

FREE COLLEGE IN SMCCCD – SB 893 FIRST YEAR REPORT

AY 2023-24 (SUMMER 2023, FALL 2023, AND SPRING 2024)

INTRODUCTION

Senator Josh Becker (13th CA Senate District) introduced Senate Bill 893 ([SB 893](#)), co-authored by former State Assembly member and current U.S. Congressman Kevin Mullin and State Assemblymember Marc Berman, on behalf of the San Mateo County Community College District (SMCCCD) on January 31, 2022. SB 893 worked its way through the legislative process and was passed by the State Senate (with amendments from committees) and by the State Assembly (with amendments from committees). The bill was signed into law by Governor Newsom on October 31, 2022. The bill allowed for the full-scale implementation of the Free College strategic initiative, building on the \$6.75M investment made by the SMCCCD Board of Trustees in 2021.

OVERVIEW OF SB 893

SB 893 provides greater flexibility to the SMCCCD to use existing local revenues (in the District's unrestricted general fund) to reduce costs for students furthering their education. The bill is a five-year pilot program, and requires reporting to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, the California Department of Finance, and the appropriate committees of the legislature of how the District has determined to use local unrestricted general funds to support implementation of the California College Promise, assist students with total cost of attendance, the fiscal impact of the pilot program and demographic information on the students served by the funds allowable under the bill. The bill took effect January 1, 2023.

With SB 893, SMCCCD is permitted to use its local funds to provide for a student's total cost of attendance (COA). SB 893 does not increase any state funding for SMCCCD or commit the state to allocate any additional resources to SMCCCD. Importantly, the bill explicitly places the burden of using the allowable flexibility on SMCCCD and further required the Board of Trustees to adopt appropriate and necessary policies relating to qualifications for students who would be eligible for reduced fees.

There are a number of additional transparencies requirements and safeguards in the bill, including:

- The SMCCCD Board of Trustees must establish a framework and adopt policies to determine eligibility and students must demonstrate financial need (as determined by the District).
- Students must reside in San Mateo County, thus preventing any real or perceived competition with neighboring community college districts.
- SMCCCD must publicly provide financial impact information at a public Board meeting showing that the District has the funds to reduce fees for additional students and the District is prohibited from receiving reimbursement from the state.

The bill defines a student's total cost of attendance as:

"[...]the total cost of attendance for a student attending a community college shall be defined to include the student's tuition and fees, books and supplies, living expenses, transportation expenses, and any other student expenses used to calculate a student's financial need for purposes of federal Title IV student aid programs."

With this definition as a framework, the SMCCCD Board considered and ultimately adopted specific Board Policies to implement the legislation. An associate Administrative Procedure was also developed to provide further details on the implementation of the District's Free College strategic initiative (see Appendix A). Both the Board Policy and Administrative Procedure were reviewed by the District Participatory Governance Council (DPGC), which ultimately recommended the adoption of the Board Policy to the Chancellor, who subsequently recommended it to the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees approved the policies at its regular meeting on [March 22, 2023](#).

IMPROVING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

The most immediate and direct impact of the implementation of the Free College strategic initiative, as authorized by SB 893 and codified in Board Policy and Administrative Procedure, has been a significant increase in enrollment across the three colleges of the SMCCCD. As reported to the Board of Trustees at its [October 23, 2024 meeting](#) in East Palo Alto, the three colleges combined have seen an increase of 24% in enrollment since the Fall 2022 semester due to the passage of SB 893. Since it took effect on January 1, 2023, SB 893 has benefited 26,656 members of the San Mateo County community.

The majority of students benefiting from the Free College support in AY 2023-24 came from historically marginalized communities of color in San Mateo County, with more than 41% of students in AY 2023-24 identifying as Hispanic/Latino/a/x, 10% as Filipino/a/x, and another 2.2% as Black/African American.

AY 2023-24	Cañada		CSM		Skyline		Total SMCCCD	
Race/Ethnicity	# of Students	%	# of Students	%	# of Students	%	# of Students	%
AIAN	7	0.10%	-	0.06%	-	0.05%	-	0.08%
Asian	692	9.80%	1,319	14.01%	1,240	13.44%	2,152	12.58%
Black (Non-Hispanic)	156	2.21%	209	2.22%	188	2.04%	371	2.17%
Filipino/a/x	446	6.32%	740	7.86%	1,358	14.72%	1,720	10.06%
Hispanic/ Latino/a/x	3,360	47.59%	3,663	38.90%	3,458	37.48%	7,067	41.32%

Multi-Racial	385	5.45%	704	7.48%	711	7.71%	1,184	6.92%
Pacific Islander	106	1.50%	216	2.29%	155	1.68%	314	1.84%
Unknown	276	3.91%	279	2.96%	240	2.60%	543	3.18%
White (Non-Hispanic)	1,633	23.13%	2,281	24.22%	1,872	20.29%	3,738	21.86%

Table 1

Additionally, the majority of students (53%) who benefited from Free College support in AY 2023-24 were the first in their family (i.e., First Generation) to attend college.

	Cañada		CSM		Skyline		Total SMCCCD	
First Gen Status	# of Students	%	# of Students	%	# of Students	%	# of Students	%
First Generation	3,808	53.93%	4,856	51.58%	5,023	54.44%	9,037	52.85%
Not First Generation	2,398	33.96%	3,824	40.62%	3,469	37.60%	6,351	37.14%
Unreported	855	12.11%	734	7.80%	735	7.97%	1,712	10.01%

Table 2

REMOVING FINANCIAL BARRIERS

Free College and SB 893 have removed financial barriers faced by the communities of San Mateo County, resulting in significant benefits to the very communities who have historically been denied access to higher education. The use of property tax dollars to remove those barriers is an example of social justice in action. Now that the first academic year has been completed with the full implementation of SB 893 and the Free College strategic initiative, the District can begin to examine the impact on student persistence and completion.

The earliest indicator of the impact of Free College with respect to completion is the persistence of students from the Fall to the Spring semester. As shown in Table 3 below, students who received any benefit from SB 893 persisted at an almost 15% higher rate (74% vs 59%) than students who had the same educational goal (ACE goal) but were not eligible for SB 893 support.

	Fall to Spring Persistence SB 893		Fall to Spring Persistence ACE Goal No SB 893	
	# of Students	%	# of Students	%
Total	11,420	74.10%	1,939	59.70%

Table 3

As Free College under SB 893 moves into its second full year of implementation, additional persistence and completion metrics will be examined to continue to understand the full impact of Free College in SMCCCD.

INVESTING IN OUR COMMUNITY

The SMCCCD Free College strategic initiative returns a substantial portion of the significant investment made by the communities of San Mateo County in the District and its three Colleges. As authorized by SB 893, Free College uses the general fund dollars of the District that primarily come from property tax collected in San Mateo County to then pay for enrollment and registration fees, and additional educational supports for students who demonstrate financial need. This support is divided into two tiers based on the adopted Board Policy. All students residing in San Mateo County who had an educational goal of degree, certificate, or transfer (also known as ACE goals) had their enrollment fees (\$46/unit) paid for under Tier 1 supports. Students who received Tier 2 supports ($n = 5,189$) were enrolled in a minimum of six (6) units, had an ACE goal, and demonstrated financial need as defined in the Board Policy.

	AY 2023-24	Number of Unique Students	Total Amount
Tier 1	Enrollment Fees	11,912	\$ 6,848,849
Tier 2	Fees at Registration (Material Fees, Student Body Fees, Student Union Fees)	5,189	\$ 189,747
	Inclusive Access Fees	4,147	\$ 546,252
	Total 3 T's		\$ 1,613,273
	Transportation	2,963	\$ 788,351
	Textbooks and Supplies	2,216	\$ 197,278
	Technology	1,429	\$ 627,644
Total		17,101	\$9,198,121

Table 4

LOOKING FORWARD

Senate Bill 893 is a five-year pilot program specifically for the San Mateo County Community College District. The bill also requires the governing board of the San Mateo County Community College District, on or before March 1, 2026, to submit a report to the Chancellor's Office of the California Community

Colleges, the Department of Finance, and the appropriate committees of the Legislature on the implementation of these provisions, as specified.

Importantly, West Valley-Mission Community College District has also been successful in passing free college legislation with AB 3158 (Berman), which was signed by Governor Newsom on September 22, 2024. This legislation was modeled after SB 893 and represents an expansion of the Free College initiative to thousands of additional students in California. A seven-year pilot, this legislation provides another example of the importance of removing financial barriers for students, and another example that the SMCCCD model can and should be replicated by all community supported community college districts.

Sustainability of funding for Free College based on the first complete year of SB893 implementation is an active discussion within the District. In the FY 204-25 budget the Board approved \$11.2M to support Free College as authorized by SB893. In addition, the Board directed non-resident tuition revenue from international students to be used to support Free College, above and beyond the FY 2022-23 amount allocated to the District Office and Colleges. Additionally, working with the San Mateo County Community College Foundation (SMCCCF) there is the potential to work towards developing an endowment campaign specifically to fund Free College. A discussion will be brought forward in the Spring 2025 semester as part of the budget development process to provide a menu of options and resources that can be considered by the Board of Trustees for the ongoing funding of the Free College strategic initiative. Collectively through shared efforts and vision, the leadership and constituents of SMCCCD, its Board of Trustees, and the representatives of the communities of San Mateo will be working together to ensure the permanence of Free College in San Mateo County for generations to come.

CONTACT

Any questions or comments related to this report can be sent to Dr. Aaron McVean, Vice Chancellor of Educational Services, mcveana@smccd.edu.