

Date of Hearing: April 21, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 2466 (Fong) – As Introduced February 20, 2026

SUBJECT: Strong Workforce Program: work-based learning opportunities: regional consortia

SUMMARY: Expands how the California Community Colleges (CCC) can use funding under the Strong Workforce Program, by authorizing funds apportioned directly to regional consortia to be used to provide direct support to students, employers, or both for paid work-based learning to increase employability and employment, and make conforming changes. Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires that, no later than June 30, 2026, the CCC Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) must revise any policies, regulations, and guidance necessary to provide students, employers, or both, with paid work-based learning opportunities that may be directly supported with funds apportioned directly to a regional consortia, as specified, of the Strong Workforce Program.
- 2) Specifies that funds apportioned directly to regional consortia, as specified, may also be used to provide direct support to students, employers, or both, for paid work-based learning, including, but not limited to, apprenticeships, internships, externships, and student-run enterprises to increase employability and employment.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) 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 is comprised of community college districts (CCD). (Education Code (EDC) Section 70900).
- 2) Creates for each CCD a board of trustees, known as the governing board, and authorizes the governing board to establish, maintain, operate, and govern each CCC within their district in accordance with state and federal law, as specified. The governing board may initiate and carry on any program, activity, or may otherwise act in any manner that is not in conflict or inconsistent with any law and that is not in conflict with the purpose of a CCD, as specified. (EDC Section 70902).
- 3) Establishes the Strong Workforce Program as a K-14 state education, economic, and workforce development initiative for the purpose of expanding the availability of high-quality, industry-valued career technical education and workforce development courses. Establishes the Strong Workforce Program Consortia comprised of Local Educational Agencies (LEA), CCDs, and other entities who collaborate with local and regional governments, and industry partners to meet the career technical educational workforce needs of a given region. Funds are allocated to consortia members with a specified amount to CCDs and a specified amount to K-12 partners. Requires the CCC Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) to, no later than June 30, 2017, bring before the CCC Board of Governors any policies, regulations, and guidance necessary to accomplish, among other things, providing work-based learning opportunities for students that increase their employability and earning potential, as provided.

Additionally, requires the CCCCCO to revise, no later than June 30, 2026, any policies, regulations, and guidance necessary to provide students, employers, or both, with paid work-based learning opportunities. Additionally requires a percentage of the funds apportioned for community colleges under the program to be apportioned directly to CCDs in the consortia to fund, among other things, student grants to cover fees for third-party certification and licensing, and to provide direct support to students, employers, or both, for paid work-based learning to increase employability and employment, including, but not limited to, apprenticeships, internships, externships, and student-run enterprises. Funding must be used as specified for career technical education programs. (EDC Section 88820 et seq.)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS: *Purpose.* According to the author, “Access to higher paying jobs is increasingly tied to practical experience and technical skills. Integrating paid work experience alongside academic coursework allows students to cultivate their skill set and work experience early on while also earning income to offset their education costs. AB 2466 gives the Strong Workforce Program greater flexibility to increase the number of paid work-based learning experiences available to students, increasing their job opportunities and employment earnings following their education.”

Career technical education (CTE). According to California's 2026-2027 Unified Strategic Workforce Development Plan Modification published by the California Workforce Development Board, the top 25 middle-skilled occupations — those that require more than a high school education but less than a four-year degree — are expected to generate 1,822,530 total job openings during the 2023-2033 period. These openings include approximately 711,420 due to those exiting the labor force, 989,010 transferring to a different occupation, and 122,100 due to job growth. Middle-skilled occupations include teaching assistants, medical assistants, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, paralegal and legal assistant, heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers, and HVAC technicians, among others. A 2025 publication by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), *Early Insights from the Golden State Pathways Program*, estimates suggest that 72 percent of jobs will require postsecondary education or training by 2031, with 42 percent of all jobs requiring at least a bachelor's degree, emphasizing the importance of preparing students with the necessary academic and job skills.

CCCs are the only California public higher education institution tasked with offering vocational education in the Education Code as well as the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education. The CCC offers CTE programs to prepare students for professional-level employment opportunities in an array of fields including courses in fire technology, mechatronics, fashion, and welding. While four-year diplomas are often heralded as the ticket out of poverty, many CTE credentials lead to wage gains and benefits. Recognizing the value of short-term certificates and CTE, the state and federal governments have provided funding for increased CTE programs at both the K-12 and higher education levels.

Strong Workforce Program. The Strong Workforce Program was established in the annual Budget Act in 2016. The program was originally a recommendation from the CCC Board of Governors and was adopted by the Legislature and the Governor in order to create one million more middle-skill or CTE workers to meet workforce demands. The original allocation for the Strong Workforce Program was \$248 million and was reserved for student success, career pathways, workforce data outcomes, CTE faculty, and regional coordination. Funding for

community colleges is dispersed with 60% being given to each community college district, and 40% to regional consortia for distribution in order to focus on the workforce needs of the state's eight regions: Far North, Bay Area, Central/Motherlode, South Central Coast, Los Angeles, Orange County, Inland Empire/Desert, and San Diego/Imperial. In 2018, the annual Budget Act expanded the Strong Workforce Program to include K-12 LEAs.

According to the CCCCCO's 2023-2024 Strong Workforce report, "Since its inception, the Strong Workforce Program has invested over \$1 billion to strengthen CTE across California community colleges. These funds are strategically allocated based on regional workforce priorities and performance metrics, enabling each region to target resources toward industry sectors that drive local economic growth and address labor market demands. In Fiscal Year 2023-2024, the Strong Workforce Program distributed a total of over \$275 million in funding. The distribution approach ensures every region, regardless of size or economic status, has access to baseline funding."

Reinforcing the workforce outcomes mission of the Strong Workforce Program. Paid work-based learning helps students bridge the gap between classroom training and real-world employment, particularly for students in high-demand middle-skill occupations. This bill aligns with the foundational goals of the SWP by strengthening student-employer connections and improving job placement outcomes especially for underserved students who cannot afford to work for free. These experiences are particularly valuable in CTE fields like healthcare, manufacturing, and technology.

Arguments in support. The Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) wrote in support, stating that "In 2016, the California Legislature created the Strong Workforce Program to expand workforce opportunities and help underemployed individuals move into living-wage jobs. This was done at the recommendation of the California Community College Board of Governors; the programs allocated \$290 million annually to spur career technical education into the nation's largest workforce development system. Under the program, local consortia create funding and programmatic plans for the annual allocation of dollars. Last year, the signing of AB 323 authorized colleges and districts to utilize the funding to partner with industries to provide internships in areas that increase employment opportunities for the students. However, the current state statute does not explicitly permit the use of funding apportioned directly to the eight regional consortia for these work-based learning opportunities."

LACCD additionally noted that, "In the community college system, paid internships and work-based learning, more broadly, serve as an important bridge between academic programs and the world of work. They are critical tools that enable colleges to serve students from special populations who often experience equity gaps in completion and employment. This is consistent with a focus on living wages and employment. Additionally, the Center for Research on College-Workforce Transitions (CCWT) has conducted studies indicating that unpaid internships disproportionately affect underrepresented students, particularly Black and Latino individuals who often cannot afford to work without compensation. AB 2466 would build upon the efforts of AB 323 to alleviate the financial burden faced by low-income students. This financial barrier limits student access to valuable work-based learning experiences, exacerbating existing equity gaps in education and employment. AB 2466 is not a mandate and simply provides consortia with an option to use their funds for this purpose, subject to their plans."

Committee amendments. Committee staff recommends, and the author has accepted, amendments that will update the June 30, 2026, deadline that the CCCCO must revise any policies, regulations, and guidance to June 30, 2027.

Prior legislation. AB 323 (Fong), Chapter 255, Statutes of 2025, required the California Community College (CCC) Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) to revise, no later than June 30, 2026, any Strong Workforce Program policies, regulations, and guidance necessary to provide students, employers, or both, with paid work-based learning opportunities. Authorize a community college district (CCD) to also use Strong Workforce Program funds apportioned directly to CCDs to provide direct support to students, employers, or both, for paid work-based learning to increase employability and employment.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Association of California Goodwills
Association of Regional Center Agencies
Cerritos College
Los Angeles Community College District
Rancho Santiago Community College District
San Jose-Evergreen Community College District

Opposition

None on file.

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