

Opinion: Free tuition in Calif. worth celebrating

By Jeff DeFranco

I have some exciting news to share. Gov. Jerry Brown signed Assembly Bill 19 into law Friday afternoon, enabling California community colleges to provide a year of free tuition for the 2018-19 academic year. I have been pleased to personally lend my name and support to the Rise California campaign. I'm thrilled to see this new program as a result of their efforts. Free community college could be a game changer for our students and our state.



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This bill waives the cost of first-year fees for any first-time student who enrolls full-time at any one of the 114 California community colleges. As you know, cost is a genuine barrier to many otherwise college-bound students. The effect of this bill for California is enormous, with the potential to have a significant impact on our citizens' ability to earn good livelihoods, experience real upward mobility, contribute to their communities and local workforces, and to bring in hundreds of thousands of new students into our system.

To be eligible for the California College Promise, students must be California residents enrolled full-time in a community college and complete a free application for Federal Financial Aid (FAFSA) or a California Dream Act application. Income will

not be a factor in whether they receive a waiver under this program. The California College Promise is estimated to cost an additional \$33 million beyond the funds already accessed by students through the BOG Fee Waiver.

The next task for Brown and the state Department of Finance is to locate the funding to cover this cost in next year's state budget to fully roll out the promise of a free first year of college. This will take place in the 2018-19 budget process starting with the governor's budget proposal which is typically rolled out in January. It is also important to note that this is a pilot program for the 2018-19 academic year and it will be essential to demonstrate the benefits of this program if it is to be renewed for future years.

We'll have much more about the California College Promise in the days and weeks to come. It will be important for us to be ready to serve these students who are coming to LTCC for the first time. For now, join me in celebrating this milestone of access for all Californians.

Jeff DeFranco is president of Lake Tahoe Community College.