
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 821
Author: Gipson (D)
Amended: 8/28/25 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: Senate Rule 28.8

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE: 7-0, 7/2/25

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

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/3/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Pupil instruction: high school graduation requirements: career technical education

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill eliminates the sunset on the existing authorization for career technical education (CTE) courses to be used to satisfy the visual and performing arts (VAPA) or world language graduation requirement, thus extending it into perpetuity.

Senate Floor Amendments of 8/28/25 resolve a chaptering out conflict with AB 121 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 8, Statutes of 2025).

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Requires a student to complete all of the following while in grades 9-12 in order to receive a diploma of graduation from high school (each course having a duration of one year unless otherwise specified):
 - a) Three courses in English.
 - b) Two courses in science, including biological and physical science.

- c) Two courses in mathematics.
 - d) Three courses in social sciences, including United States History and geography; world history, culture, and geography; a one-semester course in American government and civics; and a one-semester course in economics.
 - e) One course in VAPA, world language, or until July 1, 2027, CTE.
 - f) Two courses in physical education, unless the student has been exempt, as specified.
 - g) A one-semester course in ethnic studies beginning with students graduating in the 2029-2030 school year.
 - h) A separate, stand-alone one-semester course in personal finance that shall not be combined with any other course, beginning with students graduating in the 2030-2031 school year.
 - i) Other coursework requirements adopted by the governing board of the school district. (Education Code (EC) § 51225.3)
- 2) Authorizes, with respect to (i) above, the governing board of a school district to, at its discretion, adopt a policy to exempt students from any additional coursework requirements it adopts. Establishes that it is the intent of the Legislature that the policy include a consultation with the student and the educational rights holder for the student regarding any impact of not fulfilling locally required coursework on the student's ability to gain admission to an institution of higher education. (EC § 51225.3(a)(2)(B))
- 3) Defines a course in CTE as a course in a district-operated CTE program that is aligned to the career technical model curriculum standards and framework adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE), including courses through a regional occupational center or program operated by a county superintendent of schools or pursuant to a joint powers agreement (JPA). (EC § 51225.3)
- 4) Requires a local educational agency (LEA), if it elects to allow a CTE course to satisfy the graduation requirement, before offering that alternative to students, to notify parents, teachers, students, and the public at a regularly scheduled meeting of the governing board of all of the following:
- a) The intent to offer CTE courses to fulfill the graduation requirement.

- b) The impact that offering CTE courses to fulfill the graduation requirement will have on the availability of courses that meet the eligibility requirements for admission to the California State University (CSU) and the University of California (UC), and whether the CTE courses to be offered are approved to satisfy those eligibility requirements
 - c) The distinction, if any, between the high school graduation requirements of the school district or county office of education (COE), and the eligibility requirements for admission to the CSU and the UC. (EC § 51225.3)
- 5) Beginning July 2, 2027, the high school graduation requirements no longer allow CTE as an option to fulfill the graduation requirement, instead of VAPA or world language. (EC § 51225.3)
- 6) Authorizes the Career Technical Education Incentive Grant (CTEIG) program as a state education, economic, and workforce development initiative with the goal of providing students in kindergarten through 12th grade with the knowledge and skills necessary to transition to employment and postsecondary education. (EC § 53070)
- 7) Authorizes the K-12 component of the Strong Workforce Program (SWP) to create, support, or expand high-quality CTE programs at the K-12 level that are aligned with the workforce development efforts occurring through the SWP, and authorizes, commencing with the 2018-19 fiscal year, and subject to an annual appropriation, \$150 million to be apportioned annually by the California Community College Chancellor's Office to local consortia. (EC § 88827)

This bill extends indefinitely, the existing authorization for CTE course to be used to satisfy the VAPA or world languages graduation requirement.

Comments

- 1) *Need for this bill.* According to the author, "With a contemporary twist, AB 821 aims to bring back "shop classes" to California schools that would offer an additional path to students who choose to not pursue higher education. This will, statistically speaking, also help those who decide to go to college. Research shows that students who have more access to CTE are directly linked to better grades and attendance, as well as a decrease in the school-to-prison pipeline."
- 2) *High school graduation requirements.* Since the 2012-2013 school year, LEAs have been authorized to accept a CTE course as an optional high school graduation requirement in lieu of the VAPA or world languages requirement, subject to adoption by their respective governing boards. At the time, the

authorization was set to sunset in 2017. However, it was subsequently extended twice, resulting in the current sunset date of January 1, 2028. This bill eliminates the sunset of the CTE graduation requirement authorization. However, notably, this bill does not require a school or school district that currently does not offer CTE courses to establish new CTE programs.

- 3) *What is Career Technical Education?* CTE prepares students for the world of work by introducing them to workplace competencies and making academic content accessible through hands-on contexts. Along the way, students develop career-relevant, real-world 21st-century skills. CTE is a program of study that involves a multiyear sequence of courses integrating core academic knowledge with technical and occupational knowledge, providing a pathway to postsecondary education and careers.

In California, CTE programs are organized into 15 industry sectors, encompassing 58 pathways that outline the necessary knowledge and skills required for each sector. These sectors include:

- Agriculture and Natural Resources
- Arts, Media, and Entertainment
- Building and Construction Trades
- Business and Finance
- Education, Child Development, and Family Services
- Energy, Environment, and Utilities
- Engineering and Architecture
- Fashion and Interior Design
- Health Science and Medical Technology
- Hospitality, Tourism, and Recreation
- Information and Communications Technology
- Manufacturing and Product Development
- Marketing, Sales, and Services
- Public Services

- Transportation

These programs often involve partnerships between high schools, businesses, and postsecondary institutions, offering pathways to employment and various degrees. CTE courses and pathways may be offered in comprehensive high schools with CTE programs and through regional CTE programs or centers operated by JPAs or COEs. Some CTE programs are integrated with academic programs in a “linked learning model,” and community colleges and technical institutes also offer CTE at the postsecondary level.

- 4) *California CTE Model Curriculum Standards.* In 2013, the SBE adopted the revised California CTE Model Curriculum Standards to assist schools in developing high-quality curriculum and instruction to help ensure that students are career and college ready and to prepare them for future careers. The Model Curriculum Standards were developed with input from more than 1000 stakeholders from business, industry, and both postsecondary and secondary education to ensure the updated, research-based CTE standards would be world-class; meet the demands of the twenty-first-century workplace; help students make a smooth transition into colleges and universities; and prepare graduates to successfully compete in the global community. The standards, written for grades seven through twelve, specify learning goals in 58 career pathways organized around 15 industry sectors (listed in Comment 2).
- 5) *The current state of CTE and work-based learning in California.* California has significantly expanded support for CTE and work-based learning over the last decade, both through the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and through nearly \$500 million in ongoing state categorical programs. The two largest are the CTE Incentive Grant (CTEIG) and the K–12 SWP, each distributing hundreds of millions of dollars annually to help schools expand CTE access, align instruction with workforce needs, and develop partnerships with industry and community colleges. These are layered on top of LCFF funding, which already includes a high school base rate adjustment to reflect the higher cost of CTE programs.
- 6) *California’s Master Plan for Career Education.* In 2023, Governor Newsom called for the development of a new Master Plan for Career Education, urging state agencies and institutions of higher education to build and strengthen education and training pathways. The Master Plan features a primary area of action to develop career pathways for high school and college students, encouraging TK-12 and postsecondary agencies to provide experiential learning opportunities, shorten the timeline to a career, alleviate financial pressures, and empower individuals to actualize their dreams.

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

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/28/25)

Association of California School Administrators
California Teachers Association
Career Technical Education Joint Powers Authority Coalition
College Board
Los Angeles Unified School District
Oakland Unified School District
United Administrators of Southern California

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/28/25)

None received

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/3/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, 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, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

Prepared by: Therresa Austin / ED. / (916) 651-4105
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