

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bill No: SB 960
Author: Cabaldon (D)
Amended: 8/27/26
Vote: 21

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE: 6-0, 4/15/26
AYES: Pérez, Cabaldon, Choi, Cortese, Gonzalez, Reyes
NO VOTE RECORDED: Ochoa Bogh

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 5/14/26
AYES: Cervantes, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

SENATE FLOOR: 37-0, 5/18/26
AYES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
NO VOTE RECORDED: Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: Passed, 8/31/26

SUBJECT: Public postsecondary education: community colleges: statewide baccalaureate degree program

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill, beginning January 1, 2028, restructures the approval framework for California Community College (CCC) baccalaureate degree programs. Limits the prohibition on duplication of California State University (CSU) programs to CSU campuses whose local service area includes or overlaps with the community college district's (CCD) territory, and creates an exception permitting duplication where the CSU campus program has had a transfer acceptance rate of less than 75% for three consecutive years. Retains the statewide

prohibition on duplication of University of California (UC) programs. Establishes a five-tier eligibility framework that caps the number of baccalaureate degree programs a CCD may offer based on the district's award and transfer rate. Creates a role for the Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development in determining unmet workforce need and in resolving CSU objections. Contains contingent enactment and double-jointing provisions tying the bill's operation to AB 2694 (Alvarez, 2026).

Assembly Amendments of 8/27/26, 1) Modify regional standard for approving duplicative CCC baccalaureate programs, 2) create a five-tier framework governing district eligibility and program limits, 3) establish a process for determining unmet regional workforce need through the Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development, 4) require districts to preserve the CCCs' primary mission and access to lower division instruction, and 5) delay implementation until January 1, 2028 and make the bill's provisions contingent upon the enactment of AB 2694 (Alvarez, 2026).

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Differentiates the missions and functions of public and independent institutions of higher education. Under these provisions:
 - a) The primary mission of the CSU is to offer undergraduate and graduate instruction through the master's degree in the liberal arts and sciences and professional education, including teacher education. The CSU is authorized to establish two-year programs only when mutually agreed upon by the Trustees and the CCC Board of Governors. The CSU is also authorized to jointly award the doctoral degree with the UC and with one or more independent institutions of higher education.
 - b) The UC provides undergraduate and graduate instruction and has exclusive jurisdiction in public higher education over graduate instruction in the professions of law, medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine. The UC is also the primary state-supported academic agency for research.
 - c) The independent institution of higher education requires undergraduate and graduate instruction and research in accordance with their respective missions.

- d) The mission and function of the CCC are to offer academic and vocational instruction at the lower division level, and the CCC is authorized to grant associate degrees. The CCCs are also required to offer learning supports to close learning gaps, English as a Second Language instruction, and adult noncredit instruction, and support services which help students succeed at the postsecondary level. (Education Code (EC) § 66010.4)
- 2) Authorizes the CCC Board of Governors, in consultation with the CSU and the UC, to establish baccalaureate degree programs that do not duplicate a baccalaureate degree program offered by the CSU or UC. Allows for the approval of 30 CCC baccalaureate degree programs per academic year. Current law further requires the CCC Chancellor to consult with and seek feedback from the CSU Chancellor, the UC President, and the President of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities on proposed baccalaureate degree programs, as specified, and establishes a mechanism for the assessment, consultation, and approval of programs where duplication is identified, as specified. (EC § 78040 et seq.)
- 3) Requires the CSU Trustees to ensure that any changes in the admission criteria for campus admission comply with specified consultation, public meeting, notification and disclosure requirements, and prohibits any change from becoming effective until one year has elapsed, or six months, if the change is based upon the resources of the local service area of the affected campus. Applies these requirements to all changes in the admission criteria that affect eligibility of local service area applicants, including changes to transfer requirements and determinations regarding impact of majors. (EC § 89030.5)

This bill:

- 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 when the CSU program has had a transfer acceptance rate below 75% for three consecutive years. This bill requires CSU to publish the applicable transfer acceptance rate data annually.
- 2) Retains the prohibition on duplication of UC programs unless a written agreement is reached.
- 3) Establishes a tiered framework determining the maximum number of baccalaureate degree programs a community college district may offer, based on the district's rate of students who earned a certificate, associate degree for

transfer, or baccalaureate degree or transferred within three years of entering the cohort, measured against the statewide mean rate and standard deviation, as follows:

- a) A Tier 1 district, more than one standard deviation above the mean rate, may offer up to 10 programs; up to 11 if the district has more than one campus. and up to 12 if the district has 75,000 or more full-time equivalent students (FTES).
 - b) A Tier 2 district, above the mean rate and within one standard deviation above it, may offer up to eight programs; up to nine if the district has more than one campus; and up to 10 if the district has 75,000 or more FTES.
 - c) A Tier 3 district, at or below the mean rate and within one standard deviation below it, may offer up to six programs.
 - d) A Tier 4 district, more than one but less than two standard deviations below the mean rate, may offer up to four programs.
 - e) A Tier 5 district, two or more standard deviations below the mean rate, may offer up to two programs.
- 4) Provides that programs approved before January 1, 2028, do not count toward the tier limits or the 10- program limit, allows districts that fall to a lower tier to retain approved programs, counts a program offered at multiple colleges within a district as one program, and allows Tier 3, 4, or 5 districts demonstrating sustained improvement to move to the next highest tier. The 10-program limit is subject to specified adjustments for certain multicampus and large districts.
 - 5) Prohibits the district from offering a fully online program if CSU or UC offers a substantially similar program fully online.
 - 6) Encourages a district to obtain an advanced determination of unmet current or projected future workforce need from the Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development before applying. The bill requires the Secretary to consider regional workforce need and the capacity of substantially similar programs, issue a determination within 90 days, and make the determination valid for four years.
 - 7) Requires districts to preserve access to lower-division instruction and prohibits baccalaureate programs from displacing opportunities for students seeking associate degrees, associate degrees for transfer, certifications, or noncredit instruction.

- 8) Defines “local service area,” “same academic discipline,” “substantially similar,” and “unmet current or projected future workforce need.”
- 9) Makes the bill operative only if AB 2694 (Alvarez, 2026) is enacted and effective on or before January 1, 2027, and includes double-jointing language to integrate the bills’ changes.

Comments

- 1) *Need for the bill.* 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 California State University (CSU) has been impacted in that same program for three consecutive years or if the program is not offered by the regional CSU.

“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.”

- 2) *Companion bill.* This bill and AB 2694 (Alvarez, 2026) divide the proposed changes to the CCC baccalaureate degree program between two measures. This bill establishes the district eligibility tiers, program limits, regional duplication standards, and the process for obtaining an advanced workforce-need determination. AB 2694 applies those standards through the application and objection process, establishes the process for resolving CSU objections, retains the existing written agreement process for UC objections, and expands annual reporting. This bill becomes operative only if AB 2694 is also enacted and takes effect, and double-jointing language integrates the two bills into a single statutory framework.
- 3) *Mission and lower-division access.* The state has four segments of higher education: three public and one private. Each plays a vital and unique role for the state and its students. Their mission statements are outlined in state statute. The CCCs are to have an open admission policy and bear the most extensive responsibility for lower-division undergraduate instruction. Its primary area of mission includes academic and vocational instruction leading to associate

degrees and university transfer, career technical education, and remedial education. The primary mission of the CSU is undergraduate and graduate instruction through the master's degree. The UC was granted the sole authority to offer doctoral degrees and is the state's primary research institution. Despite the differentiation of missions, the Legislature has authorized the CSU and CCCs to go beyond their original mission to offer doctoral degrees and baccalaureate degree programs, respectively, so long as programs do not duplicate those offered by the other segments with primary jurisdiction. This bill explicitly states that CCC upper-division instruction is an additional mission, secondary to the CCCs' primary mission, and requires districts to maintain access to lower-division instruction and avoid displacing opportunities for students pursuing associate degrees, transfer pathways, certificates, or noncredit instruction.

- 4) *Existing CCC Bachelor's programs.* SB 850 (Block, Chapter 747, Statutes of 2014) authorized the Board of Governors, in consultation with the CSU and the UC, to establish a CCC baccalaureate degree pilot program. The pilot program included 15 participating CCC districts to offer one baccalaureate degree program each to meet local workforce needs, as long as it did not duplicate a baccalaureate degree program already offered by the CSU or the UC. The original pilot led to the statewide authorization established by AB 927 (Medina, Chapter 565, Statutes of 2021), which allows the CCC Board of Governors to approve qualifying programs bi-annually. Today, as reported on the CCC Chancellor's website, there are more than 50 approved CCC baccalaureate programs statewide, primarily in applied and workforce-related fields such as health care, industrial technology, and public safety. Specific degree offerings include respiratory care, mortuary science, industrial automation, and public safety management. These programs are intended to address unmet regional workforce needs rather than broad expansion into traditional academic fields of study. Since 2017, approximately 1,893 students have attained a CCC bachelor's degree, with 293 completed in the 2023-2024 academic year. This bill aims to broaden the types of programs a CCC may offer beyond their current authority.
- 5) *Growing tension over duplication.* Existing law establishes an administrative process intended to evaluate proposed CCC baccalaureate degree programs based on required criteria, including workforce need and program duplication. Since the enactment of the statewide program, disagreements regarding program duplication have resulted not only in formal objections during the Chancellor's review process, but also in district-specific legislation seeking

authority to establish individual baccalaureate degree programs. Under this measure, a CCC district would have greater flexibility to offer a baccalaureate degree program when a CSU campus offers a similar program. This change represents a significant policy shift from a statewide prohibition on duplication to a local one. Specifically, duplication of CSU programs at a campus outside the local service area would no longer be restricted. Within an overlapping service duplication may occur when the substantially similar CSU program has had a transfer acceptance rate below 75% for three consecutive years. CSU and CCC disputes over regional duplication would be addressed by the specified Labor & Workforce Development Agency (LWDA) third-party process. The UC duplication prohibition remains intact, so a CCC district cannot offer a program already offered by a UC campus, no matter the location. The UC written agreement process remains in place to collaboratively resolve disputes over a duplicative program when necessary.

- 6) *Regional impactation issue and transfer rates.* An undergraduate CSU program may be “impacted” when it receives more eligible applicants than it can accommodate given its instructional resources and physical capacity. Limited capacity may restrict student access, and under these circumstances, consideration of regional duplication may be merited. Recent amendments replace CSU program impactation with the transfer acceptance rate as the measure of regional access. It applies when a substantially similar CSU program has accepted fewer than 75% of eligible transfer applicants from the respective CCC district for three consecutive years. CSU must publish the applicable data annually beginning January 1, 2028. The 75% acceptance rate establishes an objective standard for determining whether there is adequate access within the region and helps prevent unnecessary duplication a program within the same region.
- 7) *Performance-based growth.* Under this bill, once approved, a CCC program remains subject to the district’s tier and program limits. Programs approved before January 1, 2028, are excluded from the new limits, and districts may retain previously approved programs if they later fall to a lower tier. The five-tier framework links future program growth to district performance based on student outcomes. The tiered framework limits new programs at between two and 10 per district (up to 12 for multi-campus and larger districts).

The metric includes certificates, associate degrees, associate degrees for transfer, baccalaureate degrees, and transfer to a four-year university. Lower-tier districts may advance after sustained improvement. The framework is

intended to provide opportunities for baccalaureate degree program growth while maintaining a focus on student success in programs, including career technical education and associate degrees, that are core and unique to CCC instruction.

- 8) *Impact on CCCs core mission.* In previous discussions around authorizing the offering of CCC baccalaureate degrees, concerns were raised that broadening the CCC mission would diminish attention to transfer, associate degree completion, remedial education goals, and career technical education. In an effort to address this concern and limit any potential impact on the current mission of the CCC, as well as on existing associate degree programs at local campuses. Existing law established by AB 927 (Medina, Chapter 565, Statutes of 2021) limits the number of programs a CCC may offer to no more than 25% of the number of associate degree programs offered at the college. This bill expands CCC baccalaureate degree authority but does not authorize unlimited growth. Bachelor's degrees remain a secondary CCC mission.
- 9) *Workforce need determination.* Workforce need is the central for CCC bachelor's degrees. This bill allows a district to seek an advanced determination from the Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development that a proposed program addresses an unmet regional workforce need and that existing and planned capacity is insufficient to meet that need. A favorable determination exempts the proposal from the CSU objection process established by AB 2694 (Alvarez, 2026) for a substantially similar regional program. If a district does not obtain an advanced determination and CSU objects, AB 2694 (Alvarez, 2026) requires the Secretary to make the same determination before the program may proceed. An independent determination helps ensure new programs address verified workforce gaps and insufficient capacity rather than simply duplicating programs already capable of meeting regional demand. The UC objection and written-agreement process remain separate.
- 10) *Encouraging collaboration.* AB 2694 (Alvarez, 2026) requires districts that do not obtain an advanced workforce determination to consult with CSU and UC and explore structured partnerships before independently establishing a new baccalaureate degree. Potential approaches include guaranteed transfer agreements, 2 + 2 articulation, dual enrollment pathways, credit for prior learning, shared facilities, co-location, and cross-location delivery. This encourages the segments to use existing institutional capacity where a partnership can meet the need.

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

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee analysis, this bill would have the following fiscal impact:

- 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, approximately 70,000 students total.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/31/26)

Campaign for College Opportunity

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/31/26)

Community College League of California
California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office
Association of California Community College Administrators

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