
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 2301
Author: Soria (D)
Introduced: 2/19/26
Vote: 21

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE: 7-0, 7/1/26

AYES: Pérez, Ochoa Bogh, Cabaldon, Choi, Cortese, Gonzalez, Reyes

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 8/13/26

AYES: Cervantes, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 71-0, 5/27/26 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Community colleges: Baccalaureate Degree in Nursing Pilot Program

SOURCE: United Nurses Associations of California

DIGEST: This bill requires the California Community College (CCC) Chancellor's Office to establish a Community College Baccalaureate Degree in Nursing Pilot Program that would authorize 10 community college districts to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Differentiates the missions and functions of public and independent institutions of higher education. Under these provisions:
 - a) The primary mission of the California State University (CSU) is to offer undergraduate and graduate instruction through the master's degree in the liberal arts and sciences and professional education, including teacher education. The CSU is authorized to establish two-year programs only when mutually agreed upon by the Trustees and the CCC Board of

Governors. The CSU is also authorized to jointly award the doctoral degree with the University of California (UC) and with one or more independent institutions of higher education.

- b) The UC is authorized to provide undergraduate and graduate instruction and has exclusive jurisdiction in public higher education over graduate instruction in the professions of law, medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine. The UC is also the primary state-supported academic agency for research.
 - c) The independent institutions of higher education are required to provide undergraduate and graduate instruction and research in accordance with their respective missions.
 - d) The mission and function of the CCC is the offering of academic and vocational instruction at the lower division level, and the CCC are authorized to grant the Associate in Arts and the Associate in Science degrees. The community colleges are also required to offer learning supports to close learning gaps, English as a Second Language instruction, and adult noncredit instruction, and support services which help students succeed at the postsecondary level. (Education Code (EC) § 66010.4)
- 2) Authorizes the CCC Board of Governors, in consultation with the CSU and the UC, to establish baccalaureate degree programs that do not duplicate a baccalaureate degree program offered by the CSU or UC. Allows for the approval of 30 community college baccalaureate degree programs per academic year. Current law further requires the CCC Chancellor to consult with and seek feedback from the CSU Chancellor, the UC President, and the President of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities on proposed baccalaureate degree programs, as specified, and establishes a mechanism for the assessment, consultation, and approval of programs where duplication is identified, as specified. (EC § 78040 et seq.)

This bill:

- 1) Requires the Chancellor of the CCC to develop a Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program that authorizes select community college districts to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree.

- 2) Limits the pilot program to 10 community college districts statewide and requires the Chancellor to identify eligible community college districts based on the following criteria:
 - a) The CCC Chancellor is encouraged to ensure there is equitable access between the northern, central, and southern parts of the state for the pilot program.
 - b) Priority granted to community college districts that are located in underserved nursing areas.
 - c) Priority granted to community college districts where the service area of the community college district includes communities with persistent poverty.
 - d) The community college district has a nationally accredited program.
- 3) Requires the community college district to retain the associate degree in nursing program.
- 4) Specifies that the total number of participants in a pilot program at a community college district is to be limited to the class size approved by the Board of Registered Nursing, and the total number of participants in a pilot program is to be limited to 25 percent of that class size, or 35 students, whichever is greater.
- 5) Allows CCC districts without a nationally accredited nursing program, but that are in “candidate” status, to be provisionally selected to participate in this pilot program and commence the program upon final accreditation, as specified. This bill further requires that priority be given to CCC districts located in the Central Valley and Inland Empire. If a CCC district that is provisionally selected is found to be making untimely progress toward accreditation, after notice and an opportunity to cure, the Chancellor’s Office may withdraw the provisional selection and may select a different CCC district to participate in the pilot program.
- 6) Requires the Chancellor’s Office to develop a process designed to assist CCC nursing programs applying for national accreditation for the purpose of qualifying for the pilot program, and that assistance be made available to CCC districts upon request.

- 7) Requires each participating district to give priority registration for enrollment in the pilot program to students with an associate degree in nursing from that CCC district.
- 8) Requires that the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) conduct an evaluation of the pilot program to determine the effectiveness of the program and the need to continue or expand the program, as specified. This bill further requires each participating CCC district to submit the information necessary for this evaluation, as determined by the LAO, to the Chancellor's Office.
- 9) Exempts a Bachelor of Science in Nursing offered under the pilot program from being subject to the CCC bachelor's degree approval process outlined in existing law.
- 10) Defines, for purposes of the bill, "underserved nursing area" to mean a Registered Nurse (RN) shortage area designated at a high-, medium-, or low-severity level as identified by the Department of Health Care Access and Information.
- 11) Sunsets this bill's provision on January 1, 2036.

Comments

Need for the bill. According to the author, "California's current healthcare workforce development apparatus is not equipped to handle the growing nursing needs of the state, especially in disadvantaged communities in more rural parts of the state. While California's Community College system can reach these communities and does offer associates degrees in nursing, the needs of the healthcare workforce more frequently demand a bachelor's degree. This level of degree is exclusive in California to private institutions that are prohibitively expensive or the UC and CSU systems that have limited capacity and difficulty serving areas of the state with the highest need.

"In order to meet our nursing workforce needs and extend these career opportunities to Californians throughout the state, we must expand the role of our community college system. AB 2301 will take the first steps in this process by allowing a limited number of campuses to expand their nursing programs to offer Bachelors of Science in nursing degree."

Differentiation of mission. The state has four segments of higher education: three public and one private. Each plays a vital and unique role for the state and in California's higher education system. Their mission statements are outlined in the Master Plan for Higher Education and by state statute. The CCCs are to have an open admission policy and bear the most extensive responsibility for lower-division undergraduate instruction. Their primary areas of mission include instruction leading to associate degrees and university transfer, vocational instruction, and remedial education. Despite the differentiation of mission, the Legislature has authorized the CSU and CCCs to go beyond their original mission to offer doctoral degree and baccalaureate degree programs, respectively, so long as programs do not duplicate those offered by the other segments with primary jurisdiction. This bill would authorize an additional exception by creating a separate pathway for CCC Bachelor of Science in Nursing programs that is exempt from the existing community college baccalaureate approval process.

Related budget agreement to expand access. The 2024 Budget agreement included \$60 million per year, from 2025-26 to 2028-29, to the CCC system for the Rebuilding Nursing Infrastructure Grant Program. Moneys allocated to this program may be used to develop or expand associate-level degree programs at the CCCs while also explicitly allowing for the use of those funds to develop or expand Bachelor of Science in Nursing partnerships with CSU, UC, and independent nonprofit colleges. Rather than authorizing community colleges to independently offer additional bachelor's degree programs, the budget agreement invested in strengthening California's existing nursing education pipeline by expanding associate degree capacity while leveraging the bachelor's degree authority of California's universities through collaborative partnerships. This investment demonstrates the State's commitment to expanding community college nursing capacity within the community colleges' traditional role for preparing entry-level registered nurses.

Is this the appropriate solution? If it is the desire of the Legislature to expand Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree programs, arguably, more effective and efficient alternatives do not require a departure from the CCC's mission to expand and streamline Bachelor of Science in Nursing pathways between CCCs and public universities or nonprofit colleges. Further, in its recommendation for alternatives to the original CCC baccalaureate degree pilot program, the LAO's analysis notes that some CCCs have existing agreements with baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. Improving alignment between CCC and the universities could increase the number of CCC students who ultimately obtain a bachelor's degree and reduce the amount of time students take to obtain their degree. The LAO report further

asserts that such partnerships could not only be more cost-effective but also benefit more students (including place-bound students), thereby having a more widespread impact.

Not all CCC nursing programs are accredited. Accreditation acts as a measure of quality that verifies a program meets standards of educational quality set by a recognized accrediting body. According to the CCC Chancellor's Office, in 2024, of the 77 associate degree for nursing programs, 28 are nationally accredited, 27 by the Accreditation Commission for Education on Nursing (ACEN), and one by the Commission for Nursing Education Accreditation. Nine are candidates for national accreditation by ACEN. All programs have Board of Registered Nursing (BRN) approval. BRN approval ensures compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements, whereas accreditation provides a baseline measure of program quality and supports transferability of credits for students seeking an advanced degree. Accreditation also enables students to qualify for federal financial aid. This bill restricts participation in the pilot program to nationally accredited CCC nursing programs but allows a non-accredited CCC program to be provisionally selected as they work toward obtaining accreditation.

Enrollment decisions controlled by the licensing board. The BRN is one of a few licensing boards that continues to actively approve educational programs and make enrollment decisions. According to a recent state audit of the BRN, two of the key factors that should be included in the BRN's enrollment decisions are the forecasted supply of nurses that the state will need to fulfill demand and the available number of clinical placement slots. The audit found that the BRN has failed to gather and use sufficient data related to both of these factors to appropriately inform its enrollment decisions. Should the BRN continue to approve RN educational programs? Shouldn't institutions play a greater role in determining enrollment decisions?

Statewide workforce shortage projected to close, and regional workforce disparities may persist. State forecasts for the RN workforce provide both state-level and regional projections. The Institute for Health Policy Studies at the University of California, San Francisco, conducted the 2024 reports, "Regional Forecasts of the Registered Nurse Workforce in California," and "Forecasts of the Registered Nurse Workforce in California," which find that statewide forecasts have projected that a shortage exists now but that it will abate over the next few years. Projections indicate that rising numbers of nursing enrollments will close the current shortage of RNs by 2028. Noting that after decreases in new RN education enrollments and graduations during the pandemic, RN schools have returned to

growth. This growth has been concentrated on private and bachelor's degree programs. Regional projections indicate that all regions of California face a shortage of RNs, but the degree of shortage varies widely, as does the projected growth of RN supply, particularly in the Central Valley, Central Coast, and San Francisco Bay Area. These disparities suggest that healthcare demand in some regions may fall below population needs, especially when compared to national benchmarks. Factors such as RN degree program graduates, inter-regional migration, and employment rates can influence future workforce projections. The report further notes that regional healthcare and education leaders should closely monitor these variables—along with faculty shortages, clinical placement availability, reliance on contract nurses, and new student enrollments in nursing programs to determine whether and the extent to which local nursing degree program should expand. <https://www.rn.ca.gov/pdfs/forms/fogCrecast2023.pdf>
<https://www.rn.ca.gov/pdfs/forms/forecast2024.pdf>

Greater higher education coordination. All of California's public education institutions share a commitment to work together to ensure that parts of the system work for all Californians. The assignment of distinct missions is important as it helps to justify allocation of state resources for three separate public university systems (CCC, CSU, and UC), contain growth in costs, and facilitate college access for all eligible California students. Although the Legislature recently established the California Education Interagency Council to improve coordination across California's education systems, California no longer has an entity charged with statewide higher education planning and coordination of institutional missions, academic program development, and long-range postsecondary policy following the elimination of the California Postsecondary Education Commission in 2011. As a result, significant changes to California's higher education framework are increasingly considered through individual legislative proposals rather than through a comprehensive statewide planning process, which could result in an uncoordinated and fragmented system. This bill illustrates the broader challenge facing the Legislature.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, this bill would have the following fiscal impact:

- The Chancellor's Office indicates that there could be one-time Proposition 98 General Fund costs for each pilot district to create and implement a Bachelor of Science of Nursing degree program, but these start-up costs could be absorbable within existing resources. These costs would encompass any updates to the

design of new nursing academic standards, student learning outcomes, updates to existing curriculum that would be needed to satisfy the program, and implementation of other coursework requirements. The Chancellor's Office estimates these costs could range from \$80,000 to \$138,000 per pilot district but they can be implemented by operating within the current community college Associate Degree in Nursing infrastructure.

- The Chancellor's office estimates one-time General Fund workload costs of up to \$33,000 to develop the application for the pilot program, issue guidance, and provide technical assistance.
- The costs for the Legislative Analyst Office to complete the evaluation is expected to be minor and absorbable within existing resources.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/14/26)

United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals
(source)

Academic Senate for California Community Colleges

Adventist Health

Allan Hancock College

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO

American Nurses Association\ California

Antelope Valley Community College District

Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California

Association of California Community College Administrators

Barstow Community College

Bay Area Council

Cabrillo Community College

Calbright College

California Association of Health Facilities

California Community College Baccalaureate Association

California Community College Independents

California Consortium for Urban Indian Health

California Hospital Association

California Latino Legislative Caucus

California Physicians Alliance

California School Employees Association

California Teachers Association

California Workforce Association

Cerritos College

Chabot-Las Positas Community College District
Chaffey College
Citrus College
Clovis Community College
Coalinga College
Coast Community College District
College of Marin
College of the Canyons
College of the Desert
College of the Redwoods
College of the Sequoias
College of the Siskiyous
Columbia College
Community College Association
Community College League of California
Contra Costa Community College District
Copper Mountain College
Courage California
Cuesta College
De Anza College
El Camino College
Evergreen Valley College
Faculty Association of California Community Colleges
Feather River College
Foothill College
Foothill-De Anza Community College District
Foundation for California Community Colleges
Fresno City College
Fresno County Economic Development Corporation
Gavilan College
Glendale Community College
Greater Sacramento Economic Council
Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District
Hartnell College
Imperial Valley College
Improve Your Tomorrow, Inc.
Jewish Community Free Clinic
Kern Community College District
Lake Tahoe Community College
Lassen Community College

LeadingAge California
Lemoore College
Long Beach City College
Long Beach Community College District
Los Angeles Community College District
Los Angeles Pierce College
Los Angeles Unified School District
Madera Community College
Mendocino College
Merced College
Michelson Center for Public Policy
MiraCosta College
Modesto Junior College
Mt. San Antonio College
Mt. San Jacinto Community College
NextGen California
North Far North Regional Consortium
North Orange Community College District
North Orange County Community College District
Northern California Apprenticeship Network
Ohlone College
Palo Verde College
Palomar Community College District
Pasadena Area Community College District
Peralta Community College District
Rancho Santiago Community College District
Redwood Grove Post Acute
Reedley College
Rio Hondo College
Riverside City College
Riverside Community College District
Rural County Representatives of California
San Bernardino Community College District
San Diego City College
San Diego Community College District
San Diego Continuing Education
San Diego Mesa College
San Diego Miramar College
San Diego Unified School District
San Francisco Community College District

San Jose City College
San Jose-Evergreen Community College District
San Mateo County Community College District
Santa Monica College
Santa Rosa Community Health
Santa Rosa Junior College
Shasta College
Sierra College
Solano Community College
South Orange County Community College District
Southwestern College
Southwestern Community College District
State Center Community College District
Student Debt Crisis Center
Student Senate for California Community Colleges
Taft College
Valley Children's Healthcare
Ventura College
Ventura County Community College District
Victor Valley College
Victor Valley Community College District
West Hills Community College District
West Valley-Mission Community College District
Western Center on Law and Poverty
Yosemite Community College District
Yuba College
Yuba Community College District

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/14/26)

Association of Independent California Colleges & Universities
California Faculty Association
California State University, Office of the Chancellor

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 71-0, 5/27/26

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Elhawary, Ellis, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-

Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez,
Schiavo, Schultz, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward,
Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NO VOTE RECORDED: Arambula, Castillo, Dixon, Flora, Johnson, Lackey,
Muratsuchi, Celeste Rodriguez, Sharp-Collins

Prepared by: Olgalilia Ramirez / ED. / (916) 651-4105
8/15/26 13:43:00

**** **END** ****