Rural and Rural-serving College Infrastructure

How to Address Needed Physical, Technological, and Data Infrastructure
February 4, 2026

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Vision

Every Community College District should ensure students have access to high quality and well maintained physical, technological, and data infrastructure.

I. Introduction: Facilities Infrastructure

Community college districts are responsible for maintaining, modernizing, expanding, and adapting campus facilities to support the educational and workforce development programs available to the students and communities they serve.

To support most campus facility needs, community college districts are authorized to seek voter approval of local general obligation bond resources and can compete for available voter approved statewide general obligation bond resources. Additionally, intermittent Proposition 98 General Fund allocations are sometimes provided to address deferred maintenance, revenue bonds can be used to support the construction of revenue generating facilities (such as parking structures), and recently lease revenue bond resources have been available to support affordable student housing projects.

Voter approved statewide general obligation bond resources are allocated to districts through an annual state capital outlay grant application process that relies upon a Board approved scoring matrix to prioritize projects for funding. Districts tend to leverage both state and local bond funds to build or modernize facilities; however, rural-serving districts often have access to fewer, or no, local voter approved general obligation bond resources.

The Board's approved priority funding matrix is used to evaluate each district's capital outlay proposals that request available state general obligation bond funding. The priority funding matrix provides a consistent way to determine which projects the Chancellor's Offices submits to the Department of Finance and Legislature for funding considerations. The Matrix prioritizes projects that best meet the following priorities:

1. Expanding campuses to appropriately meet enrollment demands,
2. Modernizing aging facilities,
3. Meeting space utilization standards referenced in California Code of Regulations, and,
4. Leveraging state and local funds to provide facilities at the least cost to the state.

Community College Economic Impact

According to the recent California Community College Economic Impact report developed by Lightcast:

- In [fiscal year] 2023-24, operations, construction, and student spending of the colleges, together with the enhanced productivity of their alumni, generated $173 billion in added income for the California economy, a value equal to approximately 5.0% of California's total gross state product (GSP). Expressed in terms of jobs, California's Community Colleges' impact supported 1.7 million jobs."
- For every dollar of public money invested in educating students attending California's Community Colleges, taxpayers will receive an average of $1.60 in return over the course of the students' working lives. The average annual rate of return for taxpayers is 3.1%.
- For every dollar invested in California's Community Colleges in [fiscal year] 2023-24, people in California will receive $14.00 in return, for as long as California's Community Colleges' [fiscal year] 2023-24 students remain active in the state workforce.

II. The Case for Providing Technical Assistance and Support to Rural-Serving Community College Districts

This issue brief describes the need to provide technical assistance and associated technology support to districts, particularly rural-serving districts that have opted to participate as a member of the rural-serving community college caucus, to help them more effectively articulate their facilities infrastructure needs, strengthen campus connectivity and data infrastructure, sustain Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system deployments, and support their discussions of infrastructure financing options with local communities. Beyond general resource constraints, rural-serving community college districts often have limited staffing capacity and technical expertise to maintain, update, and ensure the operational continuity of their ERP systems, as well as to fully engage their communities around broader facilities needs and available financing structures.

Facilities

Appendix 1 reflects the $33.4 billion in voter authorized local general obligation bond resources that have been approved to address the facilities needs of districts. Between 2015-16 through 2025-26, of the 72 districts eligible districts, 39 districts have access to approved local General Obligation Bond resources, 4 districts have access to less than $100 million in access to approved local General Obligation Bond resources, and 29 districts did not approve a local bond. During this time, statewide voters have also approved $3.5 billion in General Obligation Bond, $2 billion through Proposition 51 of 2016 and $1.5 billion through Proposition 2 of 2024.

Of the local bond funds approved by voters since 2015-16, roughly $2.9 billion, or just under 8.7% of the total approved local General Obligation Bond resources, is attributable to the 22 districts that currently represent the rural-serving college/district CEO caucus.

Appendix 2 reflects the total amount of Proposition 98 General Fund resources provided to support district deferred maintenance and instructional equipment. Between 2015-16 through 2025-26, approximately $1.3 billion was allocated to districts to address deferred maintenance and instructional equipment needs. Although sizable, funding to support deferred maintenance and instructional equipment has been provided on a one-time basis and there have been four years with little or no deferred maintenance funding provided to address these needs.

Technology

As noted in a 2022 letter that predominantly reflected the perspectives of rural-serving districts, these districts often struggle with the costs and labor required to operate and manage Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems and related data systems that are essential to core institutional functions—including student registration, financial aid, finance, and human resources—as well as required reporting to the Chancellor's Office. While ERP systems do not directly run classroom technology, they are foundational systems that must reliably integrate with a wide range of student-facing applications, instructional tools, and analytics platforms that increasingly depend on stable, high-quality data connections.

Many rural-serving districts face constraints not only in managing unwieldy ERP systems, but also in their underlying network infrastructure. Limited broadband or fiber connectivity to campus ("north–south" infrastructure), combined with aging internal wiring and, in some cases, a lack of fiber between campus buildings ("east–west" infrastructure), can hinder their ability to fully utilize modern cloud-based systems, statewide data platforms, and other technology investments being advanced by the state. Even where connectivity exists, bandwidth limitations or outdated campus networks may require districts to throttle or prioritize traffic, reducing their ability to effectively leverage these shared systems for students, faculty, and staff.

These challenges are particularly acute for smaller districts that lack economies of scale in procurement, system management, cybersecurity, and ongoing maintenance of complex data environments that contain highly sensitive information. In addition, when rural-serving districts rely on locally approved bonds to address infrastructure needs, they can face community pressure to prioritize visible facility improvements over "invisible" investments such as fiber, wiring, and network upgrades, even when those investments are essential to modern instruction and operations.

Rural-serving districts are also at a distinct labor-market disadvantage in recruiting and retaining personnel with the specialized skills needed to operate, secure, and continuously improve ERP and related data systems. As a result, the costs of these critical systems are disproportionately high for smaller districts, requiring them to devote a larger share of their overall budgets to basic technology operations. This, in turn, limits their capacity to invest in additional student support services, instructional technology, and program implementation in furtherance of Vision 2030 goals.

2026-27 Five-Year Capital Outlay Plan

The 2026-27 Five-Year Capital Outlay Plan for the California Community Colleges covers the period from 2026-27 through 2030-31, and reflects a total of $28.6 billion in facility needs. This amount includes $6.1 billion for construction of new facilities for enrollment growth, and $22.6 billion for modernization of existing facilities. However, the total unmet facilities needed for the California Community Colleges is approximately $32.6 billion because roughly $4 billion in additional resource needs would be attributable to fiscal years that are outside of the current five-year window. Additionally, the 2026-27 Five-Year Capital Outlay Plan reflects approximately $2.2 billion in deferred maintenance needs.

Connecting to Vision 2030 Strategic Directions

Vision 2030 reflects three core strategic directions:

- Equitable Baccalaureate Attainment - A baccalaureate degree remains one of the most powerful drivers of socioeconomic mobility. California's community colleges are unwavering in advancing the Governor's goal for 70% of working-age Californians to hold a postsecondary degree or certificate, including the baccalaureate degrees vital for high-wage, high-skill careers in the state's advanced economy.
- Generative Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Learning - The rapid emergence of generative artificial intelligence offers California community colleges powerful opportunities to streamline operations, expand capacity, and improve the student experience.
- Equitable Workforce and Economic Development - Vision 2030 takes a sector approach to workforce development, calling on colleges to partner with industry to invest in skilling up workers for socioeconomic mobility. It prioritizes high-demand careers in health care, climate, STEM and technology, education and early education that are essential to sustaining California's economic future and meeting the state's growing demand for trained workers.

Access to high quality facilities and technological infrastructure will further enable colleges to support their students' educational pathways and focus on the strategic directions reflected in Vision 2030.

III. The Challenges Facing Rural-Serving Districts

Challenges specific to rural-serving districts include:

- Existing law limits the amount of local general obligation debt authorization at 1.25% of the districts assessed property values. This serves to cap the total amount of General obligation Bonds that can be available to a district.
- Existing law limits the amount of debt service associated with voter approved local General Obligation bonds debt service at any one point in time to no more than $25

per $100,000 of assessed property values. This limits how much individual taxpayers can be charged to support voter approved debt.

- Combined these two provisions generally disproportionately impact rural-serving districts than larger urban districts because rural-serving districts generally have lower assessed property valuations and the debt service is spread over a smaller population base.
- Rural-serving districts tend to face higher construction costs because acquiring and transporting building materials to rural areas of the state is generally more expensive.
- Rural-serving districts tend to have lesser economies of scale when building new, or renovating existing facilities, to meet the educational programming needs of their students. These economies of scale also apply to their ability to convey their facilities and technology infrastructure needs to their interest holders.
- Limited staffing resources in rural areas of the state hinder rural-serving districts ability to discuss their facility needs with their broader communities and hinder their ability to convey the educational and economic benefits associated with high-quality, modern and educationally aligned facilities.
- Rural-serving districts also face challenges using locally approved bond funds for modern technology projects because bond allowability rules are better suited to one-time capital investments in depreciable hardware than to contemporary technology models that rely on software subscriptions, security licenses, and ongoing maintenance and support.
- Beyond districts' access to modern technology projects, students throughout the state often have limited access to items such as laptops, furthering the need for access to high quality facilities and technological infrastructure.
- Although statewide economic impact reports are available, rural-serving districts may not have ready access to updated region-specific economic impact data.
- Rural students would seem to be poised to benefit from the rise of online education, and indeed many are, however network bandwidth restrictions often make even online educational opportunities difficult to access or participate in equally.
- The so-called "last mile" costs of rural-serving districts are much higher than for urban districts due to the need to run much more network capacity per user served due to the low-density population of rural areas. This drives up the cost per customer and drives down the value realized in terms of service provided per dollar expended. These higher rural infrastructure costs pose steep challenges to rural networking infrastructure initiatives.

IV. Opportunity to Support Rural College Students and Communities

Addressing both facility and technology infrastructure needs will better enable districts to offer students access to high-quality, modern, and educationally appropriate facilities. These benefits can include, but are not limited to:

- Access to lab space for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics courses,
- Access to career technical education and workforce development training space,
- Access to student support services space, including space for veterans resource centers,
- Access to public safety training space,
- Access to modernized classrooms utilizing the latest technological innovations,
- Access to high-speed broadband on campuses and between campus buildings needed to support access to digital materials and learning management platforms, and
- Access to the operational infrastructure needed to maintain transparent access to fiscal and programmatic data.
- Continuing to adapt existing facilities to reflect the needs of students attending courses either in-person, virtually, or in a hybrid fashion.
- Reliable student registration, financial aid processing, and records systems supported by stable core data infrastructure.
- Stronger protection of sensitive student and employee data through modernized, well-supported networks and systems.

V. Conclusion

To assist rural-serving districts as they work to address facilities and technology infrastructure needs, and thereby further their ability to meet Vision 2030 strategic directions, including equitable baccalaureate attainment, the Chancellor's Office could establish an ongoing project that is focused on providing technical assistance to districts to:

- Enhance their ability to engage in local conversations regarding their facilities and technology infrastructure needs;
- Convey the educational and economic benefits associated with having access to high-quality, educationally aligned facilities and modern digital infrastructure;
- Highlight districts' economic impact in the region.
- Engage their community in conversations regarding how bond resources, if approved, would support their local community college campus;
- Ensure appropriate accountability measures are in place to oversee both capital outlay and technology infrastructure investments; and
- Maximize the benefits of their campus facilities and educational programming for their local communities and local economies.
- Act as an intermediary or facilitator for rural colleges who are eligible to access grants or funds intended to improve service to rural areas.
- Identify possible grant or philanthropic opportunities to support the technology needs of students.

Additionally, to assist rural-serving community college districts, the Chancellor's Office can:

- Re-engage rural-serving districts to design a shared, opt-in fiscal responsibility approach that supports their ability to access comparable Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems and collaboratively sustain ongoing operations, maintenance, cybersecurity, and system integration with student-facing technologies; and
- Collaborate with the Foundation's CollegeBuys program to explore systemwide opportunities that reduce costs, administrative burden, and technical risk associated with acquiring and maintaining ERP systems and related core data infrastructure.

Appendix 1 **Local General Obligation Bond Resources Approved 2015-16 through 2025-26**			
District*	**Resources per District**	**District***	**Resources per District**
Allan Hancock CCD	**$ -**	North Orange County CCD	**$ -**
Antelope Valley CCD	**$ 350,000,000**	Ohlone CCD	**$ -**
Barstow CCD	**$ -**	Palo Verde CCD	**$ -**
Butte-Glenn CCD	**$ 190,000,000**	Palomar CCD	**$ -**
Cabrillo CCD	**$ -**	Pasadena Area CCD	**$ 565,000,000**
Cerritos CCD	**$ 425,000,000**	Peralta CCD	**$ 800,000,000**
Chabot-Las Positas CCD	**$ 950,000,000**	Rancho Santiago CCD	**$ -**
Chaffey CCD	**$ 700,000,000**	**Redwoods CCD**	**$ 120,000,000**
Citrus CCD	**$ 298,000,000**	Rio Hondo CCD	**$ 442,200,000**
Coast CCD	**$ -**	Riverside CCD	**$ 954,000,000**
Compton CCD	**$ 200,000,000**	San Bernardino CCD	**$ 470,000,000**
Contra Costa CCD	**$ -**	San Diego CCD	**$ 3,500,000,000**
Copper Mountain CCD	**$ -**	San Francisco CCD	**$ 845,000,000**
Desert CCD	**$ 577,860,000**	San Joaquin Delta CCD	**$ 598,000,000**
El Camino CCD	**$ -**	San Jose-Evergreen CCD	**$ 748,000,000**
Feather River CCD	**$ -**	**San Luis Obispo County CCD**	**$ -**
Foothill-DeAnza CCD	**$ 898,000,000**	San Mateo County CCD	**$ -**
Gavilan CCD	**$ 248,000,000**	Santa Barbara CCD	**$ 198,000,000**
Glendale CCD	**$ 925,000,000**	Santa Clarita CCD	**$ 230,000,000**
Grossmont-Cuyamaca CCD	**$ -**	Santa Monica CCD	**$ 720,000,000**

Hartnell CCD	**$ 167,000,000**	**Sequoias CCD**	**$ 95,000,000**
Imperial CCD	**$ 130,000,000**	**Shasta-Tehama-Trinity CCD**	**$ 139,000,000**
Kern CCD	**$ 502,821,000**	Sierra CCD	**$ 350,000,000**
Lake Tahoe CCD	**$ -**	**Siskiyou CCD**	**$ -**
Lassen CCD	**$ -**	Solano County CCD	**$ -**
Long Beach CCD	**$ 1,840,000,000**	Sonoma County CCD	**$ -**
Los Angeles CCD	**$ 8,600,000,000**	South Orange County CCD	**$ -**
Los Rios CCD	**$ -**	Southwestern CCD	**$ 1,200,000,000**
Marin CCD	**$ 265,000,000**	**State Center CCD**	**$ 1,183,000,000**
Mendocino-Lake CCD	**$ -**	Ventura County CCD	**$ -**
Merced CCD	**$ 46,000,000**	Victor Valley CCD	**$ -**
Mira Costa CCD	**$ 455,000,000**	**West Hills CCD**	**$ 44,100,000**
Monterey Peninsula CCD	**$ 230,000,000**	West Kern CCD	**$ -**
Mt. San Antonio CCD	**$ 1,50,000,000**	West Valley-Mission CCD	**$ 6,9800,000**
Mt. San Jacinto CCD	**$ -**	**Yosemite CCD**	**$ -**
Napa Valley CCD	**$ -**	**Yuba CCD**	**$ 33,565,000**
		TOTAL	**$ 33,430,546,000**

**Districts in bold have rural-serving college/district CEO caucus participants.

Appendix 2

Deferred Maintenance Funding by District between 2015-16 and 2025-26

District*	TOTAL per District	District*	TOTAL per District
Allan Hancock CCD	$ 11,009,670	North Orange County CCD	$ 38,226,880
Antelope Valley CCD	$ 12,887,336	Ohlone CCD	$ 10,149,128
Barstow CCD	$ 4,174,715	Palo Verde CCD	$ 3,957,955
Butte-Glenn CCD	$ 12,262,263	Palomar CCD	$ 19,828,108
Cabrillo CCD	$ 12,626,041	Pasadena Area CCD	$ 25,512,708
Cerritos CCD	$ 20,229,105	Peralta CCD	$ 19,381,057
Chabot-Las Positas CCD	$ 19,315,026	Rancho Santiago CCD	$ 31,872,620
Chaffey CCD	$ 16,677,014	**Redwoods CCD**	$ 5,151,392
Citrus CCD	$ 13,761,237	Rio Hondo CCD	$ 14,993,940
Coast CCD	$ 33,501,954	Riverside CCD	$ 33,238,369
Compton CCD	$ 7,089,531	San Bernardino CCD	$ 18,284,770
Contra Costa CCD	$ 31,692,646	San Diego CCD	$ 44,420,479
Copper Mountain CCD	$ 3,502,824	San Francisco CCD	$ 20,678,040
Desert CCD	$ 11,724,393	San Joaquin Delta CCD	$ 18,409,434
El Camino CCD	$ 20,595,406	San Jose-Evergreen CCD	$ 14,076,414
Feather River CCD	$ 3,722,840	**San Luis Obispo County**	$ 10,111,856
Foothill-DeAnza CCD	$ 31,335,278	San Mateo County CCD	$ 19,485,977
Gavilan CCD	$ 6,695,101	Santa Barbara CCD	$ 15,883,072
Glendale CCD	$ 16,649,976	Santa Clarita CCD	$ 19,002,368
Grossmont-Cuyamaca CCD	$ 19,589,978	Santa Monica CCD	$ 26,717,592
Hartnell CCD	$ 9,714,026	**Sequoias CCD**	$ 12,287,508
Imperial CCD	$ 9,065,588	**Shasta-Tehama-Trinity**	$ 9,203,256
Kern CCD	$ 26,634,373	Sierra CCD	$ 16,979,852
Lake Tahoe CCD	$ 3,780,456	**Siskiyou CCD**	$ 4,041,247
Lassen CCD	$ 3,605,713	Solano County CCD	$ 9,426,433
Long Beach CCD	$ 23,926,694	Sonoma County CCD	$ 21,558,023
Los Angeles CCD	$ 106,031,967	South Orange County CCD	$ 31,833,714
Los Rios CCD	$ 55,113,637	Southwestern CCD	$ 17,610,208
Marin CCD	$ 5,583,234	**State Center CCD**	$ 33,129,257
Mendocino-Lake CCD	$ 4,253,051	Ventura County CCD	$ 29,031,221
Merced CCD	$ 12,100,737	Victor Valley CCD	$ 11,345,384
Mira Costa CCD	$ 12,865,202	**West Hills CCD**	$ 7,445,450
Monterey Peninsula CCD	$ 7,956,765	West Kern CCD	$ 4,188,629
Mt. San Antonio CCD	$ 37,107,474	West Valley-Mission CCD	$ 15,130,500
Mt. San Jacinto CCD	$ 14,293,723	**Yosemite CCD**	$ 18,673,687
Napa Valley CCD	$ 6,875,418	**Yuba CCD**	$ 9,546,080

*Districts in bold have rural-serving college/district CEO caucus participants.