

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 1641 (Jackson and Ramos)
As Introduced January 27, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Expands the definition of California's public higher education system to formally include tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) located in California and operated by a federally recognized tribal government.

Major Provisions

- 1) Amends existing law to include TCUs as part of California's public higher education system.
- 2) Defines TCUs as institutions geographically located in California and operated by an Indian tribal government, as defined in federal law.
- 3) Maintains existing provisions governing independent and private postsecondary institutions.
- 4) Includes a sunset provision repealing the amended section on January 1, 2030, with a subsequent operative version continuing the inclusion of TCUs.

COMMENTS

This measure seeks to formally recognize tribal colleges and universities as part of California's public higher education system, reflecting their role in serving Native American students and communities.

What are TCUs? According to California Indian Nations College (CINC), the sponsors of this measure, tribal colleges and universities are part of the treaty and trust responsibilities between the government and tribes. TCUs provide culturally relevant education and serve populations historically underrepresented in higher education.

Further, according to CINC, "tribal colleges and universities do not fit into any of the segments of higher education listed in California Education Code Section 66010. They are not part of the University of California, California State University, nor the California Community College system. As TCUs are public institutions, not private, they are not part of the Independent California Colleges and Universities segment."

Additionally, data provided by CINC shows California has one-fifth of all federally recognized tribes and 1.4 million people who identify as American Indian or Alaska Native, the largest overall population of any state. Native American students who attend a TCU before attending a mainstream four-year institution are four times more likely to earn their bachelors degree compared to their peers who enroll directly in a mainstream four-year institution.

California currently is home to three TCUs:

- 1) CINC;
- 2) California Tribal College; and,

3) Kumeyaay Community College.

Structural policy change. This measure represents a symbolic and structural expansion of the State's higher education framework by adding a fourth category of public higher education institutions alongside the CCC, CSU, and UC. While it seeks to expand the framework, it does not modify governance structures, funding formulas, or constitutional authority of existing segments; and, TCUs remain tribally governed institutions.

This measure appears to complement State priorities for transfer pathway expansions by acknowledging TCUs within the broader higher education ecosystem, potentially facilitating future policy alignment.

According to the Author

According to the author, "existing law excludes TCUs as a segment of postsecondary education in California despite serving the public, receiving public funds, and having a treaty and trust responsibilities. This deficiency overlooks an already historically underrepresented group, leaving them out of important discussions and long-term planning regarding public higher education in California."

Further, the author states that, "California's tribal colleges and universities deserve to be recognized for their vital role in uplifting Native American students. These institutions serve as centers of identity, resilience, and opportunity that empower a historically underrepresented group to access and thrive in higher education. By including them in the Education Code, we affirm their importance within the state and lay the foundation for long-term planning that acknowledges the essential role these institutions will continue to play in California's higher education landscape."

Arguments in Support

According to the Cahuilla Band of Indians, "AB 1641 directly recognizes and acknowledges TCUs in the higher education landscape, ensuring these institutions are included in coordinated planning and long-term higher education policy discussions. This bill expands access to culturally responsive higher education and improves degree completion outcomes for Native American students, while supporting tribal sovereignty and self-determination in higher education."

Further, the Cahuilla Band of Indians states that, "we must strive to reach educational equity and closing structural gaps in our state systems by ensuring all Californians can succeed. Tribal Colleges and Universities, such as California Indian Nations College, support our community by providing meaningful and culturally relevant educational support that is directly tied to our tribal members' educational success."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations, no new state costs. While the bill recognizes TCUs as part of the larger California public higher education framework, they remain tribally governed institutions and separate from existing governance structures or funding formulas.

VOTES

ASM HIGHER EDUCATION: 9-0-1

YES: Fong, DeMaio, Boerner, Jeff Gonzalez, Jackson, Muratsuchi, Patel, Sharp-Collins, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Celeste Rodriguez

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-1

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Muratsuchi

UPDATED

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