

Date of Hearing: April 2, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 2044 (Chen) – As Introduced February 1, 2024

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

SUMMARY: Requires the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges (CCC) to evaluate whether baccalaureate degree holders are paid more than associate degree holders in the same field when conducting a review to approve the elimination of an associate degree program.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Specifies that the mission and function of the CCC is the offering of academic and vocational instruction at the lower division level, including those persons returning to school, and that the CCC are authorized to grant the Associate in Arts and the Associate in Science degrees. Additionally specifies that the CCCs are required to offer additional learning supports to close learning gaps, English as a Second Language instruction, adult noncredit instruction, and support services which help students succeed at the postsecondary level. Specifies that a primary mission of the CCCs is to advance California's economic growth and global competitiveness through education, training, and services that contribute to continuous workforce improvement. (Education Code (EDC) Section 66010.4)
- 2) Establishes the CCC, under the administration of the BOG of the CCC, as one of the segments of public postsecondary education in this state. (EDC Section 66700, et seq.)
- 3) Existing law requires the Board of Governors (BOG) to appoint a chief executive officer, to be known as the Chancellor of the CCC. (EDC Section 71090, et seq.)
- 4) Authorizes the BOG of the CCC to establish permanent district baccalaureate degree programs, and provided that only 15 baccalaureate degree programs are approved during each application period allowing for a total of 30 baccalaureate degree programs per academic year. Additionally, existing law:
 - a) Specifies that community college districts (CCD), as part of the baccalaureate degree program, will have the additional mission to provide high-quality undergraduate education at an affordable price for students and the state.
 - b) Requires the Chancellor of the CCC to consult with and seek feedback from the Chancellor of the CSU, the President of the University of California (UC), and the President of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU) 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;
 - c) Requires a CCD to continue to offer an associate degree program in the same academic subject for which baccalaureate degree program has been approved, unless the CCD has received approval from the CCC Chancellor to eliminate the associate degree program,

and requires the CCC Chancellor to evaluate both changes to the labor market viability of an associate degree and changes to the minimum education required to maintain program accreditation when making a decision to authorize the elimination of an associate degree program; and,

- d) Specifies that the total number of baccalaureate degree programs offered by a CCD, at any time, does not exceed 25% of the total number of associate degree programs offered by the CCD, including associate degrees for transfer. (EDC Section 78040, et seq.)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS: *Purpose.* Current law stipulates that the CCC Chancellor must evaluate specified criteria when approving the elimination of an associate degree program. Those criteria are: “changes to the labor market viability of the associate degree” and “changes to the minimum education required to maintain program accreditation.” This bill seeks to add an additional evaluative criteria “whether baccalaureate degree holders are paid more than associate degree holders in the same field.”

According to the author, “AB 2044 is a small but meaningful step forward to ensure that before a community college can eliminate an associate’s program, the Chancellor’s Office must consider long-term student success. This bill will help to safeguard the mission of the community college system, while ensuring affected students will persist with less debt, and in less time.”

Background - the Master Plan for Higher Education. As outlined in the Master Plan for Higher Education and by state statute, the CCCs are designated to have an open admission policy and bear the most extensive responsibility for lower-division undergraduate instruction. Its three primary areas of mission include; education leading to associates degrees and university transfer, career technical education, and basic skills. 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.

Existing law specifically establishes that the CCCs must, as a primary mission, offer academic and vocational instruction at the lower division level for both younger and older students, including those persons returning to school. The Associate in Arts and the Associate in Science degrees are used to recognize those students who have completed courses of study at the lower division level. The Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) may also be awarded to students who complete 60 units of lower division coursework in articulated pathways – ADT recipients can transfer to CSU campuses as upper division students in their field of study.

Baccalaureate degree pilot program. Senate Bill 850 (Block, Chapter 747, Statutes of 2014) authorized the CCC BOG, in consultation with the CSU and the UC, to establish a baccalaureate degree pilot program. The pilot program allows up to 15 participating community college districts to offer one baccalaureate degree program each to meet local workforce needs as long as it does not duplicate a baccalaureate degree program already offered by the CSU or the UC. The Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO) conducted interim and final evaluations of the pilot program.

The LAO found that assessing whether programs met industry needs was difficult based on the information provided by colleges in their initial applications. Generally, colleges provided documents citing broad support for the proposed programs with little concrete evidence of the benefits to employers. In most of these cases, the LAO found that graduates were using their

bachelor's degrees to enter management positions where a bachelor's degree is a minimum requirement. The LAO found little evidence that graduates from these pilot programs were better prepared to fill these positions compared to those with other bachelor's degrees, or that pilot program graduates were helping employers fill hard-to-staff positions.

The most common benefit of the pilot cited by students was the relatively low cost of attending the community college bachelor's degree programs. In a survey conducted by the pilot community colleges, 51% of respondents stated they would not have pursued a bachelor's degree if their community college program had not been offered. The pilot programs particularly benefited students with an associate degree in the same major and related work experience in the industry.

Pilot made permanent. Assembly Bill 927 (Medina and Choi, Chapter 565, Statutes of 2021) made the SB 850 (Block) pilot program permanent, perpetually approving the original pilot programs and authorizing as many as 30 new baccalaureate degrees per year. As of publication there are a total of 39 approved programs. Most participating campuses currently offer one program, while with seven campus offer two baccalaureate degree programs.

AB 927 (Medina and Choi) addressed a specific area where SB 850 (Block) was silent – the phasing out of associate degrees in programs where a CCC baccalaureate degree has been approved. AB 927 (Medina) explicitly states that a CCD must continue to offer an associate degree program in the same academic subject for which a baccalaureate degree program has been approved, unless that community college district has received approval from the Chancellor of the CCC to eliminate the associate degree program.

Committee Staff is not aware of an instance since the implementation of AB 927 (Medina) where a CCD has requested approval to eliminate their associate degree program, and thus a test of the process in detailed in *Existing law* has not been made. Given that the elimination of an associate degree would require students to stay enrolled in their program for additional time – eliminating the opportunity to enter the workforce with an associate's degree and return later to finish their baccalaureate – an evaluation of wage differences between associate and baccalaureate degree recipients seems reasonable.

In seeking an application to offer a baccalaureate degree, colleges must provide evidence that “employers are willing to pay baccalaureate degree holders more than those with a related associate degree.” Committee staff notes, however, that a decision to eliminate an associate degree program might not happen *simultaneously* with the approval of a baccalaureate degree, and thus the evaluation wage earning proposed in this bill has the potential of yielding useful information.

Related legislation. AB 2305 (Mike Fong, 2024) would require that a CCD is provided with one annual timeline in which to apply for a baccalaureate degree program, with a total of 30 baccalaureate degree programs approved per academic year, and that a minimum of 90 days is taken to validate the submitted information and assess the workforce value of the proposed baccalaureate degree program. AB 2305 (Mike Fong) is scheduled to be heard by the Assembly Committee on Higher Education on April 2, 2024.

Prior legislation. AB 927 (Medina and Choi), Chapter 565, Statutes of 2021, removed the cap on the total number of baccalaureate degree programs allowed within the CCC system and

eliminates the January 1, 2027 sunset date of the statewide baccalaureate degree pilot program, thereby permanently authorizing the offering of baccalaureate degree programs at CCCs.

SB 874 (Hill) of 2020, would have extended the operation of the statewide baccalaureate degree pilot program indefinitely. The bill would have removed the requirements that the program consist of a maximum of 15 community college district programs and for a student to commence a program by the end of the 2022–23 academic year. SB 874 was held in the Senate Committee on Education due to bill restrictions from COVID-19.

SB 769 (Hill) of 2017, would have extended the operation of the statewide baccalaureate degree pilot program until July 1, 2028. SB 769 was held in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

SB 577 (Dodd), Chapter 603, Statutes of 2018, established the CCC Teacher Credentialing Partnership Pilot Program, awarding grants to collaboratives of one or more teacher-credentialing higher education institutions partnering with one or more community colleges for the purpose of offering teacher credentialing programs at community colleges.

SB 850 (Block) Chapter 747, Statutes of 2014, authorizes the BOG of the CCC, in consultation with the CSU and the UC, to establish baccalaureate degree pilot programs, at up to 15 community college districts, with one baccalaureate degree program each, as specified, to be determined by the CCCCCO.

AB 661 (Block, 2011) authorized Grossmont-Cuyamaca and the San Mateo Community College districts to offer one baccalaureate degree pilot program per campus. AB 661 was heard and passed in the Assembly Higher Education Committee by a vote of 6-0 but was moved to the inactive file on the Assembly Floor.

AB 2400 (Block, 2010) authorized the San Diego, Grossmont-Cuyamaca and San Mateo Community College districts to establish baccalaureate degree pilot programs. No vote was taken and AB 2400 was held in the Assembly Higher Education Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

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