

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 927 (Medina and Choi)
As Amended April 12, 2021
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Authorizes the Board of Governors (BOG) of the California Community Colleges (CCC) to establish permanent district baccalaureate degree programs, as specified.

Major Provisions

- 1) Extends the operation of the statewide baccalaureate degree pilot program indefinitely, removing the "pilot" title and authorizing previously approved programs to continue operating.
- 2) Removes the requirements that the program consist of a maximum of 15 community college district (CCD) programs and for a student to commence a program by the end of the 2022–23 academic year.
- 3) Requires a CCD seeking approval to offer a baccalaureate degree program to provide evidence of unmet workforce needs to the Chancellor of the CCC, as specified.
- 4) Requires, as part of the application and review process, the Chancellor of the CCC to ensure that a CCD is provided with two timelines in which to apply for a baccalaureate degree program and receive a response, as specified, that only 15 baccalaureate degree programs are approved during each application period allowing for a total of 30 baccalaureate degree programs per academic year, and that a minimum of 30 working days is taken to validate the submitted information and assess the workforce value of the proposed baccalaureate degree program, as specified.
- 5) Requires the Chancellor of the CCC to consult with and seek feedback from the Chancellor of the California State University (CSU) and the President of the University of California (UC) on proposed baccalaureate degree programs, as specified.
- 6) The bill would require a CCD to continue to offer an associate degree program in the same academic subject for which a baccalaureate degree program has been approved, unless the community college district has received approval from the chancellor to eliminate the associate degree program, as specified.

COMMENTS

Background – the Master Plan for Higher Education. As outlined in the Master Plan for Higher Education and by state statute, the CCCs are designated to have an open admission policy and bear the most extensive responsibility for lower-division undergraduate instruction. Its three primary areas of mission include education leading to associates degrees and university transfer, career technical education, and basic skills. The primary mission of the CSU is undergraduate and graduate instruction through the master's degree. The UC was granted the sole authority to offer doctoral degrees.

Notwithstanding the differentiation of mission envisioned by the Master Plan and outlined in statute, the Legislature has authorized the CSU to go beyond its original mission to offer four professional doctoral degrees which include the Doctor of Audiology, Doctor of Education, Doctor of Physical Therapy and Doctor of Nursing. Fees were capped at the rate charged at the UC, no additional funding was provided by the state, and these programs were to be implemented without diminishing or reducing enrollment in undergraduate programs. Additionally, The CSU programs offer applied doctorates and are not duplicative of degrees offered by UC.

Baccalaureate Degree Pilot Program. SB 850 (Block), Chapter 747, Statutes of 2014, authorized the CCC BOG, in consultation with the CSU and the UC, to establish a baccalaureate degree pilot program. The pilot program allows up to 15 participating community college districts to offer one baccalaureate degree program each to meet local workforce needs as long as it does not duplicate a baccalaureate degree program already offered by the CSU or the UC. The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) conducted interim and final evaluations of the pilot program. SB 850 sunsets on July 1, 2026.

LAO review. The LAO published their final review of the Baccalaureate Degree Pilot Program on January 24, 2020. The LAO made the following assessments:

- 1) *Some programs show signs of meeting workforce objectives.* Assessing whether programs met industry needs was difficult based on the information provided by colleges in their initial applications. Generally, colleges provided documents citing broad support for the proposed programs with little concrete evidence of the benefits to employers. In most of these cases, the LAO found that graduates were using their bachelor's degrees to enter management positions where a bachelor's degree is a minimum requirement. The LAO found little evidence that graduates from these pilot programs were better prepared to fill these positions compared to those with other bachelor's degrees or that pilot program graduates were helping employers fill hard-to-staff positions.
- 2) *Programs provide several benefits for students.* The most common benefit of the pilot cited by students was the relatively low cost of attending the community college bachelor's degree programs. In a survey conducted by the pilot community colleges, 51% of respondents stated they would not have pursued a bachelor's degree if their community college program had not been offered. The pilot programs particularly benefited students with an associate degree in the same major and related work experience in the industry
- 3) *No general concern with academic quality.* The LAO found no notable issues with the academic quality or rigor of the pilot programs. The programs have been designed to teach concepts and skills that would be immediately relevant in related industries. Furthermore, all programs have been accredited by the CCC regional accrediting body and, if applicable, have obtained third-party accreditation required by industry.
- 4) *Concerns with small size of programs.* The LAO was concerned with colleges operating relatively small programs, particularly six programs that averaged less than 15 students per cohort. The enrollment for these programs was far below the projections included in colleges' applications. The LAO surmised that low enrollment levels after three or four years of operation suggests student demand for bachelor's degrees in the particular fields selected is limited.

- 5) *Concerns with accelerated review and limited consultation.* The LAO noted that several concerns with the application review process, primarily due to the accelerated time line set by the CCC Chancellor's Office – about one month for colleges to submit applications and one month for the pilot programs to be selected. To meet these expedited time lines, colleges were not required to have completed all the typical local curriculum development and review processes. Moreover, the CCC Chancellor's Office and application review team did not have sufficient time to validate the information submitted and assess the workforce value of the proposed degrees. The LAO also identified several concerns regarding CCC's consultation with CSU. Most notably, the CCC provided CSU with little information about the programs and requested feedback within three business days.

The LAO noted in their conclusions that creating targeted short-term programs and increasing coordination between CCC and CSU, specifically citing joint enrollment programs that have shown some promise. The LAO also noted that, should the Legislature seek to make the pilot permanent or expand the amount of programs offered, changes should be made to meet certain enrollment and graduation targets to continue operating and provide more concrete evidence demonstrating workforce need. The LAO also encouraged the Legislature to consider requiring a longer time line for reviewing applications, a clearer process for consultation with CSU, and more detailed fiscal accounting guidelines.

Committee comments. This bill has made several changes to the application timeline, the consultation process, and the demonstration of workforce need. The bill does not contain more detailed fiscal accounting guidelines, or enrollment and graduation targets for continued operation.

Additionally, the author has taken several amendments to narrow the scope of AB 927. Current language caps the growth of baccalaureate programs at no more than 30 per year, and requires an existing associate degree to be offered unless a CCD is granted permission from the Chancellor of the CCC to cease offering the associate degree.

According to the Author

According to the author, "The success of the baccalaureate pilot programs at the CCC has enabled students across the state to pursue affordable degrees that will better prepare them to enter California's economy. Since SB 850 (Block, 2014), the demand to extend and expand these programs remains high. Therefore, AB 927 is a critical bill that will make permanent the successful baccalaureate degree programs and further allow other community colleges to introduce degrees that do not duplicate those at the CSU or UC, but instead fill a much needed gap in California's workforce development."

Arguments in Support

Arguments in support. A coalition of CCDs, chambers of commerce, and community organizations wrote in support of AB 927. San Diego CCD, a co-sponsor of the bill, noted that, "In recent years, many organizations, including the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), have identified the need for over one million bachelor's degree holders in California in the coming decade, especially in workforce fields. The PPIC found that to keep up with the demand for a college-educated workforce the state would need to increase the number of bachelor's degrees awarded by 40%. In 2014, in order to help address this shortfall, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed SB 850 authorizing up to fifteen community college districts to offer bachelor's degrees in workforce fields that did not duplicate programs already offered at UC and

CSU. Those programs have proven to be very successful serving a diverse population, including people who may not otherwise have access to a baccalaureate program."

"Currently, 27 states already offer bachelor's degrees at the community college level in select workforce fields to better accommodate labor needs. Access, affordability, and high quality characterize these community college programs, and research shows that the state and local economies have benefited from these programs. The Legislative Analyst's Office evaluated the pilot initiative and found the programs to be of high academic quality, rigorous, and highly regarded by local communities and students."

"A statewide survey of the graduates of these programs found that 75% of graduates were first-generation college students, received FAFSA, struggled financially, experienced homelessness or housing insecurity, indicated a disability, or served in the military. 83% of graduates were employed within 3 months of completing their degree, and with over 90% employed in the same field of study. 94% continued to reside in California. Graduates saw an income boost of \$25,000 as a result of their programs. 82% of graduates feel that the bachelor's degree has prepared them well for their employment, with 87% stating that the value of the bachelor's program was both affordable and well worth the tuition."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file

FISCAL COMMENTS

The Assembly Committee on Appropriations identified ongoing General Fund costs to the CCC Chancellor's Office of about \$250,000 to administer the expansion of the baccalaureate degree program, one-time Proposition 98 General Fund cost pressures of an unknown amount to CCCs opting to develop baccalaureate degree programs at their campuses, and potential ongoing Proposition 98 General Fund costs to provide apportionment funding to support students in baccalaureate degree programs, to the extent these students would not have otherwise enrolled at a CCC.

VOTES

ASM HIGHER EDUCATION: 11-0-1

YES: Medina, Choi, Arambula, Bloom, Gabriel, Irwin, Levine, Low, Blanca Rubio, Santiago, Valladares

ABS, ABST OR NV: Kiley

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 16-0-0

YES: Lorena Gonzalez, Bigelow, Calderon, Carrillo, Chau, Megan Dahle, Davies, Fong, Gabriel, Eduardo Garcia, Levine, Quirk, Robert Rivas, Akilah Weber, Holden, Luz Rivas

UPDATED

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