

Date of Hearing: May 6, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 2191 (Quirk-Silva) – As Amended March 26, 2026

Policy Committee: Education

Vote: 9 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill requires the California Department of Education (CDE) and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), by July 1, 2027, to establish a statewide resource for establishing alternate diploma pathways for individuals with exceptional needs through capacity building within the state's System of Support (SOS), subject to an appropriation for this purpose.

FISCAL EFFECT:

Minor one-time General Fund cost pressures of an unknown amount but likely in the tens of thousands of dollars, to support CDE creating alternate diploma pathways resources if the Legislature appropriates funding for this purpose. The CDE reports an estimated cost of \$60,000 to fund two partial positions to oversee implementation and technical assistance of the resource.

SB 74 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 6, Statutes of 2020, appropriated \$250,000 to support the convening of a workgroup to examine and propose alternative pathways to a high school diploma for students with disabilities.

COMMENTS:

1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

For far too long students with disabilities have been denied high school diplomas and relegated to certificates of completion. These certificates are not widely recognized by institutions of higher education and employers, further limiting the chance that these students will have at independence and academic growth. AB 2191 establishes upon appropriation, a statewide resource focused on eliminating the unnecessary barriers that stand between our neurodivergent students and the access, equity, and opportunity they deserve in earning a high school diploma. Making sure that a special education resource lead project is providing technical assistance, peer support, and resources to help school districts implement the important policy of alternative pathways.

Background. The Alternate Pathways to a High School Diploma Workgroup convened pursuant to the 2020 Budget Act education omnibus trailer bill recommended the state create a new pathway specifically for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Implemented June 2024, this new pathway allows high school diploma attainment through meeting state minimum course requirements, in a manner that also meets federal graduation criteria for state accountability.

Under the alternate pathway established pursuant to the workgroup's recommendation, a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team decides eligibility for the pathway and students fulfill standards-aligned courses satisfying the minimum requirements for high school graduations but are exempted from any local graduation requirements. Therefore, the alternate pathway provides students with access to standards-aligned instruction, improved post-secondary opportunities, including increased likelihood of employment and education, continued education until age 22 pursuant to their IEPs, and inclusion in graduation ceremonies with their peers. In contrast, absent this pathway, special education students typically either graduate with a diploma consistent with their general education peers or they receive a certificate of completion. However, the certificate of completion does not provide the student with proof they've completed a specific course of study or access to basic postsecondary education or employment, nor is it recognized in California's education accountability systems.

According to the CDE, 467 students with IEPs graduated with diplomas through the alternate pathway in the 2024-25 school year. While CDE has guidance in the form of frequently asked questions on its internet website for an LEA wishing to provide alternative diploma pathways to its students with IEPs, this bill requires CDE to establish a statewide alternate diploma pathway resource leveraging the state's SOS.

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