

Date of Hearing: March 18, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 240 (Alanis) – As Amended March 10, 2025

SUBJECT: Community colleges: study: Counties of Amador, Alpine, Mariposa, Modoc, and Sierra

SUMMARY: Requires that the California Research Bureau (CRB) conduct and prepare a report that would align with the state's declaration that all of the territory of the state shall be included within a community college district (CCD). The report would provide specific policy recommendations evaluating California Community Colleges (CCC) services and opportunities for the residents of Amador, Alpine, Mariposa, Modoc, and Sierra counties that are not fully included in a CCD. CRB will also convene and consult a working group to help implement the recommendations. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Declares as a legislative policy that all of the territory of the state shall be included within a community college district or otherwise provided with equivalent opportunities for residents to participate in both in-person and online community college programs and courses.
- 2) Requires that CRB conduct a study and prepare a report evaluating the provision of community colleges services and opportunities to residents of the underserved Counties of Amador, Alpine, Mariposa, Modoc, and Sierra that are not fully within the territory of a CCD. The report shall include policy recommendations regarding how the state can ensure that residents of these five countries have opportunities to participate in both in-person and online community college programs and courses equivalent to those of similarly sized communities that are fully included within the territory of a CCD. The report and recommendations shall include, but is not limited to, all of the following:
 - a) An analysis of the educational and economic impacts of the existing deficit of community college services and opportunities in the five underserved counties listed above, in (2);
 - b) An analysis of the potential benefits of providing equivalent community college services and opportunities in the five underserved counties listed above. When defining "equivalent services," the report shall look for services and opportunities offered in similarly sized communities;
 - c) An analysis of the current availability of, and opportunities to strengthen, dual enrollment opportunities with community colleges and transfer pathways to public postsecondary education institutions;
 - d) Identification of existing community colleges, public four-year postsecondary education, and independent postsecondary education public and independent institutions of higher education that are conducting outreach, recruitment, and providing in-person or online postsecondary education programs and services within the five underserved counties listed above, in (2);

- e) Identification of potential providers of both in-person and online postsecondary education programs and services within the five underserved counties listed above, and options for implementing those programs and services;
- f) Identification of opportunities and resources needed to provide in-person community college programs and courses in locations reasonably accessible to a majority of residents of the five underserved counties listed above, in (2);
- g) Identification of opportunities for partnership with local educational agencies, public postsecondary educational institutions, local governments, and nonprofit organizations to facilitate expanded community college opportunities to serve the residents of the five underserved counties listed above, in (2);
- h) An analysis of resource needs and potential funding sources for expanding community college services and opportunities to the residents of the five underserved counties listed above, in (2);
- i) Identification of potential legislative and administrative actions that may be taken to ensure that residents of the five underserved counties listed above have opportunities to participate in both in-person and online community college programs and courses equivalent to those of similarly sized communities that are fully included within the territory of a CCD;
- j) For purposes of this section, the bureau may request and receive, but not require, information from the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges and the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges, the State Department of Education, any community college district, any local educational agency, the office of the Chancellor of the California State University, the office of the President of the University of California, or any organization representing independent institutions of higher education, as defined in Section 66010; and,
- k) To assist with and inform the development of the report and recommendations required by this section, CRB shall convene and consult a working group that includes voluntary representatives from all of the following:
 - i) One representative from each of the five underserved counties identified above, in (2);
 - ii) One representative of an organization representing rural counties;
 - iii) Representatives from one or more of the CCD's adjacent to each of the five underserved counties identified above, in (2);
 - iv) One representative of the office of the Chancellor of the CCC;
 - v) One representative of the office of the Chancellor of the California State University;
 - vi) One representative of the office of the President of the University of California;

- vii) One representative of an organization of independent, nonprofit colleges and universities in California;
 - viii) One representative of the State Department of Education; and,
 - ix) Representatives from one or more local educational agencies located within each of the five underserved counties identified above, in (2).
- 3) Requires the working group to be subject to the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act (Article 9 (commencing with Section 11120) of Chapter 1 of Part 1 of Division 9 of Title 2 of the Government Code.)
- a) Requires the CRB, on or before December 31, 2027, to submit the report and the recommendations to the California Assembly Committee on Higher Education and the California Senate Committee on Education of the Legislature and the Governor.
 - i) For purposes of this section the following definitions apply:
 - (1) “Bureau” means the California Research Bureau;
 - (2) “Independent institutions of higher education” has the same meaning as specified in Section 66010; and,
 - (3) “Local educational agency” means a school district, county office of education, or charter school.
 - ii) Repeals this section on January 1, 2031.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California Community Colleges (CCC) as a part of public higher education consisting of community college districts under the control of a local board of trustees. (Education Code (EDC) section 70900 and 70902)
- 2) Declares as legislative policy that all of the territory of the state shall be included within a community college district, except that territory located within a county where the county residents accounted for fewer than 350 units of average daily attendance in the state’s community colleges during the preceding fiscal year, and that territory located within such a county may be included within a community college district pursuant to prescribed procedures. (EDC section 74000)
- 3) Authorizes the county committee on school district organization to, if certain conditions are met approve or disapprove petitions to transfer territory and the formation of a district that meets specified conditions. (EDC section 35710)

- 4) Authorizes the county committee on school organizations to establish trustee areas, rearrange the boundaries of trustee areas, abolish trustee areas, adopt one of the alternative methods of electing governing board members, and increase to seven or decrease to five the number of members of the governing board in any school district or community college district. (EDC section 5019)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: *Purpose.* According to the author, “California has one of the strongest higher education systems in the nation, and yet students in rural areas struggle to attend college and graduate due to geographic and financial barriers, as well as limited educational opportunities. AB 240 is a good-faith effort to strengthen our workforce and ensure all Californians have the same access to education.”

Current issues facing residents in California rural areas. A factsheet provided by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) in March of 2024 listed the numerous ways in which access to CCC’s in rural areas differ from those in more urban area. The factsheet made the following observations:

- Rural Californians are less likely than urban residents to be in the labor force (53% vs. 64%) and more likely to be unemployed (7.0% vs. 6.4%). Some of these differences likely reflect the older age profile of rural residents. Wages and incomes also tend to be lower. Median income is \$83,100 for rural households compared to \$92,400 for urban households.
- Three counties have lost more than 10% of their population relative to their population peak (Lassen, Modoc, and Sierra). Lassen has lost the most, declining 21% since its population peak in 2007.
 - A source of population loss is domestic migration. Rural counties tend to lose young adults to larger urban areas, most likely for educational opportunities.
- Rural Californians are less likely to have graduated from college: 27% have at least a bachelor’s degree, compared to 36% of urban residents.¹

Goal of community colleges within the Higher Education system. The CCC’s have a distinct mission within the higher education system. According to EDC Section 66010.4, the California Community Colleges shall, 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. A primary mission of the California Community Colleges is to advance California’s economic growth and global competitiveness through education, training, and services that contribute to continuous workforce improvement.

How to include community colleges into rural areas. EDC Section 35710 states that a county committee on school district organization determines the service areas for both community colleges and school districts. It also authorizes the county committee on school district organization to, if certain conditions are met, approve or disapprove petitions to transfer or establish the formation of a district that meets specified conditions. Community college districts

¹ <https://www.ppic.org/publication/rural-california>

cannot expand their service boundaries without involvement from their local government partners.

CRB Report and Workgroup. The CRB is tasked with performing specific legislative research in providing a detailed report of requested information. The mission of the CRB is to provide nonpartisan and confidential public policy research for the Governor’s Office and the State Legislature. The workgroup proposed in this bill includes a myriad of representatives ranging from local representatives from the rural areas mentioned in the bill to representatives from each of the higher education institutions.

Arguments in support. The Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) wrote in support of AB 240 by stating that, “Currently, the Counties of Amador, Alpine, Mariposa, Modoc, and Sierra are wholly or partially outside an existing CCC district, leaving those residents without access to much-needed affordable post-secondary educational opportunities. Rural residents face significantly unique challenges to higher education, workforce development, and vocational training due to factors such as remote geographical location and low population density. Community colleges, especially those that offer online options, can provide an accessible entry point to advanced learning, career training, and the ability for high school students to earn college credit to be more competitive in applying to a four-year university. Even without a physical facility in the county, the benefits of being part of a community college district can be seen through CCC partnerships and outreach to the community, driving educational opportunities to the residents. AB 240 will analyze how we can bring those same benefits to the underserved five rural counties through a coordinated effort of representatives from the public higher education system and the affected counties and will present suggested pathways that will ensure all Californians have an equitable opportunity to higher education.”

Prior legislation. SB 1222 (Alvarado-Gil) of the 2023-24 Session, which was held on the Suspense File in the Senate Committee on Appropriations; would have required the Legislative Analyst’s Office to conduct research, convene a workgroup and prepare a report with specific policy recommendations to the legislature evaluating postsecondary education services and opportunities for residents of Amador, Alpine, Mariposa, Modoc, and Sierra Counties that are not fully included in a community college district.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) (Sponsor)
Alpine County, CA
Amador County Board of Supervisors
Colusa County Office of Education
Faculty Association of California Community Colleges
Modoc County
Sierra Business Council

Opposition

None on file.

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