Community college students will start paying $36 per unit this fall as part of the state’s cost-cutting measures. It will cost students $120 more per semester to take classes full-time.

Even with fee increases, San Diego’s community college district will lose more than $10 million in state funding. The district already turns away more than 10,000 potential students each semester.

Funding cuts will mean fewer courses will be offered next year, and more people vying for each class seat, according district spokesman Richard Dittbenner.

“If from the standpoint of the unemployed of San Diego, of the students who cannot get into the University of California or the CSU, they’re going to find it’s going to be a very challenging environment for them to get a public higher education in California,” Dittbenner said.

Community colleges could face even deeper cuts if temporary tax increases aren’t extended to fill the state’s remaining budget gap.

Many community college students are the first in their families to pursue a higher education, said Alberto Vasquez, president of City College Associated Students. Vasquez, 33, is a father of three and will be transferring to UCSD in the fall.

He said delays in a student’s education caused by too few course seats is a serious issue for those for whom finishing college already might seem unattainable.
“It’s going to hold you here for so long that it’s going to seem all the more unreal for you to actually complete,” Vasquez said. “It’s going to hinder our ability to get out of here and continue in our education and make a realization of what our goals are.”

The district could lose a total of $17 million if temporary tax increases are not extended to plug the remaining hole in California’s budget.