

## ASSEMBLY THIRD READING

AB 1552 (Jackson)

As Amended March 19, 2026

Majority vote

**SUMMARY**

Requires the California State University (CSU) and the California Community Colleges (CCC), and requests the University of California (UC), prior to the 2028-29 academic year, make recommendations to the Legislature on how to facilitate greater knowledge of American democracy and meaningful civic engagement opportunities for students, including necessary support from the Legislature to achieve such recommendations.

**Major Provisions**

- 1) Requires the Chancellor of the CSU and the Chancellor of the CCC, and requests the President of the UC, before the commencement of the 2028–29 academic year and in consultation with each of their respective academic senates, report to the Legislature, as specified, recommendations on how to facilitate greater knowledge of American democracy and meaningful civic engagement opportunities for students on campuses, and any necessary support from the Legislature to achieve those recommendations.
- 2) Specifies that the provisions will sunset on January 1, 2033.
- 3) Finds and declares that:
  - a) An essential element of public higher education is to build the knowledge of democracy necessary for good citizenship; and,
  - b) It is the intent of the Legislature that public institutions of higher education in California, when delivering courses that build the knowledge of democracy necessary for good citizenship, give consideration to the importance of civic engagement, civic discord, and the key components of preserving democracy and its vital institutions, including, but not limited to, the free press, free access to libraries, compulsory education, and the federalist system.

**COMMENTS**

*Civics knowledge.* The Annenberg Center for Public Policy at the University of Pennsylvania annually conducts a Constitution Day Civics Survey. This survey, which is comprised of a nationally representative sample and has a sample error  $\pm 3.5$  percentage points, found that:

- 1) Over two-thirds of Americans (70%) can name all three branches of government, up from 65% in 2024.
- 2) Asked what specific rights are guaranteed by the First Amendment, nearly 4 in 5 (79%) respondents say freedom of speech. Less than half of Americans mention each of the other four rights: the next most-often cited, freedom of religion, is named by 48%.
- 3) Four in 10 respondents (40%) can name a majority of rights (three or more), up sharply from 30% in 2024. Nearly 9% of respondents can name all five First Amendment rights, while

32% can name three or four (up from 23%) and 42% can name one or two. About 1 in 5 people (18%) cannot name any, about the same as last year.

There was no significant difference in the number of branches or First Amendment rights recalled by respondents based on party affiliation – self-described Republicans and Republican-leaning independents knew about the same number as self-described Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents. But people in both of those two party-affiliated groups were more knowledgeable than independents who said they did not lean toward either party.

The author cites Pew Research Center data, noting that Americans are becoming increasingly polarized – with 61% saying in 2023 they find political conversations with those they disagree with stressful and frustrating, 15 points higher than in 2016. The author writes that "this polarization creates an environment where citizens are less likely to consider the merits of policies they oppose and gaps in those they support."

### **According to the Author**

According to the author, "Californians are struggling to participate in civil discourse, resulting in a need for improved education in civic engagement, civic discord, and the key components of preserving democracy and its vital institutions...the natural guardians of our democracy are the citizens themselves. Whether it's the California Community College, the CSU, or UC systems, there are thousands of young people who take general education courses and have a real opportunity to learn about the tenets of a functioning democracy and an engaged citizenship. Our goal shouldn't only be to prepare students for the workforce, but to cultivate informed, engaged citizens who help sustain our democracy."

### **Arguments in Support**

A coalition of organizations that included the UC Student Association, Young Invincibles, among others, wrote a joint letter in support of AB 1552 (Jackson), noting that "California's public higher education institutions have a long history of civic engagement and democratic participation. Students across the state continue this legacy by participating in student government, organizing in their communities, engaging in public service, and advocating for change on their campuses. These experiences help develop the skills necessary for active participation in our democracy. However, not all students have equal access to opportunities that foster civic learning and engagement."

The coalition continues that, "while many students complete general education coursework that teaches the structure of government and historical context, they are not always equipped with the tools needed to engage in the difficult conversations and civic participation that democracy requires. At a time when civic literacy is declining and political polarization is increasing; students benefit from stronger preparation to engage respectfully and productively with people who hold different perspectives. Colleges and universities play a critical role in ensuring students graduate not only with workforce skills, but also with the civic knowledge and capacity needed to sustain a healthy democracy."

### **Arguments in Opposition**

The Faculty Association of California Community Colleges (FACCC) expressed concerns with AB 1552 (Jackson), writing that, "While FACCC shares the goal of ensuring that students develop a strong understanding of civic engagement and the principles of a healthy democracy, AB 1552 raises significant concerns regarding academic freedom and curriculum and instructional design. In the California community college system, academic senates are

responsible for curriculum, instructional design, and academic standards. Faculty subject matter experts develop course content through established processes with the goal of academic rigor, disciplinary expertise, and responsiveness to student needs. AB 1552 would impose additional administrative and instructional workload on colleges by requiring curriculum review and potential course redesign without providing dedicated funding or identified funding to support implementation of these efforts. This could result in increased costs associated with faculty time, curriculum development processes, and institutional coordination, placing added pressure on already constrained district resources and creating an ongoing implementation burden."

## FISCAL COMMENTS

- 1) One-time General Fund costs of approximately \$50,000 for the CSU to produce the report, inclusive of Chancellor's Office staff that would be required to produce the report, as well as the paid hours and incidental costs that would be covered for faculty to participate outside of their instruction hours.
- 2) One-time General Fund costs \$40,000 across multiple staff at both UC Office of the President and faculty from the Academic Senate to complete this work requested in this bill.
- 3) One-time General Fund workload costs of up to \$60,000 for the CCC Chancellor's Office to produce the legislative report, in consultation with the Academic Senate for the CCCs.

## VOTES

### ASM HIGHER EDUCATION: 7-2-1

**YES:** Fong, Boerner, Jeff Gonzalez, Jackson, Kalra, Patel, Sharp-Collins

**NO:** DeMaio, Tangipa

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Muratsuchi

### ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 12-1-2

**YES:** Wicks, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache

**NO:** Tangipa

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Hoover, Ta

## UPDATED

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