
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 323
Author: Fong (D), et al.
Introduced: 1/24/25
Vote: 21

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE: 7-0, 6/25/25

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

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 8/29/25

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

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 70-0, 5/29/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Strong Workforce Program: work-based learning opportunities

SOURCE: Los Angeles Community College District
San Diego Community College District
Student Senate for California Community Colleges

DIGEST: This bill authorizes community college districts (CCDs) to use Strong Workforce Program (SWP) funds apportioned directly to them to support paid work-based learning opportunities for students and employers, and requires the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) to revise related policies and guidance by June 30, 2026.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the California Community Colleges (CCC) under the administration of the Board of Governors as one of the state's public higher education segments. (Education Code (EC) § 70900)
- 2) Authorizes each CCD governing board to initiate programs and activities consistent with law and the purposes of the district. (EC § 70902)

- 3) Establishes the SWP to expand high-quality career technical education (CTE) and workforce development across K–14, funded through regional consortia and directly to CCDs. (EC § 88820 et seq.)
- 4) Requires that community college SWP funds be used to increase CTE course availability, improve workforce outcomes, and support regional coordination.
- 5) Encourages community colleges to develop work-based learning and employer partnerships, but current CCCCO guidance limits the use of SWP funds for paid student placements.

This bill:

- 1) Requires the CCCCO to revise, by June 30, 2026, any policies, regulations, or guidance necessary to support the use of SWP funds for paid work-based learning.
- 2) Authorizes CCDs to use their directly apportioned SWP funds to provide direct support to students, employers, or both, for paid work-based learning, including apprenticeships, internships, externships, and student-run enterprises.
- 3) Makes related technical and conforming changes to the SWP statutes.

Comments

- 1) *Need for this bill.* According to the author, “In 2016, California took a bold step in establishing the Strong Workforce Program in order to develop more workforce opportunities and lift low-wage workers into living-wage jobs. An initial \$200 million was allocated to the Strong Workforce Program to expand career technical education CTE in California’s community colleges. Since the program began, Strong Workforce Program has shown positive gains in noncredit student progress, credential attainment and transfer, employment, and earnings outcomes.”

“Paid internships, apprenticeships, and other work-based experiences are critical in bridging academics with hands-on experience in a student’s career choice. However, it is unclear whether SWP funds can be used for this purpose. AB 323 makes it clear that funds may be used to provide support to students, employers, or both, for paid work-based learning, which will increase

employability of students and provide opportunities for long-term employment.”

- 2) *Clarifying allowable uses of SWP funds.* While current law strongly encourages work-based learning, the CCCCCO’s guidance has not explicitly authorized the use of SWP dollars for student wages or employer subsidies in paid placements. This has resulted in some local proposals being rejected during the review process. This bill provides districts and colleges with clear authority to use existing SWP funds for this purpose, aligning implementation with the Legislature’s stated intent to prepare students for gainful employment through applied learning.
- 3) *Reinforcing the workforce outcomes mission of SWP.* Paid work-based learning helps students bridge the gap between classroom training and real-world employment, particularly for students in high-demand middle-skill occupations. This bill aligns with the foundational goals of the SWP by strengthening student-employer connections and improving job placement outcomes—especially for underserved students who cannot afford to work for free. These experiences are particularly valuable in CTE fields like healthcare, manufacturing, and technology.
- 4) *Equity and access considerations.* Unpaid internships can be out of reach for students who must work to support themselves or their families. Research shows that underrepresented students—particularly Black and Latino learners—are less likely to participate in unpaid work-based learning opportunities. This bill could help address those inequities by enabling stipends, wages, or employer partnerships that reduce cost barriers for students.
- 5) *Implementation considerations.* The CCCCCO will need to issue updated policies and technical guidance for districts by the statutory deadline of June 30, 2026. Implementation costs for this update are expected to be minor and absorbable. The larger fiscal impact will depend on local decisions about whether and how to expand paid work-based learning offerings using SWP funds.
- 6) *Broader context.* Since its inception in 2016, the SWP has invested more than \$1 billion in CTE programs across the CCC system. According to the Chancellor’s Office, over 140,000 vocational certificates were awarded in 2023–24, and 72–73% of SWP students obtain jobs in fields related to their training. Strengthening work-based learning through this bill complements the

goals of Governor Newsom’s “Vision 2030” for community colleges and supports student transitions into high-demand jobs.

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

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- The Chancellor’s Office indicates that this bill could result in additional, ongoing Proposition 98 General Fund cost pressures to the extent that community college districts increase paid work-based learning opportunities due to increased student and employer demand. The Chancellor’s Office notes that each community college district’s allocation for SWP declined by approximately 21 percent in 2024-25, as the 2024 Budget Act earmarked \$60 million over the next five years from the program for the Rebuilding Nursing Infrastructure Grant Program and \$5 million in one-time funds (also from the SWP) for a low-income workers demonstration project. While the bill does not require districts to provide apprenticeships, internships, or externships, offering these paid work-based learning opportunities may increase student and employer demand.
- The Chancellor’s Office estimates one-time General Fund costs ranging from \$13,000 to \$58,000 to update its policies regarding allowable expenditures under the SWP and provide updated guidance and technical assistance.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/28/25)

Los Angeles Community College District (Co-Source)
 San Diego Community College District (Co-Source)
 Student Senate for California Community Colleges (Co-Source)
 Antelope Valley Community College District
 Associated General Contractors, California Chapters
 Calbright College
 California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office
 California EDGE Coalition
 CFT - A Union of Educators & Classified Professionals, AFT, AFL-CIO
 Chinese for Affirmative Action
 Citrus College
 Community College League of California
 Contra Costa Community College District
 County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors
 Faculty Association of California's Community Colleges
 First Gen Empower

Foothill-De Anza Community College District
Kern Community College District
Long Beach Community College District
Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce
Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce
Los Rios Community College District
Mt. San Antonio College
Mt. San Jacinto Community College District
Nextgen California
North Orange County Community College District
Pasadena Area Community College District
Power CA Action
Power California Action
San Bernardino Community College District
San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce
San Diego Unified School District
Southern California College Attainment Network
Southwestern Community College District
State Center Community College District
Vision Y Compromiso

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/28/25)

None received

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 70-0, 5/29/25

AYES: Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Valencia, Wallis, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NO VOTE RECORDED: Addis, Alvarez, Bryan, Chen, Nguyen, Sharp-Collins,
Solache, Tangipa, Ward

Prepared by: Ian Johnson / ED. / (916) 651-4105
8/29/25 20:33:24

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