

# Maricopa Community Colleges are thriving, but need a long-term funding fix

Rufus Gasper, AZ I See It 5:15 p.m. MST February 13, 2016

*Chancellor: Our past funding model is no longer viable for the future of our district. Here's how we're moving forward.*



*(Photo: Michael Chow/The Republic)*

As I prepare to wrap up a 30-year career with Maricopa County Community College District, I reflect on how the district has evolved and what the future may hold for this venerable institution.

Never in its history — despite seismic changes in globalization, technology and the structure of learning, business and work — has the institution wavered from its fundamental mission of providing access to quality education and training for students.

Over the course of its 52-year history, beginning with Phoenix College in 1963, Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD) has educated millions of diverse students.

Today, the system provides degrees, certificates, training programs and courses to more than 200,000 students who seek opportunities to elevate their knowledge, earning power and standard of living.

Dramatic changes have taken place in the economy and workplace in these past five decades, and MCCCD is confronting equally striking changes in its own operational environment and funding base.

## State funding: From \$68.7 million to zero



*State funding for Maricopa Community Colleges went from \$68.7 million in 2008 to zero in 2016. (Photo: Getty Images/Stockphoto)*

State funding for MCCCD went from \$68.7 million in 2008 to \$45.3 million in 2011, to \$6.9 million in 2012, and finally to \$0 in 2016 when the [Arizona Legislature eliminated funding \(/story/news/local/phoenix/2015/03/06/tuition-hike-maricopa-colleges-funding-eliminated/24486095/\)](#) for our institution from its budget.

We had prepared for this eventuality and stewarded our resources to [minimize the need to increase tuition \(/story/opinion/editorial/2015/01/29/arizona-community-college-funding/22490791/\)](#) or property taxes. Now, in the absence of state funding, the gauntlet has been cast: the funding model of the past no longer is viable for the future of MCCCD.

The quest to identify and diversify sources of revenue is non-negotiable if we are to continue to offer access and opportunities for success to students who are pursuing higher education.

For our community to remain at the forefront of educating and preparing today's workforce and that of the future, it is imperative that we keep pace with demand, and do so in a manner that is economically sustainable.

## Return on investment for students and state



Arizona gains \$12.10 in state income and social savings for each dollar invested in Maricopa Community Colleges. (Photo: Michael Schennum/The Republic)

Research conducted by Economic Modeling Specialists International (EMSI), a national economics and analytics firm, shows that students receive a return of \$4.20 (<https://asa.maricopa.edu/departments/institutional-effectiveness/reports/maricopa-economic-impact-study>) in increased future income for every \$1 that they pay for their education at MCCCDC — an annual return on investment of 16.6 percent.

Maricopa Community Colleges are also the largest provider of transfer students to Arizona's public universities, comprising approximately 30 percent of all bachelor's degree completers.

The impact of Maricopa Community Colleges goes far beyond the increased earning power it brings to students. The EMSI report indicated that the total impact of Maricopa Community Colleges on the local business community was \$7.3 billion in 2013-14, and that Arizona gains \$12.10 in state income and social savings and \$4 in added taxes and public sector savings for each \$1 invested in the district.

## Community colleges educate our workforce



An estimated 63 percent of jobs will require some college training by 2018. (Photo: Nick Oza/The Republic)

The economic and financial benefits are critically important to Arizona taxpayers. But the value of Maricopa County Community College District is more important today and for our state's future than ever before. Employers across the nation and here in Maricopa County aggressively seek skilled workers, and Maricopa Community Colleges play an outsized role in educating, training and preparing the talent that they need.

Consider this:

1. By 2018, the economy will create 46.8 million job openings (new and replacement jobs) and approximately 63 percent of these jobs will require workers with some college education (<https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/fullreport.pdf>), according to a Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce forecast.
2. Having a well-qualified, skilled and prepared workforce is the most important factor that drives where businesses locate, grow and create jobs, according to IBM, FDI International and Area Development, as well as our region's employers.

As the demand for skilled workers accelerates, it is imperative that Maricopa Community Colleges continue to provide the best possible education and training for our current and future students.

## Innovations in education



Recognizing that education and workforce models of the past are inadequate for future demands, we have continued to innovate. In 2008, I charged our college presidents, faculty and staff to adapt a One Maricopa model — an enterprise approach that capitalizes on the unique assets and outstanding resources of all 10 colleges in new and innovative ways.

Our nursing program exemplifies the One Maricopa concept. Students in the program can transfer between colleges because of common program prerequisites and shared curricula. It is one program offered at nine colleges, enhancing collaborative opportunities and best practices, while providing the economies and efficiencies that come with a shared effort.

We are aggressively pursuing additional innovations to elevate our effectiveness, efficiency and scalability to enhance student success and yield even higher returns to students, society and taxpayers.

We are accelerating the creation of more “shared services” to align similar functions such as marketing, finance, IT and educational services across our colleges and sites. Adopting a shared services model for the entire system will result in greater efficiencies and enhanced delivery of services that will benefit our students and communities.

Another innovation we are exploring is the potential of Centers of Excellence, which will bring together like programs and resources, harnessing our collective assets and talents. This will allow us to more efficiently deliver the very best that our system offers in terms of subject experts, education and training in the highest demand sectors of our economy.

It is incumbent upon our entire community, students, policy-makers, employers, alumni, faculty and staff, to actively engage in strengthening the Maricopa Community Colleges so that collectively, we can ensure students receive the education they expect and deserve. This also ensures that employers will have a workforce prepared for the demands of the 21st century economy.

## Looking to the future



**Maricopa Community College Chancellor Rufus Glasper speaks in Tempe in 2015.** (Photo: David Wallace/The Republic)

MCCCD is financially sound and well-positioned for now, but a long-term solution is required to create a sustainable funding model for the finest community in the nation that educates and prepares the caliber of workers that are the most sought after in the nation.

Without equivocation, I am confident that the governing board, college presidents and our region's public and private sector leaders will take up the gauntlet to create a sustainable funding model to ensure students continue to experience excellence in teaching and learning.

This can be achieved only by working together with the governor and Legislature to identify innovative yet sound approaches to secure the financial stability of Maricopa Community Colleges and all community colleges in Arizona.

I am proud to have served our institution as chancellor for the past 13 years.

*Rufus Glasper is the chancellor of the Maricopa County Community College District, a post he has held for 13 years. He is retiring on Feb. 29 and will assume the mantle of president/CEO of the League for Innovation in the Community College, based in Chandler, later this spring.*

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