

The 2022-23 Budget:

California College Guidance Initiative

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Summary. This post provides background on the California College Guidance Initiative (CCGI), describes the Governor’s proposal for the program, and offers an associated assessment and recommendation to the Legislature.

Background

CCGI Is a College Planning and Advising Tool.

CCGI offers access to college planning, financial aid, and career exploration tools to students from grades 6 to 12 through its online platform CaliforniaColleges.edu. CCGI also partners with school districts to streamline the college application process through verified electronic transcripts. Partner districts can upload verified academic transcript data onto the platform and into students’ accounts. When students from these partner districts apply to a California Community College (CCC) or California State University (CSU), certain high school data is shared. The college or university, in turn, can use the data to inform decisions about admissions and course placement. As of 2021-22, 95 school districts participate in CCGI.

CCGI Is Funded Through Mix of Proposition 98, Fee Revenue, and Philanthropy.

In 2018-19, the state provided CCGI \$3.5 million ongoing Proposition 98 for operational costs. The state currently funds CCGI as part of the California Department of Education’s (CDE’s) budget, with Riverside County Office of Education (COE) and the nonprofit Foundation for California Community Colleges acting as intermediaries. CCGI generates some additional funding by collecting fees from participating districts and charter schools—\$2 per middle school student and \$2.75 per high school student. Fee revenue for 2021-22 was slightly less than \$700,000. CCGI also receives funding from private philanthropy and institutional partners. For example, CCC and CSU cover participation fees for 77 districts in the Central Valley and Inland Empire.

Recent Work Group Recommended Statewide Expansion of CCGI Under Integrated “Cradle to Career” Data System.

As part of the 2019-20 budget package, Chapter 51 of 2019 (SB 75, Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review) provided \$10 million one-time non-Proposition 98 General Fund to begin initial planning and development of a statewide integrated education data system. This initial work included convening a cross-agency work group to recommend a data system consistent with legislative intent. Specifically, the budget package included intent language that the data system “create direct support tools for teachers, parents, advisors, and students” and have the ability to “transfer high school pupil educational records to postsecondary educational institutions.” The final work group report released in June 2021 included a recommendation to expand CCGI to school districts throughout the state to fulfill certain components of legislative intent.

2021-22 Budget Provided \$3.8 Million Ongoing Augmentation for CCGI Expansion.

The 2021-22 budget increased CCGI funding to begin scaling statewide (bringing total ongoing Proposition 98 funding to \$7.3 million). The 2021-22 budget package authorized CCGI to provide its services to all California school districts. The budget also included intent language that, upon full implementation, CCGI would be expected to provide several services—including free college planning, financial aid lessons, and career planning curricula—for students in grades 6 through 12. Trailer legislation also requires CCGI to report additional information by April 1, 2022 (and every year thereafter), such as budget change proposals; details for participating districts and charter schools; and, in the first report, a needs assessment examining platform usage and relevance of existing features to users.

Governor's Proposal

Provides \$9.3 Million Ongoing Augmentation for CCGI Expansion. Of this funding, \$4.5 million is proposed to cover the cost of operating the platform for existing districts, including covering the costs of fees previously paid by participating districts. The remaining \$4.8 million would cover costs associated with new districts participating on the platform, including technology operations, maintenance, and development, as well as CCGI personnel. The proposed augmentation would bring total ongoing Proposition 98 funding for CCGI to \$16.8 million.

Includes \$4.4 Million One-Time Proposition 98 Funding to Establish Regional Support for Participating Schools. The Governor also proposes one-time funding to establish a regional network of 11 COEs to increase utilization of the CCGI platform and provide technical assistance to participating schools. Funding would be available over three years.

Assessment

Proposed Augmentation Is Aligned With Legislative Intent. As previously discussed, trailer legislation as part of the 2021-22 budget package authorized CCGI to provide its services to all California school districts and established expectations for the services CCGI would provide once fully implemented. The proposed augmentation is consistent with legislative intent to scale CCGI statewide.

Full Costs for Scaling CCGI Remain Unclear. With the proposed augmentation, CCGI plans to expand the platform to an additional 136 districts in 2022-23. As a result, roughly 230 out of 424 unified and high school districts (54 percent overall) would be participating in CCGI statewide. CCGI plans to fully scale by 2025-26. The proposed augmentation brings total ongoing CCGI funding to \$16.6 million, with 294 districts that still need to be added to the platform. CCGI initially estimated the cost of fully scaling operations between \$18 million and \$20 million, but given the large number of districts that have yet to be added to the platform, we remain uncertain about the long-term costs for fully scaling CCGI.

CCGI Could Benefit From Long-Term Implementation Plan. Although CCGI assumes more districts will want to participate as the platform becomes more helpful to students during the college application and financial aid process, there is no clear plan to expand to the remaining districts. A long-term implementation plan could be particularly beneficial given the challenges of scaling statewide. For instance, there is no state mandate requiring schools to use the CCGI platform or incentive funding to encourage more districts to participate. A long-term implementation plan could clarify how CCGI would target outreach and resources to engage new districts and address any barriers to participation. For example, CCGI could use a regional approach based on local college attendance rates or focus on the state's largest school districts first. The plan could also identify ways to encourage more district participation in CCGI, including amending existing state law.

Technical Assistance Seems Reasonable, but Regional Approach Might Have Limited Impact.

In our conversations with CCGI, they indicated the regional approach is intended to take advantage of COEs' knowledge of their local context, as well as the strong reputation of some COEs in their region. However, there is no guarantee that a district will be inclined to follow advice on best practices from a regional COE, given that under the proposal, the selected COEs will be working with a large number of districts located in a separate county and with which they may not have an existing relationship. In addition, the proposal includes little detail about the types of activities regional COEs would be expected to perform to increase utilization of the platform. Other approaches might better increase CCGI utilization, such as having CCGI or CDE highlight exemplar districts or working within the state's existing system of support to promote CCGI and share best practices statewide, especially as they relate to college and career readiness.

Recommendation

Evaluate Proposal Based on Additional Details CCGI Will Provide in Spring. Since more details will be available in April, we recommend the Legislature review the additional documentation CCGI will provide and ensure key questions are

addressed. The Legislature could also consider moving CCGI's existing reporting deadlines in statute from April to the fall, consistent with the administration's budget development cycle. Some key questions for the Legislature to consider include:

- What is CCGI's long-term plan for fully scaling the platform? What challenges does CCGI anticipate in reaching full implementation? How does CCGI plan to address these challenges?
- What are the ongoing costs associated with fully scaling CCGI? How do other revenue sources, such as private philanthropic funding, factor into these ongoing cost estimates? Are the underlying assumptions to this cost estimate reasonable?
- Does CCGI have a comprehensive plan for addressing issues identified in their needs assessment? What degree of user feedback does CCGI plan to regularly incorporate into their platform updates?
- Can CCGI provide more information on why districts might not want to participate in CCGI and other related barriers to participation? How does CCGI plan to address these barriers?

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