

# Flag law forces colleges to pay

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Maricopa Community Colleges has to come up with as many as 1,220 American flags made in the United States to comply with a new state law by next July.

The cost would be \$18,300 if early cost estimates of \$15 are accurate, the district's spokeswoman, Nicole Greason, said.

That's just for the red, white and blue fabric alone.

The Bill of Rights and the Constitution also must be posted alongside the flag in every classroom, according to House Bill 2583, recently passed by the Legislature.

With more than 280,000 students, 10 colleges and two skill centers, the district is one of the largest in the nation and makes up about half of the community college classrooms in the state. Its fiscal budget this year is \$1.5 billion.

While HB 2583 coasted past politicians this past session, Kathy Boyle said staff members at the Arizona Community College Association priced U.S. flags.

If each flag wore a \$25 price tag, the association's executive director said it would total more than \$50,600 for the 10 community college districts in Arizona.

For small districts, those dollars may leave a greater mark than Maricopa's, Boyle said.

"You're looking at a multimillion-dollar budget, it's small, but it's still an expense that could have gone to student services," she said.

She said districts around the state have said they would raise flag funds by soliciting businesses and individuals.

Scott Crowley, president of the Maricopa Community Colleges governing board who served in the U.S. Navy during Desert Storm, said that whatever the price tag, it's worth the sacrifice.

He said he believes the law is a good thing and gives students a chance to familiarize themselves with cornerstones of U.S. society and history.

When it comes to how the district might implement this law, Crowley said the unknowns are numerous.

The size of the flags, Constitution and Bill of Rights remain in the ether, along with how the district, along with elementary schools, high schools and universities, are supposed to cover the costs, Crowley said.

"The state Legislature can create laws which put the Constitution, the American flag and Bill of Rights in the classroom, but the Legislature also needs to fund more money toward education," he said.

"The education of our citizens and our future workforce and of this country should be our Number 1 priority," he added.

This piece of legislation falls in an election year and caught the attention of several out-of-state entities, including the American Council of Trustees and Alumni based in Washington, D.C.

Some members of the non-profit organization maintain that it is imperative for students in the United States to know the history of their country, council program director Charles Mitchell said in an e-mail.

"While we appreciate the Arizona Legislature's obvious good intention in passing the bill, we think there is a better way to improve Arizona students' educational experience: making sure they study American history," Mitchell said.

In 2001, 57 percent of U.S. high school seniors did not have a basic command of American history, according to a study from the National Center for Education Statistics.

**Reach the reporter at (602) 444-6924.**

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