

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 2694 (Alvarez and Pacheco)

As Amended August 27, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

This bill, contingent upon the enactment of SB 960 (Cabaldon, 2026), revises the requirements governing applications for California Community College (CCC) baccalaureate degree programs and establishes separate processes for resolving objections filed by the California State University (CSU) and retains the existing written agreement process for objections filed by the University of California (UC) and expands annual reporting requirements, as specified.

Senate Amendments

- 1) Revise the application requirements, including documentation of unmet workforce need and consultation with Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LWDA), CSU, and UC.
- 2) Require districts to explore partnerships with CSU and UC to expand access and avoid unnecessary duplication.
- 3) Limit districts to three applications per academic year and require baccalaureate programs to preserve access to lower-division instruction.
- 4) Establish separate objection process for CSU objections to be resolved through an LWDA workforce-need and capacity determination.
- 5) Expand annual reporting to include objections, LWDA determinations, student outcomes, and program funding.
- 6) Make the changes operative January 1, 2028, contingent upon SB 960 (Cabaldon, 2026) also taking effect.

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 CCDs 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 CCC Chancellor's Office (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 eight colleges and Biomanufacturing at six 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% 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, CCDs 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% of its associate degree programs at any time. The CCC Baccalaureate Degree Program operates within a system whose primary statutory mission, under EDC Section 66010.4, is the offering of lower-division academic and vocational instruction, including transfer to four-year institutions. Recent data from EdSource indicates that of CCC students who began their studies in the 2019-20 academic year, approximately 18% had transferred to a four-year postsecondary institution within four years. In 2025, 68,600 community college students transferred to a UC or CSU campus, with 71.8% transferring to CSU.

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 — that followed years of deliberations and a WestEd analysis commissioned by the community college system examining CSU's duplication claims against 16 pending proposals.

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 Campaign for College Opportunity wrote in support, stating that, "each segment of California's higher education system plays a crucial and unique role that was outlined in the Master Plan for Higher Education. That bold vision from 1960 has flourished into a crucial ecosystem that is critical for the economy. Today while there are more students served than ever imagined, there are still many around the state who need a bachelor's degree to meet local workforce demands, but don't have access to a university. Recent research by the RP group illustrated that in California 18,322 students live 80 miles or more from the nearest public university, and 139,150 students live 25 miles or more from the nearest public university. For these students to transfer to a university they would have to commit to significant commutes or relocate their life altogether. For some students this is not a possibility because they have family and financial responsibilities that keep them regionally bound. AB2694 would help address this by making more educational opportunities available locally."

The Campaign for College Opportunity continued, writing that "while in recent years some CSUs have faced declining enrollments, [five] campuses are fully impacted, and all but [three] have at least one program impacted; which means that there are more students interested than spots available at these campuses and within some programs. CSU San Luis Obispo, San Jose, San Diego, and Fullerton, all have been fully impacted since at least 2012-2013. AB 2694 helps address this issue by permitting duplication considering transfer opportunities for students to a CSU campus."

Arguments in Opposition

The Chancellor of the California Community Colleges wrote in opposition, stating that, "while we support the shift toward limiting duplication objections from four-year universities to programs within a community college district's local service area, the current version of the bill simultaneously creates new eligibility tiers, program caps, online program restrictions, external workforce and capacity reviews, and a five-year prohibition on submitting similar programs for re-consideration. Our preliminary analysis, based on the limited data that has been provided, suggests that these new requirements and restrictions could leave California with a community college baccalaureate framework that creates more barriers than the one we have today. The communities with the greatest need for expanded access to affordable bachelor's degrees should not become the communities with the fewest options for creating them."

The Chancellor continues, writing that, "we appreciate the effort to establish a clear standard for determining when a substantially similar four-year university program should no longer prevent a community college from responding to local needs. We do have concerns, however, that the 75 percent transfer acceptance threshold may be too narrow to fully address the access challenge this bill was intended to solve. Acceptance is not the same as meaningful access. A program may have a relatively high acceptance rate while students still face significant barriers to enrolling and completing a bachelor's degree, including geography, affordability, capacity, work and family responsibilities, and other circumstances that make the existing pathway inaccessible. We therefore risk solving only one part of the duplication problem, while creating new barriers for colleges trying to respond to legitimate unmet workforce and student needs within their own regions."

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee analysis, this bill would have

the following fiscal impact:

- 1) 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.
- 2) 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.
- 3) The Community College Chancellor's Office may incur minor General Fund costs to complete the annual report and provide technical assistance.

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

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 60-11-9

YES: 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

NO: Alanis, Castillo, Chen, Davies, DeMaio, Ellis, Gallagher, Johnson, Macedo, Tangipa, Wallis

ABS, ABST OR NV: Arambula, Bryan, Dixon, Flora, Gabriel, Muratsuchi, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Sharp-Collins

UPDATED

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