

Date of Hearing: April 23, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 2936 (Jackson) – As Introduced February 15, 2024

SUBJECT: Higher Education Reconciliation Master Plan

SUMMARY: Requires the California Community Colleges (CCC) and the California State University (CSU), and request the University of California (UC), to develop a reconciliation master plan for use on each of their respective campuses to address cultural and political conflicts that arise on campus. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Establishes the Higher Education Reconciliation Master Plan.
- 2) Requires the CCC and the CSU, and requests the UC, develop a reconciliation master plan for use on each of their respective campuses to address cultural and political conflicts that arise on campus.
- 3) The plan developed to pursuant to 2) above will ensure that students have a forum to be seen, have their voices heard, and feel safe.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the UC as a public trust to be administered by the Regents of the UC; and, grants the Regents full powers of organization and government, subject only to such legislative control as may be necessary to insure security of its funds, compliance with the terms of its endowments, statutory requirements around competitive bidding and contracts, sales of property and the purchase of materials, goods and services. (Article IX, Section (9)(a) of the California Constitution)
- 2) Establishes the Donahoe Higher Education Act, setting forth the mission of the UC, CSU, and CCC. (Education Code (EDC) Section 66010, et seq.)
- 3) Confers upon the CSU Trustees the powers, duties, and functions with respect to the management, administration, control of the CSU system and provides that the Trustees are responsible for the rule of government of their appointees and employees. (EDC Sections 66606 and 89500, et seq.)
- 4) Establishes the CCC under the administration of the Board of Governors of the CCC, as one of the segments of public postsecondary education in this state. The CCC shall be comprised of community college districts. (EDC Section 70900)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: *Purpose.* According to the author, there are not currently sufficient plans in place across the higher education infrastructure to handle the aftermath of conflict or tension that may arise on campuses. The intent of this bill is to provide ways to move forward while healing and mending tensions on college and university campuses. The author notes that the legislation is

not intended to be a preventive measure for these tense situations on college campuses, but lay the foundation for de-escalation in a trauma informed way.

What is happening on campuses? College campuses are more than vocational training centers – they are places where diverse individuals come together to learn, debate, and share ideas. As has been evidenced by the recent escalation of tensions in the Middle East, many students have indicated that they feel unsafe on their campuses.

The Chicago Project on Security and Threats at the University of Chicago (CPOST) recently conducted a study of the national campus environment titled *Understanding Campus Fears After October 7 and How to Reduce Them*. This study is based on two national surveys of 5,000 college students from over 600 four-year academic institutions, with an additional 5,000 American adults as a comparison set, which were fielded from mid-December 2023 to mid-January 2024. With the benefit of a previous baseline survey of 8,000 American adults fielded in spring of 2023, CPOST found that campus fears related to the current Israel-Palestinian conflict are more intense among certain groups and widespread across the student body than previously known. As a consequence of the conflict, numerous students are fearful because of their support of one side or the other:

- 1) 56% of Jewish college students felt in personal danger.
- 2) 52% of Muslim college students felt in personal danger.
- 3) 16% of other college students felt in personal danger.

These findings equate to two to three million college students nationally. The findings also show that Jewish and Muslim students report fearing for their physical safety, and other students fear of being caught in the crossfire. Many are additionally concerned about academic discrimination and loss of professional opportunities. The findings show strong support for calming actions.

Arguments in support. The California Teachers Association (CTA) wrote in support of AB 2936, noting that “a reconciliation master plan developed by California’s public institutions of higher education will provide students with a safe, secure environment to pursue their academic goals. The provision of the bill ensuring that students have a forum to be seen, heard, and feel safe contributes to enhancing campus safety and overall well-being. A reconciliation master plan developed by California’s public institutions of higher education will strengthen students’ 1st Amendment right to free speech and help to secure academic freedom.”

“CTA believes in the empowerment of student voices. Educators in all fields shape the minds of future leaders and are obligated to ensure that all students are offered safe spaces to use their agency, to be seen, heard and validated. With intent towards action, CTA and students may participate in debate reciprocally and respectfully. It is through these spaces that all students may lift their voices to express their needs, advocacy, and leadership with an emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion. By creating spaces where students feel comfortable expressing themselves and engaging in constructive dialogue, the bill helps mitigate tensions that can lead to conflicts or incidents of harassment. This proactive approach to addressing cultural and political conflicts promotes a healthier campus climate, ultimately benefiting the mental and emotional health of students and fostering a more conducive environment for learning and personal growth.”

Committee comments. Committee Staff recommends, and the author has accepted, amendments that will accomplish the following:

- 1) Strike the contents of the bill.
- 2) Require the CCC and CSU, and requests the UC, to convene stakeholder workgroups by July 1, 2025, with membership including:
 - a) Faculty.
 - b) Staff.
 - c) Students, as specified.
 - d) Campus health and safety personnel.
 - e) Campus student center personnel.
 - f) An individual who has expertise in Title VI, or is a representative specializing in Title VI from the California Civil Rights Department.
- 3) Requires the stakeholder working group to evaluate and report on the following:
 - a) Existing systemwide and campus policies, procedures, and processes regarding cultural and political conflicts.
 - b) Alternative dispute resolution options to ensure that students have a forum to be seen, have their voices heard, and feel safe.
- 4) Requires the stakeholder working group to submit a report to the Assembly Committee on Higher Education, the Senate Education Committee, the Assembly Committee on the Judiciary, and the Senate Judiciary Committee, and the budget committees of both the Assembly and Senate, and Board Presidents of their respective system by July 1, 2026 that includes recommendations to promote reconciliation on each of their respective campuses, specifically in response to cultural and political conflicts that arise.
- 5) In preparing the report pursuant to subdivision (b), the stakeholder workgroup shall, at a minimum, evaluate and report on both of the following:
 - a) Existing systemwide and campus policies, procedures, and processes regarding cultural and political conflicts.
 - b) Alternative dispute resolution options to ensure that students have a forum to be seen, have their voices heard, and feel safe.
- 6) Sunsets the code on July 1, 2029.

Prior legislation. AB 1997 (Gibson), Chapter 931, Statutes of 2022, required the Chancellor of the CSU, on or before July 1, 2023, to convene a stakeholder workgroup that includes a

representative from specified stakeholders to evaluate and report on alternative options to current emergency response programs on CSU campuses and alternative dispute resolution options to resolve employee conflicts.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Teachers Association

Opposition

None on file.

Analysis Prepared by: Kevin J. Powers / HIGHER ED. / (916) 319-3960