ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 2660 (Alvarez)
As Amended April 27, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Establishes the Cal-Bridge Program and ENLACE Program as intersegmental science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) pathway initiatives to increase the number and diversity of students pursuing STEM doctors of philosophy (PhDs) and entering California's STEM workforce.

Major Provisions

1) Establishes the Cal-Bridge Program as a statewide intersegmental partnership among the California Community Colleges (CCC), California State University (CSU), and University of California (UC).

2) Creates a structured pathway for undergraduate STEM students to pursue PhDs and careers in academia and the technology workforce.

3) Establishes five Cal-Bridge subprograms:

   a) Undergraduate Program (mentorship, financial aid, research opportunities);

   b) Summer Research Program;

   c) Doctoral Program (PhD support and professional development);

   d) Postdoctoral Program (faculty preparation); and,

   e) First Academic Scholar Training (FAST) Program (early exposure for community college students).

4) Establishes the ENLACE Program as a complementary, operationally independent program supporting STEM pathways from K–12 through undergraduate education.

5) Authorizes the use of state funding for scholarships, research opportunities, faculty mentorship, program administration, and professional development.

6) Provides that UC participation is contingent upon action by the Regents.

7) Defines the following terms:

   a) "Cal-Bridge Program" means the statewide program as specified;

   b) "ENLACE Program" means the program as specified;

   c) "UC" means the University of California;

   d) "CCC" means the California Community Colleges;

e) "CSU" means the California State University;

f) "PhD" means doctor of philosophy;

g) "Scholars" means students participating in the Cal-Bridge Program;

h) "STEM" means science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; and,

i) "STEM disciplines" include, but are not limited to, all branches of engineering, the biological, physical, health, and earth sciences, and medicine.

COMMENTS

Cal-Bridge. The Cal-Bridge Program is a CSU-UC partnership designed for CSU students interested in pursuing a PhD in physics, astronomy, computer science, computer engineering, or related fields. The Cal-Bridge Program was founded in 2014, by Alexander Rudolph, PhD; together with faculty from both the CSU and UC system, the Cal-Bridge Program has maintained operations for over a decade. The founder currently serves as the Executive Director of the Program and is a tenured faculty member at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (Cal Poly Pomona). The Executive Director, along with the assistance of faculty from various campuses of the CSU and the UC operate the Cal-Bridget Program. Additionally, the faculty team has a few staff members also employed at various campuses assisting in a variety of roles.

The Cal-Bridge Program utilizes research-validated selection methods to identify students from underrepresented minority (URM) groups who display strong socioemotional competencies along with academic potential and provides them with the support necessary to successfully matriculate to a PhD program, ideally at a UC campus. Undergraduate students at all 23 CSU campuses, along with CCC students from the 115 brick and mortar CCC campuses who are transferring to a CSU and majoring in one of the current disciplines in the Cal-Bridge Program, are eligible to apply to join the Program.

The Cal-Bridge Program recruits CSU and CCC students entering their junior year at a CSU. Once selected, Cal-Bridge Scholars benefit from the four pillars of support (as referenced in the figure below) in: 1) joint intensive mentoring by two faculty, one from their home CSU campus, the other from a nearby UC campus; 2) substantial need-based scholarships up to $10,000 per year to allow the scholars to reduce their work hours to less than 10 hours per week and focus on academics; 3) professional development workshops designed to prepare the scholars to successfully apply to PhD programs; and, 4) provide summer research opportunities, primarily through the Cal-Bridge Summer Program.

According to information provided by the author, students who have participated in the Cal-Bridge Program have a 70% acceptance rate into PhD programs with their first application. The first cohort of students have obtained not only their bachelor of science degrees, but their doctoral degrees as well, and have joined the ranks of faculty at the CCC, CSU, and UC.

Funding for the first eight years of the Cal-Bridge Program came exclusively from the NSF. Most recently, the Cal-Bridget Program has received one-time funding in the last few Budget Acts: $5 million 2022-23, $4 million 2023-24, and $5 million 2024-25.

Undergraduate and graduate degree diversity. Data provided by the author shows that the lack of diversity in the California public university STEM faculty is a persistent problem with multiple negative consequences, from low numbers of students from historically underrepresented groups participating in STEM education and training, to the lack of diversity in the state's science and technology workforce.

The author states, "California's science and technology industries are a main economic driver of the state's economy. Over 1.5 million people are employed in the tech industry in California representing 8% of the total workforce. The industry represents an even larger percentage (17%) of the state's economy, generating over half a trillion ($526 billion) of economic activity annually. However, due to a lack of diversity in these industries, the state grossly underutilizes its talent: only 15% of the 1.5 million tech workers in California are Black (3%) or Latino (12%), and only 26% are women despite the latter two groups each comprising half the state's population."

Further data from the author's office shows that the reasons for this lack of diversity are multifaceted but one key factor leading students from these groups to exit STEM educational pathways is the lack of faculty who reflect their backgrounds. The NSF data indicate that 70% of underrepresented minority (URM: Black, Latino, Native American) students who declare a STEM major do not complete their bachelor's degree, compared with 40% for non-URM students. One of the leading causes of URM students leaving STEM majors is that the lack of faculty role models deters some students.

California's economy relies heavily on STEM industries, yet gaps persist in both workforce supply and diversity. This measure contains an emphasis on integration across the CCC, CSU, and UC, which could reduce fragmentation and create a more seamless student pathway. This measure appears to align with broader policy goals of improving transfer, persistence, and graduate-level attainment.

Further, this measure contains a comprehensive "cradle-to-career" model. By pairing Cal-Bridge (undergraduate → PhD → postdoc) with ENLACE (K–12 → undergraduate), the measure seeks to create a full-spectrum pipeline model, which will increase the participation in STEM PhD programs by historically underrepresented groups. Research suggests that diverse faculty representation can positively influence student recruitment, retention, and success in STEM disciplines.

The Cal-Bridge Program will be administratively housed at a campus of the CSU or UC, but will operate independent of the CCC, CSU, and UC. This could raise questions about oversight, accountability, and coordination across the segments. Further, the long-term success of the Cal-Bridge Program will depend on sustained funding, institutional participation, and measurable outcomes such as PhD enrollment, completion rates, and workforce placement.

According to the Author
According to the author, there is no statewide program in place to systematically address the lack of STEM faculty diversity. The author states that, "the programs that do exist are generally one-off programs addressing pieces of the problem through federal grant funding that is necessarily time limited. The state of California has no codified program to address this long-standing and persistent problem in our higher education system. Codifying the Cal-Bridge and ENLACE programs through legislation would create such a mechanism to address this problem."

The author contends that, "the STEM public university professoriate in California does not come close to reflecting the state's diversity. As a consequence, large numbers of students from groups underrepresented in the science and technology workforce leave STEM majors before completing their BS degree, thereby grossly underutilizing the talent of the state. California needs to enact Cal-Bridge to broaden opportunities by identifying and nurturing the diverse talent of all Californians."

Arguments in Support
According to the California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (CCSWG), "AB 2660 deeply aligns with the Commission's commitment to advancing gender equity in education and the workforce, particularly in high-growth STEM fields where girls continue to face barriers and remain underrepresented."

The CCSWG, in reflecting on their 2026 Girls Agenda stated that, "girls continue to encounter a lack of access to high school courses, career readiness and support, mentorship, and social opportunities that keep them from gaining experience and knowledge in these fields, with only a quarter of California women in the workforce working in STEM careers. Globally, women further hold only one-third of research positions and account for only 27% of STEM roles."

Lastly, according to CCSWG, "the programs proposed by AB 2660 will build a more inclusive and equitable STEM pipeline, providing girls and college-age women with hands-on research experience, mentorship, financial support, and graduate school preparation that will increase their confidence and competitiveness when applying to doctoral programs."

Arguments in Opposition
None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations:

1) Ongoing General Fund cost pressures of an unknown amount but likely in the millions of dollars for the Legislature to appropriate funding to support the operation and participation in the Cal-Bridge program by the UC, CSU, and CCC systems.

   The Legislature most recently appropriated $5 million for the Cal-Bridge program in 2025.

2) Ongoing General Fund cost pressures of an unknown amount but likely in the low millions of dollars for the Legislature to appropriate funding to support the ENLACE program.

   According to the ENLACE program's website, the cost to participate in 2026 is $7,500 per student, not including airfare or visa processing fees. ENLACE served 200 students in 2025, representing a potential annual cost to fully fund participation costs in the program of $1.5 million. To the extent participation in the program increases because of this bill, cost pressures would increase.

VOTES

ASM HIGHER EDUCATION: 10-0-0
YES: Fong, DeMaio, Boerner, Jeff Gonzalez, Jackson, Irwin, Patel, Bennett, Sharp-Collins, Tangipa

ASM EDUCATION: 9-0-0
YES: Patel, Hoover, Alvarez, Bonta, Castillo, Garcia, Lowenthal, Pellerin, Zbur

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0
YES: Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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