

SENATE THIRD READING

SB 1255 (Reyes)

As Amended June 25, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Establishes, upon appropriation by the Legislature, an application process by which qualifying postsecondary education institutions may apply and be granted by a governing board a designation as a California Hispanic Serving Institution.

Major Provisions

- 1) Establishes the designation of California Hispanic-Serving Institutions (CHSI designation) and permits the governing board to award the CHSI designation if 2/3 of the governing board determines the college or university excels at providing academic resources to Latinx students.
- 2) Authorizes the governing board to bestow initial and renewal CHSI designations. The initial designation will be valid for five years. A college or university who receives an initial designation is qualified to apply for a renewal designation. The renewal designation once bestowed is valid for an additional five years.
- 3) Establishes the eligibility requirements for the initial authorization of the CHSI designation to colleges or universities who:
 - a) Submits an initial or renewal application to the managing entity by the applicable deadline; and,
 - b) Posts the initial or renewal application on the college's or university's website.
- 4) Outlines the content of the initial application a college or university must complete in order to be considered for the CHSI designation.
- 5) Outlines the content of the renewal application a college or university must complete in order to be considered for the renewal of the CHSI designation:
- 6) Clarifies if a college or university is denied a renewal of the CHSI designation, the applicant may submit an initial application for the CHSI designation and a subsequent renewal application if re-approved for the initial designation.
- 7) Encourages the applying college or university to consult with the academic senates of the college or university in the compilation of the application (either initial or renewal) for the CHSI designation.
- 8) Designates the Chancellor's Office of California State University as the managing entity of the CHSI designation and authorizes the managing entity to act as the neutral administrative body of the CHSI designation. Authorizes the managing entity to create a process to accept and process applications from colleges and universities for the CHSI designation. Requires the managing entity to present the applications to the governing board at least once a year.

- 9) Establishes a governing board to oversee the approval or denial process of the CHSI designation. Defines the specific government officials, members of the public, and the university representatives which are appointed to the governing board. Requires the governing board to meet at least once a year and to approve or deny applications for the CHSI designation.
- 10) Clarifies all decisions of the governing board require a 2/3 votes of the members who are present for the vote.
- 11) Subjects the governing board to the Bagley-Keene Open Meetings Act.
- 12) Subjects the implementation of CHSI designation to an appropriation by the Legislature for the specific purposes as outlined above.

COMMENTS

Need for the measure. With the enactment of SB 1348 (Bradford), Chapter 627, Statute of 2024, California became one of the first in the nation to introduce a state-level designation for colleges and universities. The intention behind SB 1348 was to create a Black-Serving Institution designation (BSI designation) to recognize California colleges and universities who are dedicating resources and focus to improve the academic achievements of Black and African-American identifying students. In the creation of the State-level designation, California chose to step into the gap left by the Federal Government in recognizing colleges and universities who would, due to circumstances beyond their control, never be recognized as Historically Black Colleges and Universities nor "Predominately Black Serving Institutions" pursuant to the federal definitions and requirements.

With the U.S. Department of Education electing to cancel grant funding for Minority-Serving Institutions, including Hispanic-Serving Institutions, California again has a unique opportunity to provide a state-level designation in the void created by the federal abdication. Prior to the cancellation of the designation in September 2025 by the U.S. Department of Education, California was home to roughly 172 Federally recognized, Hispanic-Serving Institutions prior to the cancellation of the funds. This measure modeled after SB 1348 (Bradford) would establish continuity of the CHSI designation for California colleges and universities; while ensuring that the colleges and universities who apply continue to focus on academic equity among their student population.

Affirmative Action and Proposition 209. In the United States, affirmative action is an effort introduced by the Federal Government to improve and increase employment and educational opportunities for minority groups. While used in all areas of government policy and contracting, affirmative action is most colloquially associated with college and university admissions, where admission quotas based on race were used to increase diversity and to establish equitable access to educational opportunities.

In 1996, the California voters established Proposition 209, which banned the use of preferential treatment by State and other public entities. Since 1996, the use of affirmative action has been prohibited by the State Constitution in California. In the Legislative Analyst Office's ballot description of Proposition 209 (1996), provided the following examples of affirmative action program, "public colleges and university programs such as scholarship, tutoring, and outreach that are targeted toward minority or women students."

SB 1255 (Reyes) of the current legislative session stipulates that in order for a college or university to qualify for the CHSI designation, a postsecondary institution must provide a strategic plan for academic and basic needs supports to assist in the academic success of Hispanic and Latinx students. Furthermore, this measure contains an "upon appropriation" clause which would require the State Legislature to directly fund the purposes of the measure.

Since this measure prevents the California State University (CSU) from implementing the CHSI designation without direct funding from the State and any direct funding provided by the State could be interpreted as a violation of Proposition 209, it is entirely possible this measure could be inoperative if chaptered in its current form.

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 HSIs 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."

The author contents that, "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 encourages 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."

Arguments in Support

As stated by the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), the sponsors of the measure, "HACU recognizes the important role HSIs play in educating the state's diverse student population and preparing the workforce needed to sustain California's economy. A state-level recognition process and governing structure for California's public and private institutions would ensure the state's needs for talent are met in high-growth sectors, including healthcare, technology, education, clean energy, and advanced manufacturing. By formalizing a state-level HSI designation, California can better coordinate workforce investments, maximize return on public funding, and ensure that our student population is fully integrated into the state's long-term economic strategy. [HACU] respectfully urge your support for SB 1255 and your continued leadership in advancing policies that strengthen California's education and workforce systems."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations:

- 1) While the bill's implementation is subject to an appropriation by the Legislature, the CSU cites ongoing General Fund costs in the mid-to-high hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to serve as the managing entity for initial and renewal designations and oversee the application and designation process.
- 2) Potential minor one-time Proposition 98 General Fund cost pressures for a community college district (CCD) applying for designation as a CHSI. The California Community College's Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) reports a total of 96 designated HSI community colleges under the pre-existing federal designation.
- 3) Minor General Fund state operations costs for the CCCCCO to participate in the CHSI designation governing board.
- 4) Minor and absorbable costs to the University of California (UC).

VOTES

SENATE FLOOR: 31-7-2

YES: Allen, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Cortese, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Umberg, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

NO: Alvarado-Gil, Jones, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Seyarto, Strickland, Valladares

ABS, ABST OR NV: Choi, Dahle

ASM HIGHER EDUCATION: 7-3-0

YES: Fong, Boerner, Jackson, Muratsuchi, Patel, Celeste Rodriguez, Sharp-Collins

NO: DeMaio, Jeff Gonzalez, Tangipa

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-3-1

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache

NO: Hoover, Dixon, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Ta

UPDATED

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