
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: SB 1255 **Hearing Date:** April 8, 2026
Author: Reyes
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Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Olgalilia Ramirez

Subject: Postsecondary education: Designation of California Hispanic-Serving Institutions.

NOTE: This bill has been referred to the Committees on Education and *Governmental Organization*. A “do pass” motion should include referral to the Committee on *Governmental Organization*.

SUMMARY

This bill establishes, upon appropriation, criteria and procedures for postsecondary educational institutions in California to receive a designation as a California Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) for the purposes of recognizing institutions that excel at providing academic resources to Latino students.

BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the California State University (CSU), under the administration of the Trustees of the CSU, the University of California (UC), under the administration of the UC Regents, the California Community Colleges (CCC), under the administration the Board of Governors of the CCC, and independent institutions of higher education, as defined, as 4 segments of postsecondary education in the state. (Education Code (EC) §66600, §70901, § 66010.4 et al, and Article IX, § (9)(a) of the California Constitution)
- 2) Establishes criteria and procedures for postsecondary education institutions in California to receive a designation as a California Black-Serving Institution (BSI). It designates the CSU Central office for Advancement of Black Excellence to serve as the managing entity and authorizes the office to process applications for the designation. An eight-person governing board is established to determine through a 2/3 vote whether a college or university is qualified for the BSI designation. (EC § 66076 et al.)

ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Establishes, upon appropriation, the Designation of California HSI for purposes of recognizing colleges and universities that excel at providing academic

resources to Latino students enrolled in degree or certification programs offered by colleges and universities. The designation is to be only awarded to qualifying applicants by a 2/3 vote of approval from the governing board.

Eligibility

- 2) Authorizes the designation for a period of five academic years and permits a recipient to apply for renewal after five years.
- 3) Specifies that an applicant is eligible for the designation if the applicant meets all of the following requirements:
 - a) Has at least 25 percent of the college or university's graduation rate identifying as Latino students.
 - b) Meets the application deadline established by the managing entity.
 - c) Has either submitted an initial or renewal application that meets specified criteria.
 - d) Posts the initial or renewal application on the applicant's website.

Initial Application Process

- 4) Requires that the initial application include, at a minimum, all of the following:
 - a) A certification by the institution's chief administrator of their commitment to address Latino student success that is consistent with the institution's mission.
 - b) Academic goals for the institution to achieve within the five-year period for which the initial designation is valid. The goals described in the application are to improve retention, time-to-degree or time-to-certificate completion, and graduation rates of Latino students and the overall student population based on data submitted by the applicant, as applicable.
 - c) Academic equity goals for the applicant to achieve within the five-year period for which the initial designation is valid. The goals described by the applicant are to reduce the academic equity gaps in the retention, time-to-degree or time-to-certificate completion, and graduation rates between the applicant's Latino students and the overall student population based on data submitted by the applicant, as applicable.
 - d) A strategic plan for the five-year period for which the initial designation is valid. The strategic plan is to describe how the applicant intends to meet their stated academic goals and academic equity goals. The strategic plan is to include at a minimum all of the following:
 - i) A mission statement that addresses the applicant's commitment to serve Latino students.

- ii) Outreach services to Latino students to encourage them to enroll.
 - iii) Academic and basic needs support services to assist in the workforce development success of Latino students, which may include affinity centers, corequisite coursework, or concurrent support activities.
 - iv) An outline of the planned allocation of resources during the five-year period for which the initial designation is valid to ensure that the strategic plan can be implemented.
 - v) An outline of how the applicant will use existing resources to provide culturally relevant professional development to the applicant's faculty and staff.
- e) A four-year college or university applicant is to include graduation rates for the previous three academic years for all students, and for Latino students, within the normal time and up to 150 percent of the normal time to degree completion, yield, retention, and graduation rate.
- f) A community college applicant is to include for the previous five academic years:
- i) The number of degree and certificate programs completed by all students, as well as by Latino students.
 - ii) The number of all students and of Latino students who completed degree and certificate programs within the normal time and up to 300 percent of the normal time to degree completion yield, retention, and graduation rate.
 - iii) The student transfer rates for all students and for Latino students, to four-year colleges and universities.

Renewal Application Process

- 5) Requires that upon expiration of an application, the renewal application include all of the following:
- a) Resubmission of the applicable application.
 - b) Demonstration of the applicant's progress to achieve academic goals, academic equity goals, and strategic plan implementation stated in the previous application.
 - c) Changes made to the mission statement in the strategic plan and/or in the description of campus resources.
 - d) A written certification by the institution's chief administrative officer of the

applicant's continual commitment to address Latino student workforce development success that is consistent with the applicant's mission.

- e) Academic goals for the applicant to achieve within the five-year period for which the renewal designation is valid. The goals described are to improve retention, time-to-degree or time-to-certificate completion, and graduation rates of Latino students based on the data submitted by the applicant.
- f) Academic equity goals for the applicant to achieve within the five-year period for which the renewal designation is valid. The goals described are to reduce academic equity gaps in the retention, time-to-degree or time-to-certificate completion, and graduation rates between the applicant's Latino and overall student population based on data submitted by the applicant.
- g) A strategic plan for the five-year period for which the renewal designation is valid on how the applicant intends to meet the academic goals and academic equity goals submitted. The strategic plan is to include, but is not limited to, all of the following:
 - i) Outreach services to Latino students to encourage them to enroll.
 - ii) Academic and basic needs support services to assist in the academic success of Latino students, which may include campus affinity centers and corequisite coursework or concurrent support activities.
 - iii) An outline of the planned allocation of resources for the five-year period for which the renewal designation is valid, to ensure that the strategic plan described can be implemented.
 - iv) An outline of how the applicant will use existing resources to provide culturally relevant professional development to the applicant's faculty and staff.
- h) A four-year college or university applicant is to include graduation rates for the previous three academic years for all students, and for Latino students, within the normal time and up to 150 percent of the normal time to degree completion, yield, retention, and graduation rate.
- i) A community college applicant is to include for the previous five academic years:
 - i) The number of degree and certificate programs completed by all students and by Latino students.
 - ii) The number of all students, and of Latino students, who completed degree and certificate programs within the normal time and up to 300 percent of the normal time to degree completion, yield, retention, and graduation rate.

- iii) The student transfer rates for all students, and for Latino students, to four-year colleges and universities.
- 6) Provides that if a renewal application is denied by the governing board, the applicant is only authorized to apply to receive an initial designation.

Managing Entity

- 7) Makes CSU the managing entity for the designation and requires CSU to act as a neutral administrative body charged with duties related to accepting applications, establishing annual deadlines, processing applications biannually, notifying applicants of approval or denial of their application by the governing board, preparing, and delivering the appropriate insignia to approved applicants.

Governing Board

- 8) Establishes the governing board of the Designation of California HSI for the purpose of awarding colleges and universities with the designation based on applications presented by CSU.
- 9) Requires that the governing board be subject to the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act and be comprised of the following eight members:
- a) The Lieutenant Governor, or their designee.
 - b) One member of the public, to be appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly.
 - c) One member of the public, to be appointed by the President pro Tempore of the Senate.
 - d) A UC President designee.
 - e) A CSU Chancellor designee.
 - f) A CCC Chancellor designee.
 - g) A designee of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities.
 - h) The California Latino Legislative Caucus chair, or their designee.
- 10) Deems any designee of an appointed governing board member qualified to make decisions on behalf of that appointed position.
- 11) Limits board service of a public member appointed by either the Assembly Speaker or the Senate President pro Tempore to a two-year term. The bill further requires that the appointing authority of a public member make every effort to ensure that the board membership includes persons who have a strong interest

in the further development and improvement of the academic success of Latino students.

- 12) Requires, for purposes of the first two years of the governing board's operations, the chair to be the Lieutenant Governor or their designee. Thereafter the governing board is authorized to select a chairperson from within its membership by a two-thirds vote, as specified.
- 13) Requires the governing board to convene twice a year to vote on the approval or denial of applications by a two-thirds vote by those present for the vote.

Miscellaneous

- 14) Defines various terms for the purposes of the bill, including:
 - a) "Applicant" to mean an eligible college or university that applies for a designation.
 - b) "College or University" to mean a University of California, California State University, or California Community College campus, or an independent institution of higher education.
- 15) States various legislative findings and declarations relating to the importance of supporting Latino students in higher education, historic barriers faced by Mexican American and other Latino students in California public schools, and the uncertainty surrounding the federal HSI program.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, "Since the federal designation was established, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) have played a critical role in California's higher education system. California is home to the most HSI in the country, with 171 colleges and universities holding this designation.

"These HSIs, spanning both public and private colleges and universities, not only build the capacity to better serve Latino and low-income students, but leverage the resources they receive to develop programming that helps all students on campuses. HSI funding has helped institutions provide tutoring, mental health services, career counseling, and modern learning facilities that directly improve persistence and graduation rates. Data shows that these institutions provide large economic returns for all the students they enroll, and in turn fuel local economies and the workforce. Despite this work, many HSIs are currently in jeopardy due to political and legal battles, which threaten their ability to sustain the equity strides they have made for students.

"California's strength comes from the success of our diverse students. By formally recognizing Hispanic-Serving Institutions in state law, we are acknowledging the campuses that are doing the hard work to close opportunity gaps and help Latino students thrive in college and beyond. This designation will

shine a light on what works and encourage continued investment in student success.

“We cannot allow our students to become collateral damage in political and legal battles. SB 1255 sends a clear message: we will defend college access, protect educational quality, and stand firmly behind the students who represent the future of our state.”

- 2) **Federal Minority-Serving Institutions program uncertainty.** Federally, the Minority-Serving Institutions program supports higher education institutions that serve high concentrations of minority and low-income populations by assisting these institutions in strengthening their academic, administrative, and fiscal capacity. The Minority-Serving Institution Program consist of several types of programs, including the HSI Program. Eligible institutions may apply for competitive grants. To qualify for a federal HSI designation, a qualifying institution must have an enrollment of undergraduate students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic. The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities reports that nationally 171 of the 615 institutions meeting the federal HSI enrollment criterion in 2023 are located in California. At the federal level, Minority-Serving Institutions programs, including HSI, face uncertainty regarding ongoing funding and program structure, which has prompted consideration of state-level recognition.
- 3) **Creates California HSI designation.** This bill aims to establish an independent HSI designation for California institutions defined as CCC, CSU, UC, and independent higher education institutions. When applying for the designation, institutions are required to provide information on the outcomes of Latino students, as well as a detailed description of academic resources available to support their academic success. Applicants must fulfill several additional criteria. The designation is valid for a period of five years, after which a campus may apply for renewal. Unlike the federal program, the proposed state designation does not offer financial assistance to successful applicants.
- 4) **Modeled after BSI designation.** This bill’s provisions appear to be modeled after SB 1348 (Bradford, Chapter 627, Statutes of 2024), which created California’s BSI designation, the first of its kind, to recognize colleges and universities that excel at providing academic resources to Black and African American students. CSU’s Statewide Central Office for Advancement of Black Excellence serves as its managing entity, with determinations made by a separate governing board. The BSI governing board convened its inaugural meeting in December of 2025 and approved an initial cohort of 31 campuses for the designation, including two UC campuses, three CSU campuses, 25 CCCs, and one independent institution of higher education. Information regarding subsequent meetings is not available on the BSI’s governing board website. Similar to SB 1348, this bill creates a statewide designation, establishes a managing entity (CSU) and governing board, and requires institutions to apply and demonstrate efforts to improve student success, including for a historically underserved student populations, such as Latino students.

- 5) ***Clarification needed on eligibility metric.*** This bill additionally, includes a 25 percent threshold tied to Latino students and references a “graduation rate” metric. However, it is unclear whether that threshold is intended to measure the proportion of Latino students among graduates or the graduation rate of Latino students, which may create ambiguity about how the threshold is to be applied. *Moving forward, the author may wish to consider clarifying the graduation rate eligibility metric or consider an alternative approach such as using degree completion data to establish eligibility as follows:*
- *For a community college, the community college demonstrates that, over the three most recent academic years for which completion data are available, Latino students comprise at least 25 percent of the combined total of degrees and certificates awarded and students who transfer to a four-year university.*
 - *For a four-year university, the university demonstrates that, over the three most recent academic years for which completion data are available, Latino students comprise at least 25 percent of undergraduate degrees awarded by the university.*
- 6) ***Related legislation.***

AB 2374 (Fong, 2026) would establish criteria and procedures for postsecondary education institutions in California to receive a designation as a California Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution for the purposes of recognizing institutions that excel at providing academic resources to Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander students. Similar to this bill, AB 2374 creates a statewide designation (AANAPSI), establishes a governing board, and requires institutions to apply and demonstrate efforts to improve student success, including for a historically underserved student population. AB 2374 is pending hearing in the Assembly Higher Education Committee.

SUPPORT

Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (sponsor)
 Antelope Valley Community College District
 Association of Independent California Colleges & Universities
 California Community College Independents
 California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office
 Campaign for College Opportunity
 Cerritos College
 Contra Costa Community College District
 EDvance College
 El Camino Community College District
 Foothill-De Anza Community College District
 Kern Community College District
 Lake Tahoe Community College
 Los Rios Community College District
 Mt. San Jacinto Community College District

National University
San Bernardino Community College District
San Diego Unified School District
Santa Monica Community College District
Southern California University of Health Sciences
Southwestern Community College District
State Center Community College District
University of California Chicanx Latinx Alumni Association
University of California Office of the President
Victor Valley Community College District
Two Individuals

OPPOSITION

None received

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