

Why AB 1725 Will Never Work by Lin Fraser

In 1988 lawmakers passed AB 1725. It mandated that each community college district have a **minimum** of 75% classes taught by full-time faculty and 25% by part-time faculty. The intent was simple: part-time faculty were to be used to accommodate sudden enrollment fluctuations, emergency situations, specialty courses, and small departments. The thought was that if full-time faculty represented a minimum of 75% of the teaching, there would be more student access to instructors and more instructors to take part in curriculum development and shared governance.

However, since AB 1725's inception, the statewide percentage of full-time teaching remained in the low 60% range and is in fact has dropped to the mid-50's as districts try to balance their budgets on the backs of part-time faculty. So, why has this law failed? The law has failed for any number of reasons. First, it is a toothless law.

Recognizing that there are budget constraints preventing colleges from achieving the minimum threshold of 75% full-time instruction, the Community College State Chancellor's office only requires each college district to increase its number of full-time hires based on an increase in enrollment. The Chancellor has the option of withholding money from a college district should it fail to meet the requisite percentage of full-time hires.

Unfortunately, the Chancellor's office relies on an annual report that each district submits. Equally unfortunate is the fact that each district self-reports its faculty numbers and budget. The Chancellor's office has stated in the past that it lacks sufficient staff to audit said reports; therefore, it must accept the word of each district. Should a district misrepresent the percentage of full-time instruction, as has happened in the past, the required percentage of new full-time hires goes down. Additionally, districts can claim financial hardship, in which case the percentage of new full-time hires may be temporarily waived altogether.

Funding availability is, of course, a legitimate concern. But it shouldn't be. California voters passed Proposition 98, mandating that the State divide education funding according to the following formula: approximately 89% to K-12 and 11% to community colleges. One would think that this public mandate would ease the financial crunch in the community college system, but this is not the case. To date this mandated distribution has yet to occur.

Consider that there are more K-12 teachers than community college instructors. The union representing the largest number of K-12 instructors has considerable clout, and let's face it. The younger K-12 student makes a better poster child than a community college student. When that union brings pressure to bear, the state legislators pay attention. Not once has the community college system received its mandated share of educational funding. And when each point taken away from the 11% represents \$50 million, community colleges take quite a hit.

California is now in a genuine financial bind that will not end any time soon. Additionally we have a fiscally conservative governor. Even though the community college system has received a higher percentage allocation than last year, the governor would choose to abandon Proposition 98 altogether. If he is successful in instituting his conservative fiscal policies, that can only mean further weakening of AB 1725 and more cuts to education at all levels.

What was once a minimum requirement of 75% full-time instruction has already turned into a ceiling of 75% full-time instruction. As the financial crisis deepens, AB 1725 will become even less effective. Moreover, if we are not vigilant, community colleges could end up being centralized and run by businessmen instead of educators—and all faculty could end up becoming at will or part-time employees.