

# *Fairbank, Maslin, Maulin & Associates*

*Opinion Research &  
Public Policy Analysis*

TO: Interested Parties

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RE: Recent California Statewide Poll Results

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## ***DESPITE TOUGH BUDGET TIMES, CALIFORNIA VOTERS ARE COMMITTED TO HIGHER EDUCATION***

A recent statewide poll among California voters\* found that even though voters are acutely aware of the state's ongoing budget problems, **voters strongly support California's community colleges and public universities.** Highlighted findings from the poll include:

- ***Voters want to continue offering a college education to every eligible person who wants one,*** even as the state faces tough fiscal times.
- ***Voters are aware of recent state budget cuts to higher education and the expected increase in the student population*** – voters know these problems can lead to a crisis and want them addressed now.
- In terms of solutions, ***voters favor more efficient use of current resources as well as more state funding*** for California's public colleges and universities.

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\***Research Methodology:** From December 14-16, 2004, FMM&A completed a statewide telephone survey among 800 likely California voters. The margin of error for the poll is +/- 3.5%.

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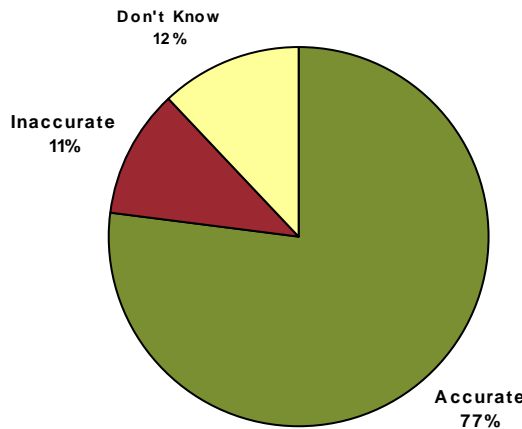
**AWARENESS OF THE PROBLEM**

Voters are aware that higher education in California faces challenges on multiple fronts.

First, voters have heard that California’s community colleges and public universities have suffered significant budget cuts in recent years. When asked if “state funding has been cut in recent years” for higher education, more than three quarters of voters (77%) indicate that is an accurate statement.

**Table 1: Voter Awareness of State Budget Cuts to Higher Education**

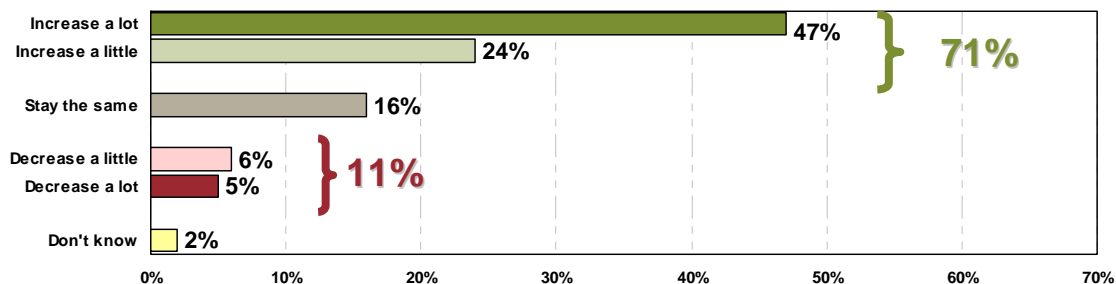
Please tell me if the following statement about California’s community colleges and public universities is accurate or inaccurate: State funding has been cut in recent years.



Second, voters believe the student-age population will increase significantly in the near future. Specifically, seven out of ten voters (71%) responded that “the number of students who attend or plan on attending a community college or public university in California” will increase, with half of all voters (47%) holding the opinion that the student-age population will grow a lot. Only one out of nine voters (11%) feel the pool of students will decrease and 16% said it would stay about the same.

**Table 2: Voters’ Sense of Increase in College Student Population**

In the next few years, do you think the number of students who attend or plan on attending a community college or public university in California will increase, decrease, or stay about the same?



Voters realize that when you combine the dual challenges of budget cuts and an increasing student-age population, California’s higher education system is facing a crisis. Nearly three quarters (72%) of voters perceive as an extremely or very serious problem the fact that “due to budget cuts and population growth, 1.8 million students could be denied a place in California’s public colleges and universities over the next 10 years.”

**VOTERS ARE COMMITTED TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

In 1960, California created its Master Plan for Higher Education. That plan promises a college education to anyone who is eligible and motivated. Today, voters remain firmly committed to that promise.

Voters were provided arguments from both sides of the debate over whether or not to keep the promise. By an overwhelming margin, two-thirds of voters (66%) demand that California continues its commitment to eligible people who want a college education. Only 27% believe we should scale back this commitment.

**Table 3: Voters’ Commitment to Higher Education (with Information)**

Which statement is closer to your own opinion?

	All Voters	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
Some people say the state continues to face a budget deficit. We have to live within our means and do more with less. Given this reality, the state should accommodate as many of the expected increase in college age youth as it can, but we can’t guarantee a place in a community college or public university for everyone.	27%	18%	39%	26%
Other people say the state should continue to provide a college education to people who want one and are eligible. We should continue this tradition that began in 1960 of providing an affordable college education to tomorrow’s workforce and leaders. We cannot afford to deny this opportunity to our youth.	66%	76%	54%	66%

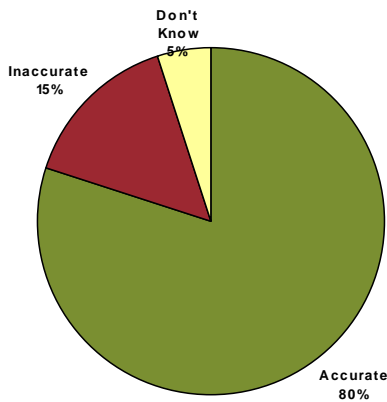
Every demographic group among California’s diverse electorate supports keeping the state’s higher education promise. Most notably, support transcends party and ideological lines – large majorities of Democrats (76%) and independent voters (66%) want to keep the promise as does a solid majority of Republicans (54% to only 39% who want to scale it back).

One of the principal reasons driving such overwhelming support for the state’s commitment to higher education is because voters fully understand the significance of California’s public colleges and universities and the essential role they play in our society. For example, four out of five voters (80%) agree that “community colleges serve the entire community.” More specifically, five out of six voters (85%) believe that California’s community colleges and public universities “train much of the workforce that contributes to the social and economic well-being of the state,” with a solid majority (56%) holding the view that this is a “very accurate” statement.

**Table 4: Significance of Public Colleges and Universities to Society**

Please tell me if the following statements about California’s community colleges and public universities are accurate or inaccurate:

**Community colleges serve the entire community.**



**Community colleges and public universities train much of the workforce that contributes to the social and economic well-being of the state.**



**SOLVING THE PROBLEM – MORE EFFICIENCY AND MORE FUNDING**

Voters focus on two main ways to address the problems facing California’s higher educational system – improved efficiency and increased funding.

Approval for having “community colleges and public universities increase the efficiency of existing resources” is nearly universal, as 95% of voters approve of this proposed solution.

Voters, however, realize improving efficiency may not be enough to solve the serious problems facing higher education. In that regard, voters overwhelmingly approve (82%) of the solution to **“increase state funding for California’s community colleges and public universities.”** This sentiment is shared by voters of all ideologies, as liberals (92%), moderates (83%), and conservatives (70%) firmly agree.

**Table 5: Solutions to the Problems Facing Higher Education**  
Do you approve or not approve of that solution?

		All Voters	Liberals	Moderates	Conservatives
Community colleges and public universities should increase the efficiency of existing resources.	Approve	95%	92%	96%	96%
	Do Not Approve	3%	5%	2%	2%
Increase state funding for California’s public colleges and universities.	Approve	82%	92%	83%	70%
	Do Not Approve	16%	7%	11%	27%