

THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 2694
Author: Alvarez (D) and Pacheco (D), et al.
Amended: 7/6/26 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE: 6-0, 7/1/26
AYES: Pérez, Ochoa Bogh, Cabaldon, Cortese, Gonzalez, Reyes
NO VOTE RECORDED: Choi

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 8/13/26
AYES: Cervantes, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 60-11, 5/26/26 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Public postsecondary education: community colleges: statewide
baccalaureate degree program

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill 1) modifies the existing community college district 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 the geographic region; and 2) 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 community college district, and requiring annual reporting to the Legislature.

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 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 California Community Colleges (CCC) Board of Governors (BOG). The CSU is also authorized to jointly award the doctoral degree with the UC and with one or more independent institutions of higher education.
 - b) The UC provides 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 institution of higher education requires undergraduate and graduate instruction and research in accordance with their respective missions.
 - d) The mission and function of the CCC are to offer academic and vocational instruction at the lower division level, and the CCC is authorized to grant the associate degrees. The CCCs 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 BOG, 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 CCC 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.)
- 3) Requires the CSU Trustees to ensure that any changes in the admission criteria for campus admission comply with specified consultation, public meeting, notification and disclosure requirements, and prohibits any change from becoming effective until one year has elapsed, or six months, if the change is based upon the resources of the local service area of the affected campus.

Applies these requirements to all changes in the admission criteria that affect eligibility of local service area applicants, including changes to transfer requirements and determinations regarding impact of majors. (EC § 89030.5)

This bill:

- 1) Modifies the eligibility and approval process for a community college district participating in the statewide CCC baccalaureate degree program.
- 2) Adds conditions for eligibility for a district participating in the CCC baccalaureate degree program to additionally satisfy either of the following:
 - a) Demonstrate, in its application, that it meets or exceeds performance benchmarks and goals for associate degree and certificate completion, as established by the CCC BOG.
 - b) If the district has not yet met the required benchmarks and goals for associate degree programs, submit a board-adopted improvement plan with measurable milestones consistent with the district's obligations under the strategic plan of the CCCs.
- 3) Prohibits a district from offering a baccalaureate degree program or program curricula *substantially similar*, instead of *already* offered, to a program offered by the CSU or the UC.
- 4) Allows the offering of a CCC baccalaureate degree program that is substantially similar where the CSU or UC does not enroll students from that geographic region in the same degree pathway or where documented unmet regional workforce needs justify the program.
- 5) When seeking authorization, includes in the list of information required for submission for review by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) and CCC BOG, documentation demonstrating that the district meets the attainment eligibility requirements including the performance benchmarks and goals for associate degree and certificate completion for the community college district, or where applicable, the board-adopted improvement plan.

- 6) Reduces the total number of baccalaureate degree programs that may be offered by a district, at any time, from less than 25% to 15% of the total number of associate degree programs offered by the district.
- 7) Removes the requirement that the CCCCO notify and send materials to the CSU Chancellor, UC President, and the President of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities about the proposed baccalaureate degree program.
- 8) Removes the current process by which CSU or UC may assess and object to a program that they believe duplicates a UC or CSU existing degree program and instead requires that the CCC Chancellor consult with and seek feedback from the CSU Chancellor and UC President regarding proposed baccalaureate degree programs that may be substantially similar to CSU or UC programs offered within the geographic region of the proposing district. If the CSU or UC believes there is substantial similarity within the geographic region, they may submit a written objection with supporting evidence. Upon receipt of an objection, the CCCCO is required to convene the applicant and the objector to establish a written agreement before the program is approved.
- 9) Requires the CCCCO to annually report to the Legislature, no later than March 1, on the status of all approved baccalaureate degree programs, the approved information for each approved program, including student outcome data and evidence of achieving the specified attainment goals.
- 10) Defines all of the following terms for purposes of the bill:
 - a) “Documented unmet regional workforce need” means evidence, showing demand for graduates in the field that is not met by existing baccalaureate degree programs within the geographic region, as demonstrated through labor market analyses prepared by the California Community Colleges Center of Excellence for Labor Market Research using labor market information and analyses published by the Labor and Workforce Development Agency. The labor market analyses shall consider projected employment demand, annual job openings, workforce supply, employer demand, wage data, and other indicators relevant to the proposed baccalaureate degree program.
 - b) “Geographic region” means the primary service area of the community college district as defined by Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations or as otherwise defined by the CCCCO.

- c) “Substantially similar” means that the proposed baccalaureate degree program’s curriculum, learning outcomes, and program objectives are materially overlapping with those of an existing CSU or UC baccalaureate degree program offered within the geographic region of the community college district such that the programs serve indistinguishable academic and workforce purposes.

Comments

Need for the bill. 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.”

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 its students. Their mission statements are outlined in state statute. The CCCs are to have an open admission policy and bear the most extensive responsibility for lower-division undergraduate instruction. Its primary area of mission includes academic and vocational instruction leading to associate degrees and university transfer, career technical education, and remedial education. The primary mission of the CSU is undergraduate and graduate instruction through the master’s degree. The UC was granted the sole authority to offer doctoral degrees and is the state’s primary research institution. Despite the differentiation of mission, the Legislature has authorized the CSU and CCCs to go beyond their original mission to offer doctoral degrees and baccalaureate degree programs, respectively, so long as programs do not duplicate those offered by the other segments with primary jurisdiction. This bill would narrow the prohibition on duplication by permitting substantially similar programs under specified circumstances, raising the broader policy question of how much flexibility should be afforded before the distinction between segment missions begin to erode. Further expansion of CCC baccalaureate degree authority, as proposed in this bill, would signal the Legislature’s willingness to allow CCCs to potentially deviate further from their core mission and duplicate programs offered by a segment with primary jurisdiction.

Existing CCC Bachelor's program. SB 850 (Block, Chapter 747, Statutes of 2014) authorized the BOG, in consultation with the CSU and the UC, to establish a CCC baccalaureate degree pilot program. The pilot program included 15 participating CCC districts to offer one baccalaureate degree program each to meet local workforce needs, as long as it did not duplicate a baccalaureate degree program already offered by the CSU or the UC. The original pilot led to the statewide authorization established by AB 927 (Medina, Chapter 565, Statutes of 2021), which allows the CCC BOG to approve qualifying programs twice a year. Today, as reported on the CCCCO website, there are more than 50 approved CCC baccalaureate programs statewide, primarily in applied and workforce-related fields such as health care, industrial technology, and public safety. Specific degree offerings include respiratory care, mortuary science, industrial automation, and public safety management. These programs are intended to address unmet regional workforce needs rather than broad expansion into traditional academic fields of study. Since 2017, approximately 1,893 students have attained a CCC bachelor's degree, with 293 completed in the 2023-24 academic year. This bill broadens the circumstances under which community colleges may offer programs that overlap with CSU or UC offerings.

Growing tension over duplication. This bill modifies the existing consultation process by eliminating the requirement that the CCCCO provide application materials to the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities and replacing the current duplication review process with one requiring the CCCCO to consult with the CSU and UC and convene the parties to reach a written agreement when an objection is raised. These changes shift the process from a formal review of potential duplication to one that places greater emphasis on consultation and negotiated resolution across the public higher education segments.

The debate surrounding CCC baccalaureate degrees has increasingly moved away from the administrative approval process established in statute to the legislative process. Existing law establishes an administrative process intended to evaluate proposed CCC baccalaureate degree programs based on objective criteria, including workforce need and program duplication. Since enactment of the statewide program, disagreements regarding program duplication have resulted not only in formal objections during the Chancellor's review process, but also in district-specific legislation seeking authority to establish individual baccalaureate degree programs. In addition, community college districts have increasingly sought letters of support from Members of the Legislature as part of their applications, reflecting the growing role legislative advocacy has played in what was originally

intended to be an evidence based administrative review process. The issue is not whether CCCs should continue offering bachelor's degrees, but rather how duplication, workforce need, and student access should be evaluated.

Changes to program duplication standard. As mentioned, existing law generally prohibits a CCC from offering a baccalaureate degree that duplicates one already offered by CSU or UC. That prohibition serves two purposes. First, it preserves the differentiated missions established within California's higher education system. Second, it encourages public institutions to coordinate program offerings instead of competing for the same students. This bill would replace the current statewide duplication standard with one based largely on geographic region, allowing substantially similar programs where the CSU or UC does not enroll students from that region or where documented regional workforce need exists. The bill defines "substantially similar" to mean programs whose curriculum, learning outcomes, and objectives are materially overlapping such that they serve indistinguishable academic and workforce purposes. Under current law, "already offered" is undefined, establishing a statutory definition for "substantially similar" provides greater clarity regarding the standard applied during implementation. As a result, a CCC could be authorized to offer a degree that is already available elsewhere in the state so long as the statutory conditions are satisfied.

Workforce evidence. This bill would allow a community college district to offer a baccalaureate degree program that is substantially similar to a CSU or UC program where documented unmet regional workforce needs justify the program. A prior version of the bill defined documented unmet regional workforce need as evidence determined by the CCCCCO. Given that this determination may be used to justify approval of a program that is substantially similar to one offered by the CSU or UC, those determinations should be based on objective workforce information. Senate Education Committee amendments made changes to the bill so that determinations regarding unmet regional workforce need rely on labor market information produced by the Labor and Workforce Development Agency as a neutral workforce entity, rather than solely left to CCCCCO's discretion.

Defining "geographic region." The bill replaces the existing statewide duplication standard with one based on whether a substantially similar CSU or UC program exists within the "geographic region" served by the proposing CCC district. The bill defines geographic region as the primary service area of the CCC district, as defined in Title 5 in the California Code of Regulations or as otherwise defined by the CCCCCO. CSU and UC campuses often serve students from multiple CCC districts and throughout the state. Given that duplication analysis depends on how a

geographic region is defined, the proposed definition may benefit from clearer parameters for defining that region.

Conditions eligibility on student attainment. Existing law focuses primarily on whether a proposed baccalaureate degree program addresses an unmet workforce need while avoiding duplication. This bill adds a new CCC district eligibility requirement by conditioning participation in the statewide baccalaureate degree program on a CCC district demonstrating that it meets specified associate degree and certificate completion benchmarks or alternatively, adopting a board approved improvement plan with measurable milestones. In doing so, the bill links expansion of baccalaureate degree authority to a district's performance in carrying out its existing community college mission. The inclusion of an alternative improvement plan recognizes that districts may be at different stages of improving student outcomes while still seeking to expand bachelor's degree opportunities. It ensures that CCC districts demonstrate success in serving students through their existing associate degree and certificate programs before expanding into upper-division instruction. The practical effect of the eligibility requirement will depend largely on how board adopted improvement plans are evaluated during the approval process.

Impact on CCCs core mission. In previous discussions around authorizing the offering of CCC baccalaureate degrees, concerns were raised that broadening the CCC mission would diminish attention to transfer, associate degree completion, remedial education goals, and career technical education. In an effort to address this concern and limit potential impacts on the CCCs' core mission of the CCC, as well as on existing associate degree programs at local campuses, existing law established by AB 927 limits the number of programs a CCC may offer to no more than 25% of the number of associate degree programs offered at the college. This bill reduces that cap from 25% to 15% of a district's associate degree programs, reflecting an effort to balance additional bachelor's degree authority with preservation of the CCCs critical mission.

Alternative solutions to expand access. If it is the desire of the Legislature to expand access to baccalaureate degree programs, more effective and efficient alternatives do not require a departure from the CCC's mission to expand and streamline bachelor's degree pathways between CCCs and public or nonprofit universities. There are numerous examples of successful CCC/CSU pathway partnerships across the state, including Sonoma State University's (SSU) liberal studies bachelor's degree completion program, which provides upper-division instruction to transfer students taught by SSU faculty on the Mendocino

Community College campus. This model brings the university to CCC students, building on the strengths of each segment. Further, in its recommendation for alternatives to the original CCC baccalaureate degree pilot program, the LAO's analysis notes that 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 Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) report asserts that CCC and university pathways could not only be more cost-effective but also benefit more students (including place-bound students), thereby having a more widespread impact. Such models may address geographic access concerns without requiring CCCs to independently replicate university programs.

Higher education coordination. All of California's public education institutions share a commitment to work together to ensure that the various 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. As the Legislature considers changes to the statewide approval process, continued coordination among the segments will remain important to ensuring that expansion of CCC baccalaureate programs complements, rather than fragments, California's broader system of higher education.

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

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

- The Community College Chancellor's Office indicates that the bill would not result in additional Proposition 98 General Fund costs to participating community college districts (CCDs) as the bill would operate within the fiscal conditions already established in statute for baccalaureate degree

programs offered at community colleges. Additionally, the Community College Chancellor's Office indicates that while the bill may lead to an overall increase in the number of new baccalaureate degree programs being approved, it cannot increase per-student costs as current statute ties funding for these programs to the current community college marginal rate for a full-time equivalent student. Further, community college districts must demonstrate full financial and operational capacity, including staffing, student supports, and long-term sustainability, before receiving authorization to offer a baccalaureate degree program.

- Depending on the number of new community college baccalaureate programs that are authorized as a result of this bill, it could impact enrollment across UC and CSU campuses and pose significant General Fund cost pressures.
- The Community College Chancellor's Office may incur minor General Fund costs to complete the annual report and provide technical assistance.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/14/26)

Academic Senate for California Community Colleges
Allan Hancock College
Antelope Valley Community College District
Association of California Community College Administrators
Barstow Community College
Cabrillo Community College
Calbright College
California Association for Alcohol/drug Educators
California Community College Baccalaureate Association
California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office
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 League of California
Contra Costa Community College District
Copper Mountain College
Cuesta College
De Anza College
El Camino College
Evergreen Valley College
Feather River College
Foothill College
Foothill-De Anza Community College District
Fresno City College
Gavilan College
Glendale Community College
Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District
Hartnell College
Imperial Valley College
Kern Community College District
Lake Tahoe Community College
Lassen Community College
Lemoore College
Long Beach City College
Long Beach Community College District
Los Angeles Community College District
Los Angeles Pierce College
Madera Community College
Mendocino College
Merced College
Miracosta College
Modesto Junior College
Mt. San Antonio College
Mt. San Jacinto Community College
North Orange Community College District
North Orange County Community College District
Ohlone College
Palo Verde College
Palomar Community College District
Pasadena Area Community College District

Peralta Community College District
Rancho Santiago Community College District
Reedley College
Rio Hondo College
Riverside Community College
Riverside Community College District
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 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 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 Senate for California Community Colleges
Taft 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
Yosemite Community College District
Yuba College
Yuba Community College District

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/14/26)

California Faculty Association
California State University, Office of the Chancellor
University of California

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: The CCCCCO states in their letter of support submitted to this Committee, in part, “AB 2694 recognizes that many community college students are place-bound learners, including working adults, caregivers, and first-generation students who cannot relocate or commute long distances to pursue a bachelor’s degree. For these students, the existence of a program elsewhere in the state does not necessarily translate into meaningful access. Current transfer pathways remain critically important, but they alone have not been sufficient to address persistent workforce shortages. AB 2694 expands opportunities for students who may otherwise stop out, delay completion, or leave the state altogether, allowing them to advance their education while remaining connected to their communities.

“By expanding affordable and accessible baccalaureate degree opportunities, AB 2694 also helps address the financial barriers that prevent many students from pursuing a bachelor’s degree. Community college baccalaureate degree programs provide one of the most affordable pathways to a four-year degree in California, helping reduce tuition costs and student borrowing while addressing access barriers for low-income students. Expanding lower-cost bachelor’s degree pathways through community colleges can help increase statewide degree attainment and economic mobility without imposing the same level of financial burden often associated with traditional university pathways.”

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION: In their letter in opposition submitted to this Committee the CSU, argues, in part, “CSU believes that any proposal that significantly expands the Community Colleges’ baccalaureate degree authority should include, at minimum, statewide duplication standards to ensure the efficient use of state resources, demonstration of meeting a clear workforce need, and a prohibition on substantially similar programs where CSU or UC programs are already accessible and effectively serving the region. Community colleges should demonstrate that they are meeting performance benchmarks for their core mission, including associate degree completion and transfer to four-year institutions, before offering new baccalaureate degree programs. We should also require annual reporting on the status and completion rates of these programs. Finally, proposals should include a full fiscal analysis across higher education segments and K-12 to understand how these degree expansions will impact Prop. 98 funding distributions and each segment’s core mission. Legislators should consider whether Prop. 98 funding should be used for bachelor’s degree programs, and if so, whether the CSU should also be able to access Prop. 98 funding for its own baccalaureate degree program. The state should support the expansion of baccalaureate degree programs through partnership programs, including clear limits and written agreement when

programs are substantially similar, while continuing to bolster each segment's core mission."

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 60-11, 5/26/26

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Connolly, Elhawary, Fong, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Valencia, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NOES: Alanis, Castillo, Chen, Davies, DeMaio, Ellis, Gallagher, Johnson, Macedo, Tangipa, Wallis

NO VOTE RECORDED: Arambula, Bryan, Dixon, Flora, Gabriel, Muratsuchi, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Sharp-Collins

Prepared by: Olgalilia Ramirez / ED. / (916) 651-4105
8/15/26 11:13:38

**** END ****