

SENATE THIRD READING

SB 960 (Cabaldon)

As Amended June 25, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Modifies the prohibition on California Community College (CCC) baccalaureate degree programs duplicating California State University (CSU) programs by limiting that prohibition to CSU programs offered within the local admission service area of the community college district (CCD), and creates an exception, beginning July 1, 2030, allowing duplication of a CSU program that has been designated as "impacted" for at least three consecutive years. Retains the existing statewide prohibition on duplication of University of California (UC) programs. Specifically, *this bill*:

Major Provisions

- 1) Limits the prohibition on CCC duplication of CSU baccalaureate degree programs to instances where a CSU campus's local service area includes or overlaps with the CCC district's territory, except:
 - a) Beginning July 1, 2030, when the CSU program has been impacted for at least three consecutive years prior to the date the program is approved.
- 2) Provides that before July 1, 2030, a CSU campus that wants to discontinue impaction of a baccalaureate degree program must develop a plan describing how the campus will address enrollment demand and maintain student access for that program. The bill requires the plan to be made publicly available on the campus website.
- 3) Allows a CCD to duplicate a CSU program where a CSU campus's local admission area does not include or overlap with the CCC district's territory.
- 4) Authorizes a CCD to continue to offer a CCC baccalaureate degree program approved under impaction-based duplication regardless of any subsequent change in impaction status of the corresponding CSU program.
- 5) Retains the prohibition on CCC baccalaureate degree program duplication of UC programs statewide.
- 6) Reduces the total number of baccalaureate degree programs offered by a CCD from 25% to 15% of the total number of associate degree programs offered by the CCD.
- 7) Defines the following terms:
 - a) Impacted programs to mean a specific baccalaureate degree program offered by a campus of the CSU that has been designated as impacted by the CSU in accordance with its established policies and procedures and for which the number of eligible applications received in the initial filing period is greater than the number that can be accommodated by the program; and,

- b) "Local service area" has the same meaning as citing in existing law to mean the CSU service area for the campus as set forth in the CSU Coded Memorandum AA-2005-05, dated February 23, 2005, or as subsequently amended.

COMMENTS

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.

Impaction as a duplication trigger. The use of CSU impaction as the trigger for the local-area exception in SB 960 is a notable policy choice. Impaction reflects situations in which the number

of eligible CSU applications during the initial filing period exceeds the program's capacity, and it is an objective, CSU-defined indicator that the existing baccalaureate pipeline is not meeting demand. As the CSU Office of the Chancellor notes in its opposition letter, however, impaction is not always a clean signal of unmet workforce demand. In some programs — such as pre-licensure Bachelor of Science in nursing — impaction is driven primarily by external constraints, including the limited availability of clinical placements, rather than by CSU's instructional capacity alone. In other programs, impaction reflects broader patterns of state investment, including the predictability of CSU's funding base relative to the resources available to community colleges.

Institutional capacity and the CCC mission. The CCC's primary statutory mission, as established in EDC Section 66010.4, is the offering of lower-division academic and vocational instruction, including pathways to transfer. Recent data indicates that 18% of community college students who began their studies in 2019-20 transferred to a four-year institution within four years. The number of CCC students transferring to UC and CSU declined by 6.9% between 2021 and 2025 — representing 5,057 fewer transfer students system-wide. These figures provide important context for how the CCC system is performing against the transfer and completion elements of its statutory mission, even as it expands into baccalaureate degree authority. *Collaboration and partnership.* Both proponents and opponents of recent baccalaureate expansion legislation have identified intersegmental partnership as a preferred mechanism for expanding access. The CSU Office of the Chancellor, in its opposition letter, points to existing tools — including 2+2 programs, co-located degrees, and post-associate pathways such as ADN- to-BSN — as available mechanisms for expanding baccalaureate access that do not require new independent program authorization. The CSU letter further notes that any proposal on this topic "should first prioritize and incentivize the development of these partnerships when possible." Existing law, however, does not require a CCD to pursue collaborative options before applying for an independent baccalaureate program, and contains no structured pathway to recognize or reward jointly developed programs.

According to the Author

According to the author, "SB 960 is a student-centered policy that allows a California Community College to offer a bachelor's degree in a high-demand field when the regional [CSU] has been impacted in that same program for three consecutive years or if the program is not offered by the regional CSU."

The author continues, writing that "...when CSU programs are consistently over-enrolled and turning qualified students away, California cannot afford to let workforce pipelines stall. SB 960 provides a student and workforce focused approach to allowing some community colleges to offer a bachelor's degree. This bill removes an outdated barrier that prioritizes institutional boundaries over students' futures. By expanding affordable, local access to bachelor's degrees in critical technical fields, SB 960 strengthens California's workforce, fuels economic growth, and ensures students are not denied opportunity simply because a program is full."

Arguments in Support

According to a joint letter representing dozens of CCC campuses across the state, SB 960 (Cabaldon) "...addresses a critical gap in current law by recognizing that the mere existence of a program within the [CSU] system does not guarantee meaningful

access for students. In many regions, CSU programs in high-demand technical fields are impacted due to capacity issues, leaving students without a viable pathway to complete a bachelor's degree aligned with workforce needs. By allowing CCDs to offer a baccalaureate degree when a comparable program has been impacted for three consecutive years, SB 960 represents a thoughtful approach that helps ensure that place-bound students are not indefinitely denied access to high-demand programs due to capacity constraints.

The coalition continues, writing that "SB 960 aligns higher education policy with workforce realities by enabling regions to respond more effectively to persistent labor market needs, particularly in applied and technical fields such as biomanufacturing and engineering technology. Expanding access to locally available, workforce-oriented bachelor's degrees will strengthen economic mobility for students and support the state's long-term economic competitiveness. Our community colleges are uniquely positioned to help close this gap, ensuring that all Californians have access to an affordable four-year degree."

Arguments in Opposition

The CSU Office of the Chancellor wrote in opposition to SB 960 (Cabaldon), noting that "dozens of academic programs as varied as nursing, business administration, electrical engineering, psychology and social work are impacted at a number of CSU universities. Additionally, five universities (Fullerton, Long Beach, San Diego, San José and San Luis Obispo) are impacted for all undergraduate degree programs. Across all our universities, more than 193,000 undergraduate students were enrolled in the CSU's impacted programs for the Fall 2025 semester. Approximately 36% of these students, nearly 70,000 in total, transferred from a California Community College. The CSU Chancellor's Office has been working and will continue to work with impacted campuses to increase access. For example, over the last three years, \$89 million dollars of annual funding and 10,000 FTES slots have been shifted from under enrolled campuses to campuses that are growing. The Chancellor's Office has also allocated \$40 million of one-time funding to support enrollment growth at in-demand campuses. Impaction is the result of a lack of equitable state investment in the CSU. While the community colleges benefit from Proposition 98's guaranteed funding, local tax revenue and access to bond authority for facility needs, the state's investment to the CSU is often lagging and unpredictable. For some programs, such as our pre-licensure Bachelor of Science in nursing programs, impaction is driven almost entirely by factors outside of the CSU's control, including the limited capacity for clinical placements."

The CSU Office of the Chancellor also wrote that "the CSU believes that any proposal that significantly expands the Community Colleges' baccalaureate degree authority should include, at minimum, statewide duplication standards to ensure the efficient use of state resources, demonstration of meeting a clear workforce need, and a prohibition on substantially similar programs where CSU or UC programs are already accessible and effectively serving the region. Community colleges should demonstrate that they are meeting performance benchmarks for their core mission, including associate degree completion and transfer to four-year institutions, before offering new baccalaureate degree programs. We should also require annual reporting on the status and completion rates of these programs."

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations:

- 1) No new Proposition 98 General Fund costs. According to the CCCCCO, this bill operates entirely within the existing framework established in statute authorizing the CCCCCO to approve up to 30 new baccalaureate degree programs per academic year. Under the existing framework, a CCD must demonstrate (a) full financial and operational capacity required for a new program prior to receiving approval from the CCCCCO and (b) the increased upper-division per-unit cost provides additional revenue to CCDs offering a baccalaureate degree program that effectively creates an ongoing revenue stream that serves to support the program financially by offsetting potential cost pressures. Additionally, the existing framework connects baccalaureate degree program funding to the current community college marginal cost rate for a full-time equivalent student as a means of keeping expenditures within existing Proposition 98 appropriated resources.
- 2) One-time General Fund costs likely in the tens of thousands of dollars for the CCCCCO to update the CCD application for the baccalaureate degree program, issue guidance, provide technical assistance, and complete required reporting.
- 3) No administrative costs according to the UC and CSU. However, the CSU reports it may experience cost pressures related to potential decreased enrollment, possibly in hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars (General Fund), due to reduced enrollment to the extent four-year degree students who would have otherwise enrolled at a campus of the CSU enroll in a newly established CCD baccalaureate program authorized under the provisions of this bill. The CSU reports that, across the CSU system, 36% of Fall 2025 semester enrolled students within an impacted degree program transferred from a community college, approximated 70,000 students total.

VOTES

SENATE FLOOR: 37-0-3

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNeerney, Menjivar, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
ABS, ABST OR NV: Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla

ASM HIGHER EDUCATION: 6-1-3

YES: Fong, Boerner, Jeff Gonzalez, Jackson, Patel, Celeste Rodriguez
NO: DeMaio
ABS, ABST OR NV: Muratsuchi, Sharp-Collins, Tangipa

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 13-1-1

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta
NO: Dixon
ABS, ABST OR NV: Tangipa

UPDATED

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CONSULTANT: Kevin J. Powers / HIGHER ED. / (916) 319-3960

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