

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING  
AB 1920 (Mark González and Ahrens)  
As Introduced February 12, 2026  
Majority vote

## SUMMARY

Clarifies eligibility for California College Promise fee waivers by ensuring that certain certificates earned along the pathway to an associate degree do not disqualify students.

### Major Provisions

- 1) Provides that a certificate awarded as part of a course sequence leading to an associate degree does not make a student ineligible for a California College Promise fee waiver.
- 2) Maintains existing eligibility requirements, including full-time enrollment and submission of a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or California Dream Act Application (CADAA).
- 3) Preserves the two-year fee waiver limit and other program conditions.

## COMMENTS

This measure seeks to clarify that students may earn certificates while completing a degree without losing access to the Community College Promise fee waiver. This clarification, according to the Solano Community College, "removes unnecessary bureaucratic barriers and ensures that California's first-generation and low-income students—who rely heavily on predictable financial support—can continue advancing toward their education and career goals."

*Fees and fee waivers at the California Community College (CCC).* Enrollment fees at CCCs are the lowest in the country (\$46 per unit), and are waived for almost half of all CCC students (this amounts to over one million students). For decades, this waiver was known as the BOG fee waiver and has existed since enrollment fees were established (1984) at the CCC and waives the per unit enrollment fee for any CCC student who demonstrates financial need.

The BOG fee waiver has been renamed as the California College Promise Grant (not to be confused with the separate California College Promise Program). Additionally, current law requires fees to be waived for surviving dependents of certain military service members and first responders.

*California College Promise Program.* In addition to the fee waivers in current law, (as noted in the *Fees and fee waivers at the CCC* section of this analysis), AB 19 (Santiago), Chapter 735, Statutes of 2017, established the California College Promise Program, which authorizes, *but does not require*, CCCs to waive fees for two years of college for first-time or returning full-time students regardless of financial need. To be eligible for these waivers, students must have no prior postsecondary coursework or have taken one or more semesters off from college coursework, enroll in 12 or more units per semester (which is considered full-time), and submit an FAFSA or CADAA. Under the Program, colleges may also use their college program funds for a variety of other purposes, such as providing students with supplemental services.

The California College Promise Program was funded beginning in 2018-19 for \$46 million. Not all colleges receiving Promise funds are waiving enrollment fees; many believe their California Promise funding is better used for other purposes, such as strengthening student support services to boost outcomes, or providing grants to help students cover the costs of child care, transportation, books or other expenses. Under the provisions of the Promise Program, colleges receiving California Promise funds must engage in several outlined activities.

Among those activities: operating programs with local high school districts that support pathways to college; implementing the Guided Pathways framework; and helping students access need-based financial aid such as Pell Grants and Cal Grants.

*Student success and completion pathways.* Career pathways have a wide range of features intended to enable individuals to develop industry-related skills and achieve their career goals. Stackable credentials, which lay out a sequence of career education awards that allow students to build qualifications over time, are an important component of successful pathway programs. According to the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), many career education credentials in the community college system are designed to be earned relatively quickly—in particular, short-term certificates require as few as 6 units. Stackable short-term credentials offer students the clearest opportunities to return to the community college system for additional training and advance along a career pathway.

Additionally, stackable credentials also hold a key component with current initiatives in the community college system that focus on helping students connect their educational plans to careers. Stackable credentials are creating clear curricular pathways to employment and further education.

Under existing law, such certificates may inadvertently disqualify students from fee waivers. This measure appears to remove an unintended barrier in the California College Promise Program by ensuring that students who earn interim certificates on the path to an associate degree are not penalized or excluded from fee waiver eligibility; by preserving eligibility for students pursuing structured pathways, this measure supports continued enrollment and degree completion, particularly for students from low-income or nontraditional backgrounds who rely on fee waivers.

### **According to the Author**

According to the author, "current law states that a student can receive free tuition for up to two years if they are a first-time college student and do not have a previous degree. The existing law includes certificates as a part of the disqualifying factors."

As noted by the author, "community college programs are intentionally designed with stackable or nested credentials, allowing students to earn certificates along the pathway to an associate degree. These interim awards provide workforce value and recognize academic milestones. So, if a student achieved their certificate while on the path to achieve an AA degree, they may be deemed ineligible."

Lastly, the author states that, "AB 1920 is a simple fix to an unintended reading of historic legislation championed by this legislature. This small clarification will ensure bureaucratic barriers are broken down, and students have access to free tuition waivers if they are first-time students."

**Arguments in Support**

According to the CCC Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), sponsors of the measure, this measure seeks to strengthen the implementation of the California College Promise by, "ensuring that students are not penalized for earning a certificate as part of their educational journey."

The CCCCCO contends that, "by clarifying that receipt of a certificate does not disadvantage a student's continued access to Promise benefits or future educational opportunities, the bill protects student progress, promotes equitable access, and supports continued advancement toward higher credentials and career goals."

Further, the CCCCCO notes that, "this measure directly advances the goals of Vision 2030, the California Community Colleges' strategic roadmap centered on Equity in Access, Equity in Success, and Equity in Support. Vision 2030 calls on our system to meet learners where they are, remove systemic barriers, and expand opportunities for underserved and working learners so they can earn credentials that lead to economic mobility. AB 1920 reinforces these priorities by ensuring students are recognized for the learning they complete and can more effectively progress toward certificates, degrees, and career advancement."

Lastly, the CCCCCO states that, "AB 1920 also aligns with the broader intent of the California College Promise to expand opportunity, reduce financial and institutional barriers, and support student persistence and completion. Strengthening pathways to recognized credentials ensures students — particularly first-generation, low-income, and historically underserved learners — can fully participate in higher education and move toward family-sustaining careers."

**Arguments in Opposition**

None on file.

**FISCAL COMMENTS**

According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations, no new state costs. According to the CCCCCO, this bill does not alter underlying eligibility provisions for the California College Promise Grant Fee Waiver but prevents currently eligible students from losing eligibility if they are awarded a certificate during their academic progress towards a degree.

**VOTES****ASM HIGHER EDUCATION: 10-0-0**

**YES:** Fong, DeMaio, Boerner, Jeff Gonzalez, Jackson, Irwin, Patel, Bennett, Sharp-Collins, Tangipa

**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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