

MCCCD approves tax hike

Property levy to increase 2%

By Mary Beth Faller
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Property owners will see their tax bills increase after the Maricopa County Community College District governing board approved a hike Tuesday.

The 2 percent increase in the tax levy will mean an additional \$2.31 in taxes per \$100,000 of assessed property, starting July 1.

The vote was 4-1, with board member Debra Pearson opposing.

No one spoke against the tax increase during the public hearing preceding the vote.

Three volunteers with the Valley Interfaith Project, a community organization composed of religious and civic leaders, spoke in support of the tax hike, telling the board members that the increase was small but would yield a good return on investment.

"The state has placed our educational system in a vice grip and now only provides 1 percent of the funding for the district," Monica Dorsey said.

"The Legislature has simply passed the buck on its responsibility to be good stewards of our economic future.

"They placed an added burden on our local government to make up the difference," said Dorsey, who also is a member of the board of Arizona Career Pathways, a non-profit job-training program that has a partnership with the community colleges.

Governing-board member

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Dana Saar supported the tax increase, although he voted against the \$5-per-credit tuition increase that was passed in March.

"I voted against the increase in student tuition for the reason that I think we need to do a better job in making sure the money that is spent has some accountability down the road," he said. "I think the board is making moves to do a good job in making sure that money is spent appropriately and is meeting our goals.

"This increase, compared to the 5 percent increase we gave our students, to me, is fair. We're asking students to do more than we're asking the tax-

payers."

The tax and tuition increases, along with about \$8.3 million from taxes on new construction in the county, will add about \$29 million to the proposed \$715 million 2013-14 operating budget for the 10-college system. The state's proposed funding, which is not final, is \$400,000 less than last year, at about \$7.9 million.

About \$2.3 million will be spent on adding 32 full-time faculty positions. The community colleges are moving toward having 60 percent of faculty be full time, and 40 percent part time, or adjunct. That's the reverse of the proportion now.

About \$5 million will go toward technology and staff for two initiatives to increase student success, which will simplify online transactions, such

as student aid, and enhance placement testing and advising.

Technology maintenance and upgrades will cost about \$4.3 million.

About \$1 million will go toward public-safety improvements, including 11 new certified officers.

The colleges are adding some need-based and academic scholarships, for another \$1 million.

About \$11.5 million of the added revenue is not specified for any purpose, and could be used for salary increases or another initiative.

In voting for the increase, board member Randolph Lumm said he wants to see an expansion of the dual-enrollment program, in which high-school students can earn college credit.