the recent budget cuts, UC employed about 2,000 people.

Precise parity in salary and staffing between two vastly different systems is not realistic. But placing a priority on community colleges is not just realistic, it is imperative. The colleges deserve more dollars, but there is another tool that in Scott's hands they could make good use of: state policy. The state has focused primarily on making sure students have access to college, but it also needs to ensure that more high school students are prepared for college and that more who attend community college can complete a credential or transfer to a four-year university.

Two policy proposals championed by Scott, if signed by the governor, could strengthen the colleges' ability to do their job well.

The first would help community colleges partner with California State University to address the large numbers of students who complete high school unprepared for college-level work. The proposal would encourage the colleges to join with California State University system in using an 11th-grade test to advise students of their proficiency in math and English then use their senior year to improve their skills. Given that the colleges have made a commitment to improving success rates of under-prepared students, they need support in implementing this policy.

The second proposal would launch a comprehensive higher education report card to keep us in the know about how well our colleges and universities are serving California: how affordable they are, and how

many of their students are completing credentials and benefiting the state. If we are to ask more from our community colleges, we need clear measures to indicate when they are meeting those expectations.

Scott, who becomes chancellor in January, introduced both proposals well before he was tapped for the job. Alone, they will not ensure success of community college students, but both are needed steps to providing community colleges not just the right leader, but also the tools to be successful.