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# SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

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**Bill No:** AB 1920 **Hearing Date:** June 3, 2026  
**Author:** Mark González and Ahrens  
**Version:** February 12, 2026  
**Urgency:** No **Fiscal:** Yes  
**Consultant:** Michelle Nguyen

**Subject:** Community colleges: California College Promise: fee waiver eligibility.

## SUMMARY

This bill prohibits a community college from deeming a student ineligible for a fee waiver under the California College Promise program if a student was awarded a certificate by a postsecondary educational institution as part of a course sequence leading to an associate degree.

## BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the California Community Colleges (CCCs), under the administration of the Board of Governors (BOG), as one of the segments of public postsecondary education in this state. (Education Code (EC) § 70900)
- 2) Requires community college districts (CCDs) to charge students an enrollment fee of \$46 per unit per semester. (EC § 76300)
- 3) Requires a waiver of enrollment fees for students who meet specified income requirements based on any of the following criteria:
  - a) At the time of enrollment, the student is a recipient of benefits under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, the Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment Program, or a general assistance program.
  - b) Demonstrates eligibility according to income standards established by regulations of the BOG.
  - c) Demonstrates financial need in accordance with the methodology set forth in federal law or regulation for determining the expected family contribution of students seeking financial aid.
  - d) At the time of enrollment, the student is a homeless youth or former homeless youth. (EC § 76300)
- 4) Additionally provides for a waiver of fees for certain types of students, including:

- a) Dependents or surviving spouses of California National Guard members, either killed or who died from a permanent disability, as a result of service to the state.
  - b) A surviving spouse or child of a California law enforcement officer or firefighter killed in the performance of active law enforcement or fire suppression duties or who died as a result of performing those duties.
  - c) The dependent of any California resident killed in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.
  - d) The child of a United States military veteran who has a service-connected disability, or was killed in action, or died of a service-connected disability.
  - e) The child of a recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor. (EC § 66025.3)
- 5) Establishes the California College Promise, under the administration of the Chancellor of the CCCs, and requires the Chancellor, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to distribute funding to CCDs to fund colleges that meet specified requirements. (EC § 76396)
  - 6) Authorizes a community college to use funding appropriated for the California College Promise to waive some or all of the fees for two academic years for first-time community college students and returning community college students, as defined, and who complete and submit either a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or a California Dream Act application (CADAA). (EC § 76396.3)
  - 7) Prohibits a student who has previously earned a degree or certificate from a postsecondary educational institution from being eligible for a fee waiver from California College Promise funding. (EC § 76396.3)

## ANALYSIS

This bill prohibits a community college from deeming a student ineligible for a fee waiver under the California College Promise program if a student was awarded a certificate by a postsecondary educational institution as part of a course sequence leading to an associate degree.

## STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, “AB 1920 clarifies eligibility rules under the California College Promise Program to ensure that first-time, full-time community college students are not penalized for earning certificates while progressing toward a degree.

Under the current interpretation of Education Code Section 76396.3, students who receive the AB 19 Community College Promise fee waiver lose eligibility if they earn any degree or certificate while enrolled—even when that credential is part of a

longer program of study. ... Many 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.

As a result, students on this fee waiver that are working towards Associate's degrees for transfer and earning a certificate from the college on that academic journey, lose access to this program without completing their Associate's degrees. This ambiguity in the law penalizes students for academic success and discourages colleges from recognizing their hard work."

- 2) **Statutory fees and fee waivers for the CCC system.** At \$46 per unit, and with an annual average tuition of \$1,380 for full-time California resident students, the CCC system offers the lowest tuition in the nation, as of February 2026. Enrollment fees are waived for CCC students demonstrating financial need, which was almost half of CCC students, or over 1 million students, in 2024-25. For decades, this waiver was known as the BOG fee waiver and has existed since CCC enrollment fees were established in 1984. The fee waiver has since been renamed the California College Promise Grant—not to be confused with the separate California College Promise Program. A CCC student meeting specified income standards may qualify and may receive the waiver, so long as they are eligible to take courses; there is no minimum unit requirement, and the fee waiver is applied to any course for which a student must pay the enrollment fee.
- 3) **"Free College" for first-time, full-time students through the California College Promise.** The California College Promise was established by AB 19 (Santiago, Chapter 735, Statutes of 2017). The program, broadly marketed as providing "free college", allowed participating CCCs to waive some or all enrollment fees for one academic year for first-time, full-time community college students who completed and submitted a FAFSA or CADAA. Unlike the statutory fee waivers for CCC students demonstrating financial need, the California College Promise allowed CCCs to waive fees for students who did not demonstrate financial need but met other program criteria. Though some have critiqued the California College Promise for not being a means-tested program, others have indicated that the "free college" marketing have created interest and enthusiasm in CCCs that exceeds the costs of the program.
- 4) **Eligible recipients.** Though the initial statute intended for California College Promise cohorts to be comprised of first-time, full-time community college students, subsequent legislation has gradually expanded, and clarified, student eligibility for the program:
  - a) AB 2 (Santiago, Chapter 509, Statutes of 2019) authorized for a student enrolled in fewer than 12 units to be deemed as full-time at the discretion of the institution if the student has been certified as full-time by a staff person in the disabled student services program.
  - b) AB 3137 (Voepel, Chapter 226, Statutes of 2020) required that a student who is a member of the Armed Forces of the United States, and is called to duty, may withdraw from participation in the California College Promise

and resume program participation upon the student's return from duty without losing eligibility for the benefits of the program, including fee waivers.

- c) AB 183 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 54, Statutes of 2022) made returning students, defined as a student who has taken a break of one or more semesters (or the quarterly equivalent), eligible for the program.
- d) AB 1342 (Megan Dahle, Chapter 102, Statutes of 2023) clarified that a high school pupil who enrolls in community college as part of dual enrollment programs are required to be considered a first-time community college student for purposes of the California College Promise upon the student's enrollment in community college after high school graduation.

The initial appropriation for the California College Promise was \$46 million in 2018-19, and program funding has grown to \$91.2 million in 2025-26. The largest augmentation for the program was attributed to expanding the program to be for two academic years, rather than one academic year.

Program eligibility for the California College Promise has included first-time community college students since program inception, and current statute specifically prohibits students who have previously earned a degree or certificate from a postsecondary educational institution as not eligible for a fee waiver under the California College Promise. This bill seeks to clarify that students would not be deemed ineligible for a fee waiver under the California College Promise program if a student was awarded a certificate by a postsecondary educational institution as part of a course sequence leading to an associate degree.

5) ***Related and Prior Legislation.***

AB 1342 (Megan Dahle, Chapter 102, Statutes of 2023) clarified that a high school pupil who enrolls in community college as part of dual enrollment programs is required to be considered a first-time community college student for purposes of the California College Promise upon the student's enrollment in community college after high school graduation.

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SB 77 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 53, Statutes of 2019) expanded the California College Promise by allowing community colleges to waive enrollment fees for first-time, full-time students for two academic years, as opposed to one academic year.

**SUPPORT**

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (sponsor)  
Cabrillo Community College District  
CalWORKs Program at San Bernardino Valley College  
CFT – A Union of Educators & Classified Professionals, AFT, AFL-CIO  
Chaffey Community College District  
Community College League of California  
Fresno CalWORKs Program  
Immigrants Rising  
Kern Community College District  
Los Angeles Trade-Technical College  
Norco College  
Ohlone Community College  
Rio Hondo College  
Riverside Community College District  
San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership  
San Jose-Evergreen Community College District  
Southwestern Community College District's Governing Board  
Student Senate for California Community Colleges  
One Individual

**OPPOSITION**

None received

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