



Review of Proposal for Los Rios Community College District to Establish an Elk Grove Education Center

Introduction

In 2007, the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges amended its Title 5 Regulations to grant conditional approval to proposals for educational centers if certain criteria were met at the time of submission. Among other requirements, a district would need to demonstrate that a proposed center would serve at least 500 full-time equivalent students annually by the third year of operation.

In this report, staff considered a proposal by the Los Rios Community College District for conditional approval for an educational center that will be located in the City of Elk Grove. This report is submitted as an information item because the Commission has not yet adopted criteria and guidelines for conditional approval of community college educational centers. After such criteria are adopted, staff will submit an updated analysis of the Los Rios proposal that will contain a staff recommendation. It is anticipated that staff will develop a set of guidelines for consideration by the Commission at its March 2009 meeting.

Background

The Los Rios Community College District started in 1942 when Grant Union Junior College opened to train civilian personnel for service during World War II. In 1954, voters established a junior college district to serve Sacramento and El Dorado Counties, and parts of Yolo, Placer, and Solano Counties. The district was officially formed in 1965 and is responsible for American River College, Sacramento City College, Cosumnes River College, Folsom Lake College, the El Dorado Educational Center, the North Natomas Educational Center, and seven major out-reach operational centers.

The Commission determined in a 2005 study that the Sacramento region continues to face significant capacity pressures in that community college enrollment demand far exceeds the availability of lecture and laboratory space. Consistent with growing student demand, the district served 81,400 students in Fall 2007, which translates to more than 60,000 full-time equivalent students for the 2007–08 academic year. The Fall 2007 enrollment headcount figure reflects a 14.3% increase in enrollment since Fall 2005, or more than 10,000 additional students. Enrollment projections prepared by the Chancellor's Office estimate that Los Rios district enrollments will top 107,000 by 2020. Given these recent enrollment patterns, the Commission believes that the projections might understate student demand.

The Proposed Davis and Elk Grove Educational Centers



To meet demand, the district determined that it would be more cost-effective to build educational centers in high demand areas, such as Davis, West Sacramento, Rancho Cordova, and Elk Grove/Laguna, than it would be to build one or two additional costly full-service community colleges. In March 2002, voters of the Los Rios Community College District passed a \$265 million bond act. More recently, in November 2008, voters passed a \$475 million bond measure to further accommodate necessary renovations and capacity growth. The district intends to use local bond funds for all construction costs associated with Phase I of the Elk Grove Educational Center, which is estimated to total about \$7 million. Phase I will provide for 13,800 assignable square feet of instructional and support space.

Conditional Approval

At its May 2008 meeting, the Board of Governors made revisions to Title 5 regulations for establishing a new center. In essence, the changes allowed the Board of Governors to grant “conditional approval” to a proposed educational center that is projected to quickly surpass the 500 full-time equivalent students (FTES) minimum for full approval but will not have the 500 FTES at the time of opening. This revision is intended to serve rapid-growth areas that anticipate precipitous student demand for an increase in course offerings. The following is specific language detailed in Title 5 Section 55185(b):

(b) If the service area of a proposed educational center has an exceptionally high rate of population growth, as determined by standards set by the Chancellor, the district may obtain conditional approval of the educational center by demonstrating that, by no later than the third consecutive full academic year of operation that is used for eligibility to become an educational center, the proposed center will be able to generate at least 500 FTES in a year. This conclusion must be based on a thorough analysis, which includes but is not limited to, a review of the facility development schedule, population trends and projected demand for the educational programs to be included in the proposed educational center. Once the district demonstrates that the educational center has generated at least 500 FTES as reported on the district’s most recent final attendance report, then full state approval for the educational center may be granted.

Additional Information Required for Full Approval

The proposal in its current form is missing specific information related to Commission criteria, which is necessary for the Commission to offer its recommendation for approval. Because the Board of Governors has already granted conditional approval to the Elk Grove Center, the Commission will review the proposal as an information item and intends to revisit the project and consider full approval at a later date. The proposal is deficient in the following areas, and the district will need to submit the following information for Commission review.

Institutional Capacity

The district provided supplemental information showing the total number of weekly student contact hours of instruction generated by its comprehensive campus and educational centers. The Commission requests that this information be disaggregated by type of space, i.e. lecture and laboratory. Further, greater explanation of capacity/load ratios for Cosumnes River College are required to supplement the argument that this campus is at full operational capacity.

Environmental Impact

The district is seeking conditional approval for the new center yet it has not conducted a comprehensive Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The new statute puts the Commission and its review process in unfamiliar territory with regard to submission of all materials needed for the Commission to grant approval, including the EIR. Commission staff will explore the changes brought by the new conditional

approval process and will determine protocol for reviewing proposals that do not contain all materials needed for new center approval.

Joint Use of Facilities

As part of the criteria that explores alternative options for accommodating enrollment demand, there must be a discussion of joint use of facilities. The district does not have any outreach centers south of Sacramento. The Commission would expect a discussion on what joint use operations the district has explored with Elk Grove area high schools to offer college courses, and why there are no existing outreach centers in the region.

The Elk Grove Educational Center and Commission Criteria for Approval

General Description and Overview

The proposed site is a 15-acre parcel located near the intersection of Bruceville and Bilby Roads, roughly equidistant from Interstate 5 and Highway 99 and about 5 miles south of Cosumnes River College, the nearest postsecondary institution, which is the district's southernmost campus and the parent campus to the proposed center. The site is surrounded by land that has been zoned for residential development and is located across the street from Franklin High School.

Enrollment Projections

The greater Sacramento region served by the Los Rios Community College District has experienced significant population growth in recent decades. Encompassing the counties of El Dorado, Sacramento, Yolo, and portions of Placer and Solano counties, the population of the district's service area increased by nearly 75% between 1980 and 2005, from 1 million to 1.73 million. Continued population growth is forecasted, with projections that the district's service area will reach 2.2 million by 2015. The City of Elk Grove, in particular, has experienced a population boom, increasing by as much as 7% in a single year and ranking the third-fastest growing city in the state. Elk Grove's adult population is projected to reach 109,000 by 2020.

The district's four colleges — Sacramento City, American River, Cosumnes River, and Folsom Lake — served more than 71,000 students last year. Cosumnes River College is located in the southern region of the district and serves the areas of South Sacramento, Florin, Laguna, and Elk Grove. According to the Board of Governors report that granted conditional approval for establishing the Elk Grove center, the Cosumnes River campus does not have the capacity to accommodate the growth of students in the area.

The district's projections for enrollment at the Elk Grove center, verified by the Department of Finance, show that FTES is well over the 500 FTES threshold required to establish a new center. Although the district could have student demand for over 1,700 FTES by 2013, the initial year of operation, it plans to start modestly in Phase I by building a facility with the capacity for only 360 FTES.

Enrollment Projections for Elk Grove Educational Center

	Projections Based on Unlimited Capacity			Projections Based on Capacity for Phases I, II, III		
	Enrollment	WSCH*	FTES	Actual Enrollment	Actual WSCH*	Actual FTES
2013	5,113	53,229	1,774	1,216	5,404	360
2014	5,308	55,251	1,841	1,216	5,404	360
2015	5,502	60,408	2,013	2,391	10,614	708
2016	5,696	62,543	2,084	2,391	10,614	708
2017	5,890	64,672	2,155	3,607	16,018	1,068

Verified by Department of Finance.

*Weekly student contact hours.

Alternatives

The district explored alternatives to building a new center. These include: building capacity at existing institutions; increasing the use of existing facilities; shared facilities use with other institutions; use of technology for virtual learning; and private funding or land donations to support a new center.

Several of the alternative options also have been explored, but these alternatives cannot fully offset the regional growth and need for a new facility.

The district has increased night and weekend course offerings at Cosumnes River College and has also grown in summer term enrollments. Despite the increase in course offerings, the district has a growing number of students who are wait-listed because demand cannot be met.

Between 2002 and 2005, online course offerings increased 82%, helping the district accommodate the enrollment demand that cannot be met by on-site classes. While online offerings are convenient in serving some sectors of the student population, the district feels that some populations are best served by a classroom experience. Many Elk Grove students are young, first-generation students from lower-income households; this particular demographic may face barriers to online course participation, such as in-home technology, and will benefit from attending school in a classroom setting.

Los Rios District planners believe that the best, and most fiscally conservative approach to address the region’s growth, is to open smaller centers around the service area, as opposed to expanding facilities at existing campuses for two reasons. First, the traffic congestion in the Elk Grove/Laguna area is a mounting problem, and the commute time to Cosumnes River College from central Elk Grove, though only five miles away, is increasing. Second, the district believes that establishing conveniently located centers will increase the participation rates of students who may not be willing to attend at a larger campus.

Academic Planning and Program Justification

The new center will primarily offer general education classes in language arts, math, science, humanities, social and behavioral science, and education. The center will offer a teacher education program that is intended to assist the Elk Grove Unified School District and the community with enrollment growth in the region’s schools. The center intends to serve as an extension to some of the career programs offered at Cosumnes River College, including general business and management, computer science, and human services. In the center’s opening semester in 2013, 51 courses in 26 disciplines will be offered.

Student Services and Outreach

In its initial year of operation, the new center will house many student services, including most admission and records functions and academic counseling services. Some of the more complex and costly services, such as financial aid processing, academic testing, and health services will be available to students but will be housed, in the initial phase, at the Cosumnes River campus. At full Phase III operation, the center will offer a complete array of admissions, financial aid, counseling, health, tutoring, and library services.

Capital Outlay and Support Budget Projections

Capital construction funding will stem from bond measure funds, capital projects funds, general funds, and State capital outlay funds. The district passed a \$265 million bond measure in March 2002, and another \$475 million bond in November 2008, funds that will be allocated to district-wide facilities improvement and construction of new facilities. District funds will cover the \$7 million required to complete the Phase I construction that will build 13,800 in assignable square feet (ASF) of laboratory, classroom, and office space.

Phase II construction will add 13,800 ASF, costing roughly \$7 million. District funds will be used for \$3.1 million of the costs and the projected state cost is \$3.9 million. The final build out, Phase III, creates an additional 12,600 ASF and will cost the district \$3.1 million and the state \$3.7 million.

Although the district estimates that student demand for the new center could produce as many as 1,700 FTES, the initial phase of operation will only produce enough space to accommodate 360 FTES. Operational costs include the hiring of 17 full-time personnel, including 10 faculty positions. Total operational cost will be \$1.1 million, or about \$3,100 per FTES. At Phase III, operational costs are estimated to be \$3.2 million, with a total of 51 full-time personnel equivalents, and servicing approximately 1,070 FTES.

Geographic and Physical Accessibility

The proposed site is located between Interstate 5 and Highway 99, with convenient access to both free-ways. The area surrounding the site is zoned for residential construction and there are new roads that will allow easy access to the center. The location is intended to cut driving times for local residents, who would otherwise commute to Cosumnes River College. The site is located across the street from a high school and the district proposes that the close proximity will encourage high school students to continue their education at the center.

The proposal does not identify whether the site is in proximity to local fire and emergency services and the ability of those services to access the site in the event of an emergency. Further, the proposal does not explain the number and location of access points to the center, nor does it discuss parking facility plans for students and staff.

Effect on other Institutions

The district consulted with numerous educational entities regarding establishment of a new center in Elk Grove, including CSU Sacramento, San Joaquin Delta College, and Sacramento- and Elk Grove-area school districts. Each entity submitted letters of support. Further, the Los Rios District and San Joaquin Delta College (which neighbors the Los Rios service area to the south) developed a Memorandum of Understanding to address regional growth needs. Development of the Elk Grove center is not anticipated to have any adverse effects on neighboring institutions.

Environment and Social Impact

A full environmental analysis, as is required under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) has not yet been conducted for the site. The district indicates that it is possible that a full Environmental Impact Report will not be required for this project and that the CEQA analysis may determine that a “mitigated negative declaration” is the only documentation that will be required.

Ramcon, an engineering and environmental contracting firm, conducted a preliminary environmental analysis of the property. The evidence of this review was a two-paragraph letter indicating that the company “found no recognized environmental conditions likely to impact the environmental integrity of the subject property.”

Economic Efficiency

Although the Los Rios service area is growing at a rapid pace, district administrators are taking a conservative approach to construction of new facilities. By acquiring smaller parcels of land, strategically located in new-growth areas, and building to modest capacity need estimates, the district demonstrates efficiency in not overstretching their need for new facilities.