

Date of Hearing: April 16, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 2093 (Santiago) – As Amended April 1, 2024

SUBJECT: Community colleges: California College Promise: fee waiver eligibility and funding formula

SUMMARY: Extend the term of eligibility of the California College Promise for an additional two academic years for first-time community college students and returning community college students who matriculate into upper division coursework of a community college baccalaureate degree program, as specified. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Expands the California College Promise to provide a fee waiver to eligible first-time community college students for fees including, but not limited to, fees for coursework in a baccalaureate degree program, as specified, and upper division baccalaureate coursework fees, as specified, for only an additional two academic years.
- 2) Adds to California College Promise funding formula, for funding appropriated for the program in excess of the funding needed to waive all student fees, the number of students who matriculate into upper division coursework of a community college baccalaureate degree program.
- 3) Makes various findings and declarations.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California College Promise, under the administration of the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges (CCC), to provide funding, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to each community college meeting prescribed requirements. Additionally, existing law:
 - a) Authorizes a community college to use that funding to waive some or all of the fees for two academic years for first-time community college students and returning community college students, as defined, who are enrolled in 12 or more semester units or the equivalent, or less for students certified as “full time,” as specified, and who complete and submit either a Free Application for Federal Student Aid or a California Dream Act application, except as provided.
 - b) Requires the chancellor to establish a funding formula that advances the goals of the program.
 - c) Requires the funding formula to include, for funding appropriated for the program in excess of the funding needed to waive all student fees, the number of full-time equivalent students at a community college and the number of students at a community college who satisfy the requirements to receive federal Pell Grants and the requirements to receive a specified exemption from paying nonresident tuition. (Education Code (EDC) Section 76396-76396.4)

- 2) Authorizes the Board of Governors (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) Requires the Chancellor of the CCC to consult with and seek feedback from the Chancellor of the California State University (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;
 - b) Requires a CCD to continue to offer an associate degree program in the same academic subject for which a baccalaureate degree program has been approved, unless the community college district has received approval from the chancellor to eliminate the associate degree program, as specified; and,
 - c) 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.* According to the author, “Higher education is a catalyst for economic mobility, especially for low-income, first generation students of color. Unfortunately, the cost of a bachelor’s degree is out of reach for so many of these students. California has the opportunity to provide a pathway to debt-free college! AB 2093 puts the dream of an affordable bachelor’s degree within reach for more California students and their families.”

Community college fee waiver programs. The BOG fee waiver has existed since the inception of CCC enrollment fees, and waives the per unit enrollment fee for any CCC student who demonstrates financial need. The BOG fee waiver has been renamed as the California College Promise Grant (not to be confused with the separate California College Promise program, which this bill addresses). AB 19 (Santiago, Chapter 735, Statutes of 2017) established a new program, the California College Promise program, which authorizes but does not require CCCs to waive fees for first-time, full-time students without financial need for their first year of college. To be eligible for these waivers, students must have no prior postsecondary coursework, enroll in 12 or more units per semester, and submit a FAFSA or a California Dream Act application. This bill expands the California College Promise program to include a third and fourth year for students participating in CCCs offered by a CCC campus.

Baccalaureate Degrees. SB 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 allowed up to 15 participating community college districts to offer one baccalaureate degree program each to meet local workforce needs as long as it was not duplicating 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. This pilot program was expanded and authorized indefinitely by AB 927 (Medina), Chapter 565, Statutes of 2021, and since then the CCC has approved a total of 33 programs.

Non-need based financial aid. While the Legislature has crossed this bridge by establishing a non-need based financial aid program through AB 19 (Santiago, Chapter 735, 2017) and AB 74 (Ting, Chapter 23, 2019), the following issues remain:

- 1) Should financial aid be allocated specifically to students with high levels of financial need rather than as an entitlement to all students?
- 2) Does the requirement for a student to be enrolled full-time to be eligible for the California College Promise fee waiver disadvantage students who cannot afford to fully cover access costs such as textbooks, transportation, food, and housing and therefore need to work more hours at the expense taking a full load of courses?
- 3) Does providing financial aid to non-needy students come at the expense of expanding financial aid for needy students, such as the Cal Grant program, to include aid for the total cost of attendance?

Committee Staff notes that two pieces of legislation, AB 2104 (Soria) and SB 895 (Roth), propose to allow the CCC to create a pilot program to offer baccalaureate degrees in nursing. Both of these bills would create a new code section not covered in AB 2093 (Santiago); thus if approved, students attending a CCC nursing baccalaureate degree pilot programs would not benefit from the fee waiver expansion proposed in AB 2093 (Santiago). *Committee Staff notes* that providing such a fee waiver for CCC nursing baccalaureate degree students would create a fundamental inequity with CSU students in a similar program, and could also skew the enrollment demand of the pilot program.

Arguments in support. The San Diego Community College District wrote in support of AB 2093, noting that “The proposed AB 2093 will expand the California College Promise Program by allowing qualifying students to pursue a Bachelor's Degree at our state's community college campuses tuition-free. In addition, it would require participants to complete identical requirements to the existing California College Promise, including completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the California Dream Act application.”

“Community colleges play an essential role in promoting equity in the labor market by providing the opportunity for individuals to access post-secondary education at a low cost. The tuition cost of a Bachelor’s Degree at a community college is approximately \$10,500, compared to the cost of a California State University (CSU) 4-year degree which is estimated at nearly \$30,000 based on Fall 2024 tuition and fees. Costs for 4-year degrees at private colleges and universities are exponentially higher.”

“AB 2093 will help California Community Colleges to prepare more degree holders for the workforce that California needs to maintain its place as the fifth largest economy in the world. It will further put community college students on a more equitable financial playing field alongside their peers at the California State University and University of California campuses.”

Related legislation. AB 2104 (Soria) requires the Chancellor of the CCC to develop a Baccalaureate Degree in Nursing Pilot Program that authorizes select community college districts to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree. This bill is currently scheduled to be heard on April 16, 2024 in the Assembly Committee on Higher Education.

SB 895 (Roth) requires the CCC Chancellor's Office to establish, until January 1, 2031, a Community College Baccalaureate Degree in Nursing Pilot Program for purposes of authorizing 15 community college districts with nationally accredited nursing programs selected by the CCC Chancellor's office to offer a Bachelor of Science in nursing degree. This bill is pending a hearing in the Senate Education Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Antelope Valley Community College District
California Federation of Teachers AFL-CIO
California School Employees Association
Immigrants Rising
Legacy LA
Public Advocates INC.
Rancho Santiago Community College District
San Diego Community College District
San Jose-Evergreen Community College District

Opposition

None on file.

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