

**The Lowest Student Worker Weekly Hour
Cap in the Most Expensive City:
How CCSF's 15-Hour Student Worker Policy Falls
Behind the California Norm**

A Statewide Audit of Student Worker Maximum Weekly Hours and Wage
Policy Across California Community Colleges

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Abstract

This report presents a statewide audit of California Community College student worker employment conditions, specifically maximum weekly hours and starting hourly wages, across the California Community College (CCC) system. This audit covers 66 of California's 73 community college districts; the remaining seven districts could not be included because their student employment policies were not publicly discoverable online at the time of research. Analysis of these 66 districts reveals that San Francisco Community College District (SFCCD), which operates City College of San Francisco (CCSF), imposes the lowest maximum weekly hour cap in the state at 15 hours per week. Every other audited district permits student workers to work at least 19 hours per week; 68.2% of all confirmed districts set the cap at 20 hours. The 15-hour cap makes CCSF a singular outlier in a system where this policy is determined entirely at the district level, not by the state Chancellor's Office or federal regulation. When hourly wage is factored in, CCSF student workers face the absolute lowest weekly earning potential (\$287.70 per week) among all districts for which both hours and wage data were confirmed, a gap of more than \$32.30 per week against the next lowest district. Raising the cap to 20 hours would increase maximum weekly earnings by \$95.90 at CCSF's current wage, bringing the college into alignment with the statewide norm. This report provides the research foundation for the CCSF Student Worker Union's formal policy ask to revise the maximum weekly hours cap at CCSF.

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Introduction

Student workers are an integral part of the operational and educational infrastructure of community colleges across California. From tutoring centers and libraries to administrative offices and campus events, student employment supports institutional function while providing students with income and professional development. For many students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds who make up a substantial portion of the community college population, student worker wages are not supplemental income but often the sole source of income to cover basic living expenses, including rent, food, and transportation in one of the most expensive cities in the country. Community College student workers across California are classified as part-time, temporary employees and thus do not benefit from standardized labor policies that classified staff and faculty receive. California Community College students are the last class of student worker at public institutions of higher education that do not enjoy default union representation, and thus the policies governing their employment are inconsistent across the state and fall under the discretion of individual community college districts.

One such policy governed at the district level is the maximum weekly hour cap and starting wage for student workers. There is no federal or statewide policy limiting the number of hours that student workers at community colleges may work. All such policies are entirely the result of district-level decisions.

City College of San Francisco (CCSF) currently caps student worker hours at 15 per week. This report investigates that cap, how it compares to policy at peer institutions statewide, and what the material consequences of the cap are for student workers in San Francisco.

The findings are clear and unambiguous: CCSF's 15-hour weekly cap is an *institutional policy choice*, not a federal, state, or system requirement, and it is the lowest cap in the California Community College system. This report provides the empirical and policy foundation for the CCSF Student Worker Union's demand that the cap be raised.

Policy Background: Who Sets Student Worker Hour Limits?

Federal Level: No Hour Limit for Federal Work-Study

A common assumption is that the 15-hour cap reflects Federal Work-Study (FWS) program requirements. This is incorrect. The official U.S. Department of Education *Federal Student Aid Handbook*, the authoritative regulatory guidance governing the FWS program, states explicitly:

“There are no statutory or regulatory limits on the number of hours per week or per payment period a student may work, provided no overaward occurs.”

(*Federal Student Aid Handbook*, Vol. 6, Ch. 2, 2025–2026 [1].)

The only federal constraint on FWS student worker hours is the requirement that total earnings not exceed the student’s financial need or FWS award amount. There is no federal weekly maximum. Institutions that impose a cap, whether 15, 20, or any other number, do so entirely at their own discretion.

State Level: The California Chancellor’s Office Defers to Districts

At the state level, the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) does not establish a maximum weekly hour limit for student workers. Regulatory authority over student employment is delegated to individual community college district governing boards.

California Education Code § 70901 establishes that the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges shall maintain and continue “local authority and control in the administration of the California Community Colleges” to the maximum degree permissible [2]. Pursuant to this mandate, the Chancellor’s Office has not promulgated statewide regulations specifying maximum weekly working hours for student employees.

California Education Code § 88003 governs the employment status of student workers within the community college system, establishing that students employed in college work-

study programs “shall not be a part of the classified service,” thereby exempting student workers from the classified employee protections and regulations that might otherwise apply [3]. This exemption further reinforces that terms and conditions of student employment, including hours limitations, are determined by district policy rather than by statewide classified employee standards.

The Chancellor’s Office Board Policy & Administrative Procedure template, **BP/AP 7270: Student Workers**, provides model policy language for districts but does not specify a maximum number of hours. Districts are expected to establish their own hours limits within their local board policies and administrative procedures. A review of BP/AP 7270 documents filed by districts across the state confirms this: each district independently sets its own cap, with no required upper or lower bound beyond applicable labor law [4].

The California Minimum Wage Floor

While no ceiling is mandated for student worker hours, California law does establish a wage floor. The statewide minimum wage as of January 1, 2026 is \$16.50 per hour. Some cities and counties, including San Francisco, maintain higher local minimums. CCSF’s current student worker starting wage of \$19.18 per hour reflects a premium above the state and San Francisco city minimum wage.

Summary: The 15-Hour Cap Is a Local Policy Choice

No federal statute, no state regulation, no Chancellor’s Office policy, and no California Education Code provision requires CCSF to cap student worker hours at 15 per week. The cap was established by district administrative policy and can be revised by the same authority: the district administration, with approval from the Board of Trustees. This is a policy problem with a local policy solution.

Methodology

Data Collection

Members of the CCSF Student Worker Union conducted a systematic audit of student employment policies across all 73 California community college districts from January through March 2026. For each district, researchers attempted to identify:

1. The maximum number of hours per week a student worker may work during the fall and/or spring semester;
2. The starting hourly wage for the lowest-paying student worker classification;
3. Whether students may work additional hours outside the fall/spring semester;
4. The maximum hours permitted during non-fall/spring periods;
5. Policy source URLs (Board Policy, Administrative Procedure, Financial Aid handbooks, or other official district documents).

Data was collected from official district websites, board policy databases (BoardDocs, Legislar), financial aid office pages, human resources salary schedules, and student employment handbooks.

Scope and Limitations

Of the 73 California community college districts, confirmed hours data was obtained for 66 districts (90.4%). The remaining seven districts are not included because their student employment hour policies were not publicly discoverable online at the time of research, whether through board policy databases, financial aid office pages, human resources portals, or other official district websites. These districts are: Copper Mountain CCD, Lassen CCD, San Luis Obispo County CCD, Glendale CCD, Grossmont-Cuyamaca CCD, and Monterey Peninsula CCD.

For wage data, 62 of 73 districts (84.9%) had confirmed starting wages. Analyses involving weekly earning potential are limited to districts with both confirmed hours and wage data

($n = 60$).

Where a district operates multiple colleges (e.g., Los Angeles CCD operates nine campuses), the policy reported reflects the district-level policy applicable to all campuses. CCSF is the sole campus of San Francisco CCD.

Findings

CCSF Has the Lowest Maximum Weekly Hours in the State

Among the 66 districts with confirmed data, CCSF, operating under San Francisco Community College District policy, is the only district in California that caps student worker hours below 19 hours per week. The distribution of maximum weekly hours caps is shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Maximum Weekly Hour Caps Across California Community College Districts ($n = 66$ districts with confirmed data, 2025–26)

Max Weekly Hours	Number of Districts	Percentage	Note	
15	1	1.5%	CCSF only — sole outlier	
19	7	10.6%		
19.5	3	4.5%	Statewide norm	
20	45	68.2%		
24	1	1.5%		
25	4	6.1%		
26	2	3.0%		
28	1	1.5%		
37.5	1	1.5%		
40	1	1.5%		
Total	66	100%		

The data reveal a strong statewide norm: **68.2% of all confirmed districts cap student worker hours at exactly 20 hours per week.** An additional 16.6% of districts permit between 19 and 19.5 hours, placing them near but still above CCSF’s cap. A substantial minority of districts, 11 of 66 (16.7%), allow student workers to exceed 20 hours per week during the academic semester.

CCSF's 15-hour cap is **5 hours per week below the statewide norm** and **4 hours below the next lowest confirmed cap** (19 hours, observed at seven districts). It stands alone as the only sub-19 policy in the state.

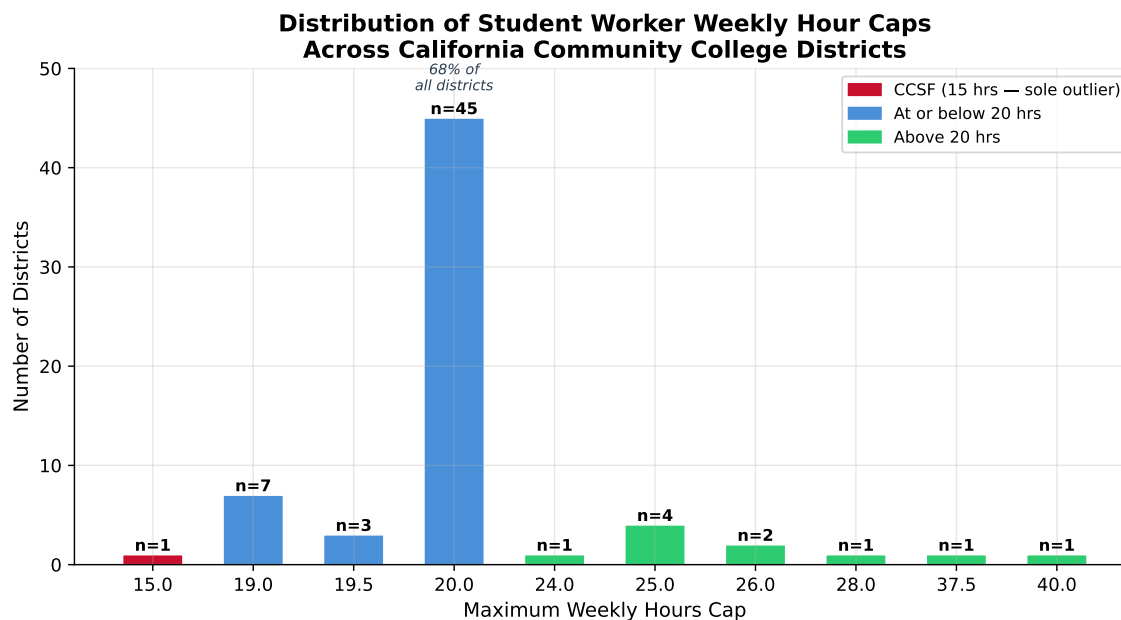


Figure 1: Distribution of maximum weekly hour caps across California community college districts. CCSF (15 hours) is the sole outlier below 19 hours; 68.2% of districts cap at 20 hours.

CCSF Student Workers Have the Lowest Weekly Earning Potential in the State

Although CCSF's starting wage of \$19.18 per hour is above the state minimum and above the wages paid at several other districts, the restrictive hour cap negates this advantage. Weekly earning potential, the product of starting hourly wage and maximum weekly hours, places CCSF at the bottom of the statewide distribution.

CCSF's maximum weekly earning potential: \$287.70.

This is the lowest among all 60 districts for which both hours and wage data were confirmed. The next lowest district (Ventura County CCD) permits a weekly maximum of \$320.00, \$32.30 more per week than CCSF. The statewide median weekly earning potential is approximately \$338.00 per week. CCSF falls \$50.30 below this median.

Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between wage and hours across all districts. CCSF occupies the lower-left corner of the chart not because its wage is particularly low, it is in fact above many peers, but because its hour cap is categorically below all other districts.

CCSF’s Higher Wage Does Not Compensate for the Hour Restriction

It is worth addressing directly the counterargument that CCSF’s relatively higher starting wage (\$19.18) offsets the lower hour cap. The data do not support this claim. Consider the comparison in Table 2:

Table 2: Weekly and Annual Earning Potential Comparison: CCSF vs. Selected Peer Districts

District	Max hrs/wk	Starting Wage	Max Weekly	Max Annual*
San Francisco CCD (CCSF)	15	\$19.18	\$287.70	\$9,206
San Jose–Evergreen CCD	20	\$19.15	\$383.00	\$12,256
Peralta CCD	20	\$17.34	\$346.80	\$11,098
Long Beach CCD	20	\$17.00	\$340.00	\$10,880
<i>State norm</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>\$16.90–\$17.00</i>	<i>\$338–\$340</i>	<i>\$10,816–\$10,880</i>
CCSF deficit (vs. state norm)	-5 hrs	+\$2.18–\$2.28	-\$50–\$52	-\$1,616–\$1,664

*Annual estimate based on approximately 32 working weeks per academic year (fall + spring semesters).

A CCSF student worker earning \$19.18 per hour for 15 hours per week earns less annually than a student worker at nearly any other California community college earning \$16.90 for 20 hours per week. The wage premium CCSF provides is entirely absorbed by the hour restriction.

Extended Hours During Non-Semester Periods

The audit also examined whether districts permit student workers to work extended hours during winter, spring, and summer breaks. Among districts where this was confirmed, the majority permit substantially more hours outside of the fall/spring semester, often 30–40 hours per week. CCSF’s policy indicates students may **not** work additional hours outside the fall/spring semester, further constraining annual earning potential relative to peers.

Full Statewide Hours Data

Table 3 provides the complete hours data for all confirmed districts, sorted by maximum weekly hours.

Table 3: Maximum Weekly Student Worker Hours by California Community College District (2025–26, confirmed data only)

District	Max Weekly Hours	Starting Wage
San Francisco CCD (CCSF)	15	\$19.18
Foothill-De Anza CCD	19	\$18.70
Kern CCD	19	\$16.90
Palo Verde CCD	19	\$16.90
Sequoias CCD	19	\$16.90
State Center CCD	19	\$17.67
West Hills CCD	19	unclear
West Kern CCD	19	\$16.90
Coast CCD	19.5	\$17.00
MiraCosta CCD	19.5	\$16.90
Santa Barbara CCD	19.5	\$16.90
Allan Hancock Joint CCD	20	\$17.00
Antelope Valley CCD	20	\$16.90
Barstow CCD	20	\$16.90
Butte-Glenn CCD	20	\$16.90
Cabrillo CCD	20	\$17.00
Cerritos CCD	20	\$16.90
Chabot-Las Positas CCD	20	\$16.90
Chaffey CCD	20	\$16.90

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Table 3 continued

District	Max Weekly Hours	Starting Wage
Citrus CCD	20	\$16.90
Compton CCD	20	\$16.90
Contra Costa CCD	20	\$16.90
Desert CCD	20	unclear
El Camino CCD	20	\$17.00
Feather River CCD	20	\$16.90
Gavilan CCD	20	\$17.00
Hartnell CCD	20	\$16.90
Imperial CCD	20	\$16.90
Long Beach CCD	20	\$17.00
Mendocino-Lake CCD	20	\$16.90
Merced CCD	20	\$16.90
Mt. San Antonio CCD	20	\$18.00
Mt. San Jacinto CCD	20	unclear
Napa Valley CCD	20	\$17.00
North Orange County CCD	20	\$17.00
Ohlone CCD	20	\$17.75
Pasadena Area CCD	20	\$18.04
Peralta CCD	20	\$17.34
Rancho Santiago CCD	20	\$16.90
Redwoods CCD	20	\$16.90
Rio Hondo CCD	20	\$18.00
Riverside CCD	20	\$16.90

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Table 3 continued

District	Max Weekly Hours	Starting Wage
San Bernardino CCD	20	\$16.90
San Joaquin Delta CCD	20	unclear
San Jose–Evergreen CCD	20	\$19.15
San Mateo County CCD	20	\$16.90
Santa Clarita CCD	20	\$17.00
Santa Monica CCD	20	\$17.81
Shasta-Tehama-Trinity CCD	20	\$16.90
Siskiyou Joint CCD	20	n/a
South Orange County CCD	20	\$18.00
Southwestern CCD	20	\$16.90
Ventura County CCD	20	\$16.00
Victor Valley CCD	20	\$16.90
Yosemite CCD	20	\$16.90
Yuba CCD	20	\$16.90
Sierra Joint CCD	24	\$16.90
Los Angeles CCD	25	\$16.90
Marin CCD	25	\$17.50
Palomar CCD	26	\$16.90
Sonoma County Jr. CCD	25	\$16.90
Los Rios CCD	26	\$16.90
Lake Tahoe CCD	28	\$18.07
San Diego CCD	25	\$22.31
West Valley-Mission CCD	37.5	\$18.00

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Table 3 continued

District	Max Weekly Hours	Starting Wage
Solano County CCD	40	n/a

Analysis and Implications

The 15-Hour Cap in the Context of San Francisco’s Cost of Living

The material significance of CCSF’s hour cap is magnified by the local cost of living. According to Apartment List’s July 2025 Rent Report, the median rent in San Francisco is \$2,991 per month, with one-bedroom apartments averaging \$3,019, making it the second most expensive city for renters in the United States [7]. The city’s overall cost of living is 145.5% higher than the national average. A student worker at CCSF earning the maximum possible wages under current policy, \$19.18 per hour for 15 hours per week, generates \$287.70 per week before taxes, or approximately \$9,206 over a 32-week academic year. This is less than the cost of three months of rent for a single one-bedroom apartment in the city.

The Hour Cap Is Not an Inevitable Consequence of Budget Constraints

Administration may argue that raising the hour cap would impose significant costs on departmental budgets. This argument is incomplete. Several contextual points mitigate it:

1. **Revision of the Hourly Cap Policy Has No Direct Financial Impact.** Changing the policy to allow student workers to work more than 15 hours per week still retains the authority to grant additional hours with the employing department. Allowing student workers to work, for example, 20 hours per week as a matter of CCSF district policy does not mandate that students be offered 20 hours of employment per week. The financial constraints of individual employing departments vary widely, and

those individual departments remain ultimately responsible for norm-setting and hour negotiations with student workers.

2. **Federal Work-Study Positions Are Especially Affordable for the College.** For FWS-funded positions, the federal government covers approximately 75% of student worker wages. An increase in hours for FWS workers would cost the district only 25 cents per additional dollar of wages.

Alignment with State Policy Values

The California Community Colleges system's Vision 2030 strategic plan and the Chancellor's Office's broader equity agenda emphasize removing financial barriers to student success and promoting economic mobility. A policy that caps student workers at 15 hours per week in the second most expensive rental market in the United States is inconsistent with these values and the spirit of the Free City Program. Raising the cap would bring CCSF into alignment not only with peer institutions but with its own stated commitments to students.

Policy Recommendation

Based on the findings of this statewide audit, the CCSF Student Worker Union recommends the following:

1. **Immediately raise the maximum weekly hour cap for all student workers from 15 to at least 20 hours per week.** This aligns CCSF with 68.2% of California community college districts, eliminates the college's status as a statewide outlier, and has no direct financial impact on the college given that departments retain authority over the hours they can offer to student workers.
2. **As an immediate first step, raise the cap to 20 hours per week for all Federal Work-Study (FWS) student workers.** Because FWS wages are primarily federally funded, this change has a minimal impact on district budgets and can be

implemented in the near term without requiring departmental budget revisions. This also incentivizes students to complete their FAFSA, a requirement to qualify for FWS. CCSF maintains ongoing interest in students completing the FAFSA to boost retention and enrollment and to unlock state and federal funding opportunities for the college.

- 3. Permit student workers to work extended hours (up to 40 hours per week) during winter, summer, and spring breaks**, consistent with the policy at the majority of peer institutions.

As shown in Figure 4, raising the cap to 20 hours would increase CCSF student workers' maximum weekly earning potential by \$95.90 per week, a 33% increase, and their maximum annual earning potential by approximately \$3,069 over a 32-week academic year.

Conclusion

This audit establishes that CCSF's 15-hour weekly cap on student worker hours is not mandated by federal law, California state statute, or Chancellor's Office regulation. It is a local district policy choice, the most restrictive such choice in the California Community College system, and it can be changed by district administration and the Board of Trustees.

CCSF student workers are doing the same work as their peers across the state, in the second most expensive rental market in the United States, and are permitted to work fewer hours than students at any other confirmed California community college. The result is the lowest maximum weekly earning potential in the system: \$287.70 per week.

Raising the cap to 20 hours is not a radical ask. It is alignment with the statewide norm, alignment with the college's own commitment to student economic wellbeing, and a straightforward act of policy correction. The CCSF Student Worker Union calls on the administration and the Board of Trustees to make this correction.

References

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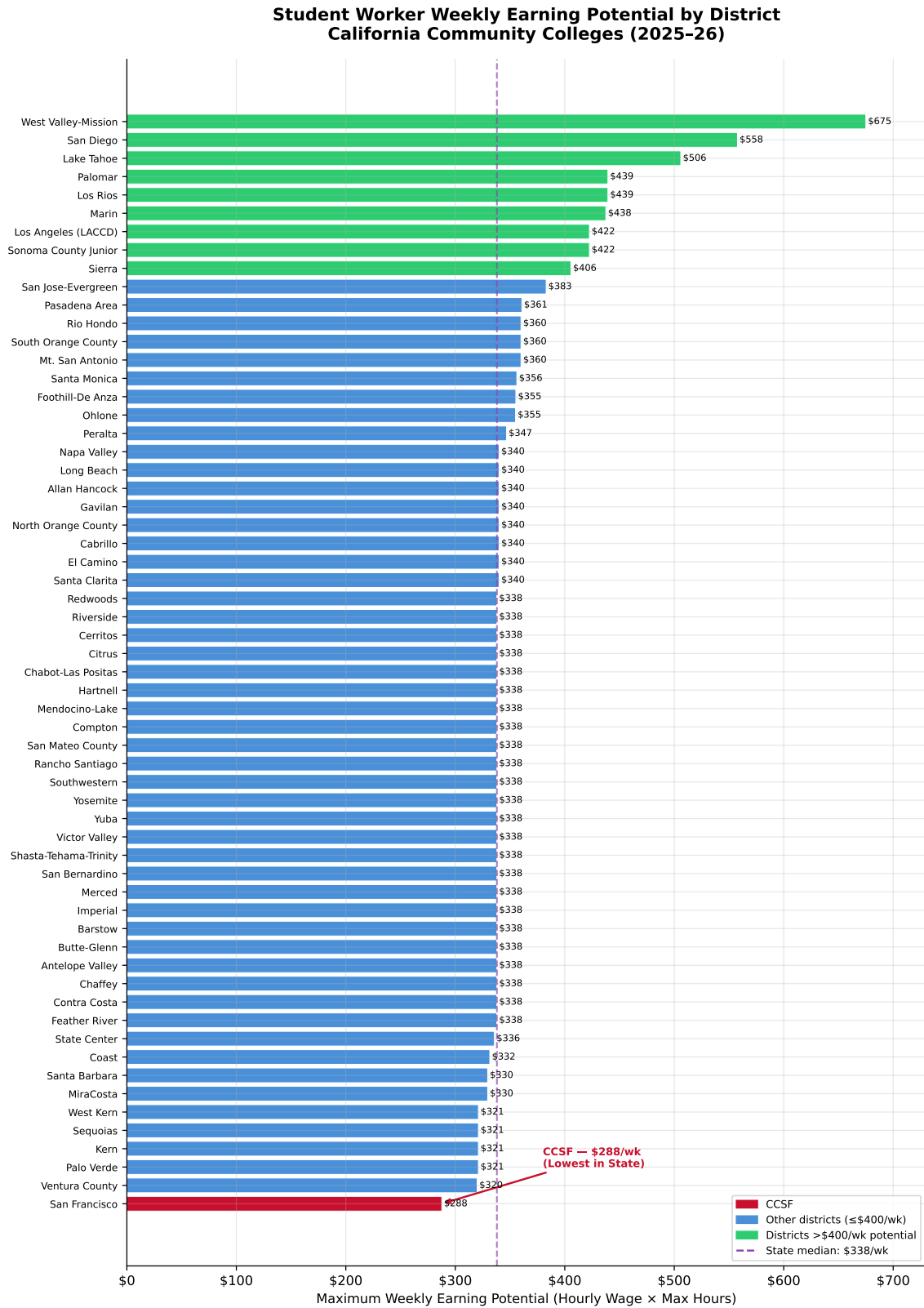


Figure 2: Maximum weekly earning potential (starting wage × maximum hours) by district. CCSF’s \$287.70 weekly ceiling is the lowest among all 60 confirmed districts.

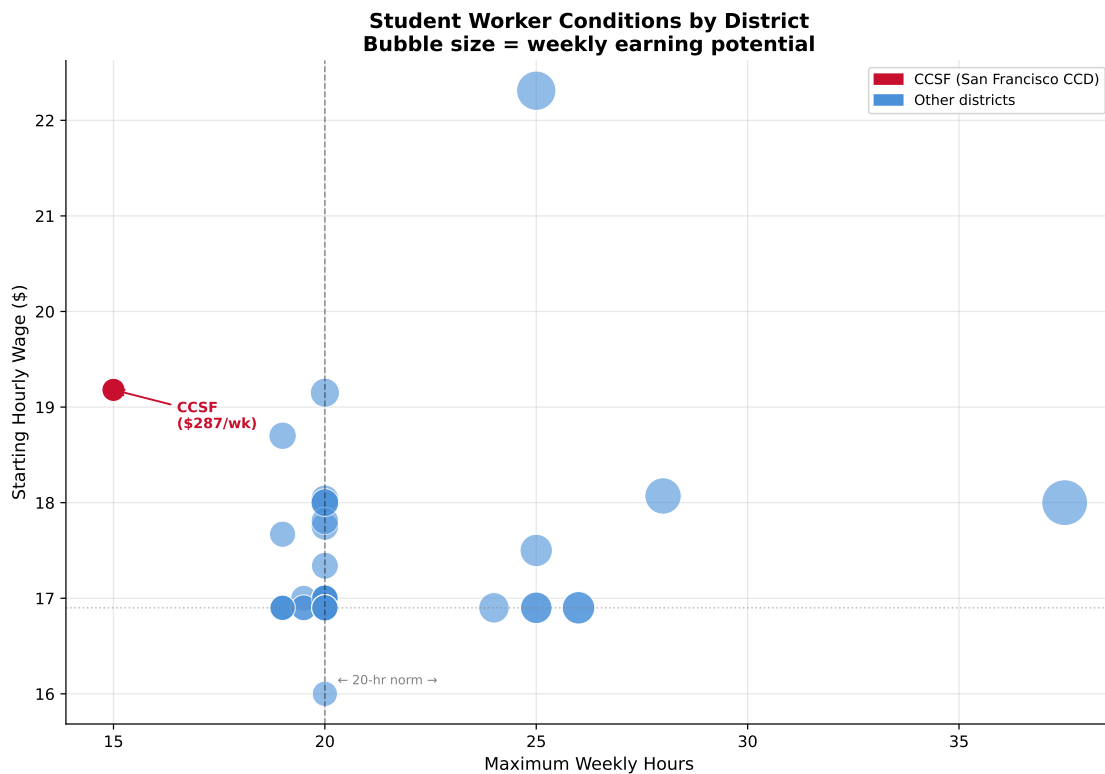


Figure 3: Student worker starting wage versus maximum weekly hours by district. Bubble size reflects weekly earning potential. CCSF’s position reflects an above-median wage undetermined by a below-minimum hour cap.

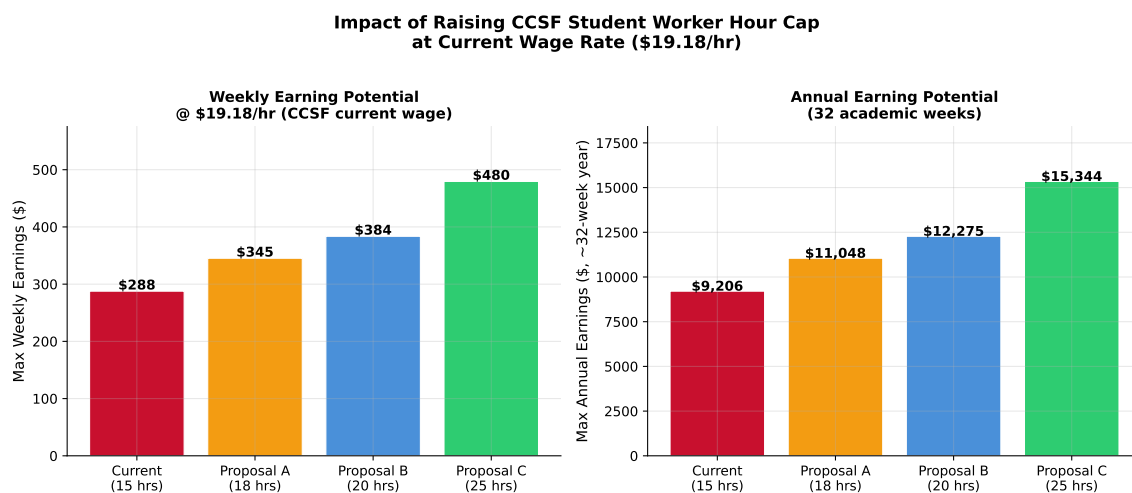


Figure 4: Impact of raising the CCSF student worker hour cap on weekly and annual earning potential at the current \$19.18 hourly wage. Raising the cap to 20 hours would increase maximum weekly earnings by \$95.90 and annual earnings by approximately \$3,069.