

San Mateo County Community College District enrollment on rise

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*Officials look to understand influences on uptick for future sustained growth*

By Sierra Lopez

*The article below originally appeared in the [San Mateo Daily Journal](#) and is being reprinted with permission.*

The San Mateo County Community College District surpassed its enrollment goal this fall semester and trustees are now eager to understand what enabled that growth so it can be harnessed moving forward.

“Whenever we have a success like this we need to completely celebrate it but then also be mindful to understand what is it we did that really made that difference, and is that what needs to be done next or is there another shift or change that needs to be made,” board President Lisa Petrides said during a Board of Trustees meeting Oct. 25.

After years of enrollment declines, the district saw a 16% uptick in local students signing up for courses in the fall, according to data presented by Dr. Aaron McVean, vice chancellor of Educational Services and Planning. That increase does not include international students or dual-enrollment high school students.

Officials had initially expected to see a 15% increase in enrollment, or about 16,000 students in classrooms after enrollment also grew by 10% this spring compared to the spring of 2022. Both upticks in enrollment follow about a decade of concerning local and statewide dips.

McVean also highlighted other positive trends. The district saw a substantial increase in first-time students including the largest incoming Promise Scholars cohort in the program’s history.

The district saw a significant decrease in the number of students who have not declared their intent to earn a certificate, degree or transfer with a degree, also known as an “ACE” goal. By declaring a goal, students are provided access to more financial assistance and counseling services.

“To see such large increases in students connected to that goal means that they’re connected now to our programs and services and we hope that we will be able to see them through completion,” McVean said.

Increasing enrollment has been a specific focus for the district in recent years. It’s begun expanding its footprint into the coastside to encourage students to enroll in courses who may struggle to get to existing campuses. Officials also tapped the marketing firm VisionPoint Marketing for assistance with planning near- and long-term strategies for improving enrollment.

The district is also one of a few in the state piloting a free college program following the approval of Senate Bill 893. The bill took effect at the start of this year and allows the district to waive and use unrestricted funds to cover a state-mandatory \$46 per unit enrollment fee for county residents.

Trustees are now eager to understand which of the recent changes or interventions have had an influence on improved enrollment. McVean said staff has planned to survey students soon but theorized reduced cost barriers were a major boost to enrollment.

Understanding the influence of each intervention would enable the district to further focus outreach efforts, trustees noted. The district does currently focus on target groups including the Filipino community, other minority groups, and those living in underserved communities but board Vice President John Pimentel noted enrollment among Black and Pacific Islander residents was extremely low, totaling just 243 students.

“There’s still a lot of opportunity and a lot of work for us to do with everything that we have been starting to do in a much more aggressive way,” Pimentel said. “Now is the time to really double down on that and hopefully that will improve these numbers for the fall even further.”

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