

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 2694 (Alvarez and Pacheco)
As Amended April 23, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Expands the existing community college district (CCD) baccalaureate degree program by authorizing program duplication if there is no substantially similar program offered at the California State University (CSU) or University of California (UC) within that geographic region. Additionally, makes several technical changes, increasing required demonstration by an applicant of specified academic performance benchmarks, decreasing the percentage of baccalaureate programs that may be offered by a CCD, and requiring annual reporting to the Legislature.

Major Provisions

- 1) Replaces the existing prohibition on a CCD offering a baccalaureate degree program or program curricula already offered by the CSU or UC with a prohibition on programs substantially similar to a CSU or UC baccalaureate degree program offered within the geographic region served by the community college district, with two exceptions:
 - a) Where the CSU or UC does not enroll students from that geographic region in the same degree pathway; or,
 - b) Where documented unmet regional workforce, as specified, needs justify the program.
- 2) Requires, as a condition of eligibility for consideration to participate in the statewide baccalaureate degree program, a CCD to satisfy one of the following attainment eligibility requirements:
 - a) Demonstrate, in its application, that it meets or exceeds performance benchmarks and goals for associate degree and certificate completion, as established by the Board of Governors (BOG) of the California Community Colleges (CCC); or,
 - b) If the CCD has not yet met the benchmarks and goals for associate degree programs, submit a board-adopted improvement plan with measurable milestones consistent with the CCD's obligations under the strategic plan of the CCC.
- 3) Require the Chancellor of the CCC to ensure that the total number of baccalaureate degree programs offered by a CCD, at any time, does not exceed 15% of the total number of associate degree programs offered.
- 4) Modifies the consultation requirement for proposed baccalaureate degree programs by narrowing the Chancellor of the CCC's obligation to consult with the CSU and UC to proposals that may be substantially similar to programs offered within the geographic region of the proposing district, and removes the existing requirement to consult with the President of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU) at the objection stage.

- 5) Modifies the objection process so that, upon receipt of a written objection from CSU or UC asserting substantial similarity within the geographic region, the Chancellor of the CCC will convene the applicant and the objecting segment to establish a written agreement before the program is approved. Removes the existing 30-working-day deadlines for filing objections and for convening the parties.
- 6) Requires the Chancellor of the CCC to annually report to the Legislature, no later than March 1, on the status of all baccalaureate degree programs, and requires the report to include:
 - a) The name of the district and program;
 - b) Evidence that the campus meets or exceeds the benchmarks and goals for associate degree and certificate completion or a copy of the campus' board-adopted improvement plan pursuant, as specified;
 - c) Whether a collaborative program was pursued and the outcome;
 - d) Any objections received from the California State University or the University of California and the written agreements reached;
 - e) Enrollment data; and,
 - f) Student outcome data, including completion rates and employment outcomes disaggregated by race, gender, income, and first-generation student status.
- 7) Adds the following definitions for purposes of the baccalaureate degree program article:
 - a) "Documented unmet regional workforce need" means evidence, as defined by the Chancellor, showing demand for graduates in the field not met by existing baccalaureate programs within the geographic region.
 - b) "Geographic region" means the primary service area of the CCD, as specified, or as otherwise defined by the Chancellor.
 - c) "Substantially similar" means that the proposed program's curriculum, learning outcomes, and program objectives are materially overlapping with those of an existing CSU or UC baccalaureate program offered within the geographic region such that the programs serve indistinguishable academic and workforce purposes.

COMMENTS

Master Plan for Higher Education. As outlined in the Master Plan for Higher Education and by state statute, the CCCs are designated to have an open admission policy and bear the most extensive responsibility for lower-division undergraduate instruction. Its three primary areas of mission include education leading to associates degrees and university transfer, career technical education, and basic skills. The primary mission of the CSU is undergraduate and graduate instruction through the master's degree. The UC was granted the sole authority to independently offer doctoral degrees.

Notwithstanding the differentiation of the mission envisioned by the Master Plan, as outlined in statute, the Legislature authorized the CSU to go beyond its original mission to offer six

professional doctoral degrees which include the Au.D, Ed.D, D.P.T., DNP, OTD, and Dr.PH. Each program was individually approved through legislation. Fees were capped at the rate charged at the UC, no additional funding was provided by the state, and these programs were to be implemented without diminishing or reducing enrollment in undergraduate programs. Additionally, the CSU programs that offer applied doctorates were not duplicative of degrees offered by UC.

CCC Baccalaureate Degree Program. The CCC Baccalaureate Degree Program was established to allow community college districts to offer four-year degrees in subject areas with documented unmet workforce needs that are not duplicated by existing CSU or UC programs. As of the most recent data available from the CCCCO, 45 colleges have received approval to offer baccalaureate programs, with a combined total of 60 approved programs statewide. The most common program areas are Respiratory Care or Therapy, offered at 11 colleges, followed by Dental Hygiene at 8 colleges and Biomanufacturing at 6 colleges — reflecting the program's emphasis on allied health and technical workforce training. Southern California has the highest concentration of approved programs, accounting for approximately 40 percent of all approvals, while rural and North State colleges represent the smallest share but some of the most regionally distinctive offerings. The program operates under a structured, merit-based approval process that evaluates workforce need, program quality, institutional capacity, and non-duplication of UC and CSU offerings before any authorization is granted.

Regarding the approval timeline, community college districts may submit applications on one of two cycles annually — by January 15 for a May 31 decision, or by August 15 for a December 31 decision — with the Chancellor's Office conducting a minimum 30-day review of each completed application. No more than 15 programs may be approved in any single application period, for a maximum of 30 new approvals per academic year, and a district's total baccalaureate offerings may not exceed 25 percent of its associate degree programs at any time.

Tension over duplication. The tension between the CCC and the CSU over baccalaureate program duplication has been well-documented in recent years. Disagreement over what constitutes duplication has left more than a dozen proposed programs in limbo since, with the two systems holding fundamentally different views on whether geographic distance between institutions is a relevant factor in the duplication analysis.

CSU has raised concerns — reflected in resolutions by the CSU Academic Senate and statements from the CSU Chancellor's Office — about both the philosophical boundaries established by the 1960 Master Plan and the potential enrollment and funding impacts of expanding community college baccalaureate offerings. The dispute recently reached an inflection point in February 2026, when the CCC Chancellor's Office approved three programs over CSU's objections — at Mesa College, Moorpark College, and Southwestern College — a decision reported by EdSource that followed years of deliberations and a WestEd analysis commissioned by the community college system examining CSU's duplication claims against 16 pending proposals.

The role of collaboration and incentivizing partnership. Both proponents and opponents of this bill have identified intersegmental partnership as a preferred mechanism for expanding baccalaureate access in California. The CSU Office of the Chancellor, in its opposition letter, points to existing tools — including 2+2 programs, co-located degrees, and post-associate pathways such as ADN-to-BSN — as available mechanisms for expanding baccalaureate access that do not require new program authorization. The Community College League of California, in

support, acknowledges that regional workforce alignment should drive program development and emphasizes the value of employer engagement and workforce board input in shaping program design. Both positions share an underlying premise: that collaborative approaches, where feasible, can serve students more quickly and at lower cost than standing up entirely new programs.

Despite this shared premise, the statutory framework governing community college baccalaureate programs does not currently include any affirmative mechanisms to encourage or incentivize partnership. Existing law establishes a process for independent program approval and provides for consultation and objection by CSU and UC, but contains no parallel pathway — expedited or otherwise — to recognize and reward jointly developed programs. As a result, the burden of pursuing partnership falls entirely on individual districts and campuses, with no systemic support or incentive structure to make collaboration the preferred first step.

The definition of "substantially similar." AB 2694 (Alvarez) introduces a new standard for evaluating program overlap, defining "substantially similar" as programs whose curriculum, learning outcomes, and program objectives are materially overlapping such that they serve indistinguishable academic and workforce purposes. The practical application of this standard is unclear. Who determines whether two programs are "materially overlapping?" Under what evidentiary standard? And on what timeline?

Expansion of CCC Chancellor authority. AB 2694 vests significant authority in the Chancellor of the CCC to make determinations that affect not only CCDs but also the CSU and UC systems. The CCC Chancellor is charged with defining what constitutes a "documented unmet regional workforce need," determining when objections rise to the level of substantial similarity, and ultimately deciding whether to approve programs in the face of disagreement.

According to the Author

According to the author, "California's economic future depends on our ability to meet regional workforce demands while expanding equitable access to higher education. AB 2694 ensures that community college bachelor's degree programs remain responsive, affordable, and aligned with local labor market needs. By clarifying outdated statutory barriers, this bill helps students—especially those who are place-bound or underserved—access high-quality, four-year degree opportunities in their communities."

Arguments in Support

The Community College Baccalaureate Degree Association wrote in support of AB 2694 (Alvarez), stating that "under current California law, a community college may only offer a baccalaureate degree if that degree does not duplicate a similar degree at a campus of the UC or the CSU. Current law does not take into account that CSU campuses and UC campuses are regional universities that may not be able to provide access to students in other parts of the state. Under current law, for example, a place-bound student attending a community college in the San Diego region may be denied access to a baccalaureate degree because of duplication concerns from an CSU in Northern California."

The Community College Baccalaureate Degree Association continued, noting that "...many UC and CSU campuses and programs are impacted. Specifically, five CSU campuses, San Diego, Long Beach, San Jose, San Luis Obispo, and Fullerton remain impacted across all programs. This means that students living in those regions could be denied access to important job training programs simply because a CSU offers that program – even if that student is unable to access

that CSU campus. AB 2694 addresses these problems by meeting students where they are. Under this important measure, community college baccalaureate degree duplication would be defined by region increasing important access points for California's community college students. At the same time, it provides community college students with an additional access point where there is a regional workforce need that is going unfulfilled by current four-year offerings."

The Community College League of California, representing the Chief Executive Officers of the California Community Colleges, also wrote in support, stating that "the current statutory framework governing these programs includes a broad prohibition on duplicating CSU or UC offerings. In practice, this restriction limits program development even when there is clear regional labor market demand and limited capacity within existing university pathways. The lack of clarity regarding what constitutes 'duplication' further complicates program approval and can delay or deter the development of needed degrees. AB 2694 addresses these challenges by replacing the current duplication standard with a 'substantially similar' threshold and by explicitly allowing program approval when regional workforce needs are demonstrated or when CSU or UC institutions are not serving students from the affected region in the relevant pathway. The bill appropriately strengthens the evidentiary standard for workforce alignment, requiring labor market data, employer engagement, workforce board input, and documentation of hiring demand or wage premiums associated with bachelor's degree attainment."

Arguments in Opposition

The CSU Office of the Chancellor wrote in opposition, stating that "AB 2694 would amend the existing process to allow a community college to offer a baccalaureate degree program that is not available in their region, or if the community college determines that an existing program is failing to meet a regional workforce need. These changes raise significant concerns and offer minimal clarity on how programs would be considered as substantially similar and what would constitute a demonstrable unmet workforce need. These determinations should be made objectively, reflect workforce needs identified by employers and communities, and be done in a collaborative process with the CSU, UC and CCC."

The CSU Office of the Chancellor also wrote that they believe "...that the most effective and sustainable way to increase access and attainment of a baccalaureate degree is improving the CCC-CSU transfer pathway and developing further partnerships between our institutions that can deliver results faster than creating new baccalaureate programs. Collaboration and partnership with community colleges is an absolute priority for the CSU and a core tenet of our new systemwide strategic plan, CSU Forward."

The CSU Office of the Chancellor also wrote that "CSU Bachelor's Partnership Pathways can also be leveraged to support specific community colleges and regional workforce needs. These program-specific transfer pathways are developed collaboratively between CSU campuses and partner community colleges. These pathways align lower-division community college coursework with CSU upper-division requirements, providing students with a clear and efficient route to a CSU bachelor's degree. While often referred to as '2+2 programs,' they are flexible in structure and include co-located programs, online pathways, and post-associate or post-licensure programs (such as ADN-to-BSN programs). These partnerships expand access, affordability and degree completion by reducing excess units, minimizing transfer confusion, and allowing many students to remain in their communities. They also support workforce needs and serve place-bound, working and adult learners. Examples include Cal Poly's 2+2 Sociology program at Allan

Hancock College, Fresno State's Central Valley Scholars Law Pathway, and in-person baccalaureate degree programs co-located at Southwestern College's campus in Chula Vista."

FISCAL COMMENTS

- 1) Ongoing General Fund cost pressures of an unknown but likely significant amount, possibly in the hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars, to the CSU due to reduced enrollment to the extent four-year degree students who would have otherwise enrolled at a campus of the CSU enroll in a newly established CCD baccalaureate program authorized under the provisions of this bill.
- 2) No new Proposition 98 General Fund costs to participating CCDs. According to the CCCCO, the bill operates entirely within the fiscal conditions already established in statute for CCD baccalaureate degree programs.
- 3) Ongoing General Fund costs, likely in the tens of thousands to low hundreds of thousands of dollars, annually, to the CCCCO to complete the annual report, provide technical assistance, and process applications.

VOTES

ASM HIGHER EDUCATION: 6-3-1

YES: Fong, Boerner, Jackson, Muratsuchi, Patel, Ramos

NO: DeMaio, Macedo, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Sharp-Collins

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 10-4-1

YES: Wicks, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache

NO: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Sharp-Collins

UPDATED

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CONSULTANT: Kevin J. Powers / HIGHER ED. / (916) 319-3960

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