

Date of Hearing: April 21, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 2136 (Pacheco) – As Introduced February 18, 2026

SUBJECT: Community colleges: baccalaureate degree program: Cerritos Community College District

SUMMARY: Authorizes the Board of Governors (BOG) of the California Community Colleges (CCC) to authorize the Cerritos Community College District (CCD) to offer up to three applied baccalaureate degree programs in the fields of public safety management, paralegal studies, and automotive technology. Requires each baccalaureate degree program to be designed to meet documented regional workforce demand and developed in consultation with employers, labor organizations, and workforce development partners, and meet specified requirements.

Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Authorizes the Board of Governors (BOG) of the California Community Colleges (CCC), notwithstanding existing law, to allow Cerritos Community College District (CCD) to offer up to three applied baccalaureate degree programs pursuant to this article.
- 2) Specifies that the applied baccalaureate degree programs will be limited to the following fields:
 - a) Public safety management;
 - b) Paralegal studies; and,
 - c) Automotive technology.
- 3) Requires each baccalaureate degree program to be designed to meet documented regional workforce demand and to be developed in consultation with employers, labor organizations, and workforce development partners.
- 4) Each baccalaureate degree program authorized, as specified, must meet all of the following requirements:
 - a) Be built upon an existing associate degree or career education pathway offered by Cerritos Community College District;
 - b) Maintain an active employer advisory committee that includes industry and labor representatives;
 - c) Demonstrate labor market demand and wage mobility outcomes for program graduates;
 - d) Incorporate work-based learning, applied instruction, or industry-aligned experiential learning;
 - e) Align with regional economic development strategies and workforce plans, and,

- f) Be self-supporting and funded through existing apportionment, fee authority, and other available funding sources.
- 5) Requires the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges (CCC) to monitor the baccalaureate degree programs and may report outcomes to the Legislature, including, but not limited to:
- a) Enrollment;
 - b) Completion;
 - c) Employment placement; and,
 - d) Wage outcomes.
- 6) Finds and declares:
- a) Cerritos Community College District serves a major workforce region in southeast Los Angeles County, and its boundaries do not contain a campus of the California State University or University of California systems. As a result, residents seeking to pursue a locally accessible baccalaureate degree must commute outside the district, creating geographic, financial, and logistical barriers to baccalaureate degree attainment for working adults, first-generation college students, and low-income students.
 - b) The region served by Cerritos Community College District includes communities that experience lower rates of baccalaureate degree attainment and higher concentrations of working adults, first-generation college students, and low-income households for whom affordable and locally accessible baccalaureate education is essential to upward economic mobility.
 - c) Labor market analyses for the County of Los Angeles demonstrate substantial unmet demand for mid- and high-skill occupations that increasingly require baccalaureate-level credentials, including public safety management and administration, legal services, and advanced automotive and transportation technology.
 - d) Employers in public safety, legal services, and advanced transportation and automotive industries report persistent shortages of qualified workers with baccalaureate-level preparation, constraining regional economic growth, emergency preparedness, public safety operations, and community resilience.
 - e) California's community colleges have demonstrated the capacity to deliver high-quality, workforce-aligned baccalaureate degree programs through the California Community Colleges Baccalaureate Degree Program, which integrates applied instruction, employer partnerships, and work-based learning.
 - f) Cerritos College operates nationally recognized career education programs with strong employer partnerships, high job placement outcomes, and established associate degree pathways that directly align with documented regional workforce demand.

- g) Cerritos Community College District maintains deep and sustained partnerships with organized labor, public safety agencies, employers, workforce boards, and regional economic development agencies that uniquely position it to deliver applied baccalaureate degrees in fields of demonstrated labor market need.
- h) Expanding access to applied baccalaureate degree programs at Cerritos College will increase educational attainment, accelerate workforce mobility, and strengthen the regional economy while providing an affordable and locally accessible pathway to a baccalaureate degree.
- i) It is therefore in the interest of the state to authorize Cerritos Community College District to offer a limited number of applied baccalaureate degree programs aligned with regional workforce demand.
- j) A special statute is necessary and that a general statute cannot be made applicable within the meaning of Section 16 of Article IV of the California Constitution because of the unique regional workforce partnerships, labor integration, program readiness, and demonstrated economic mobility outcomes of Cerritos Community College District.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Differentiates the missions and functions of public and independent institutions of higher education. Under these provisions:
 - a) The primary mission of the California State University (CSU) is to offer undergraduate and graduate instruction through the master's degree in the liberal arts and sciences and professional education including teacher education. The CSU is authorized to establish two-year programs only when mutually agreed upon by the Trustees and the CCC Board of Governors (BOG). The CSU is also authorized to jointly award the doctoral degree with the University of California (UC) and with one or more independent institutions of higher education.
 - b) The UC is authorized to provide undergraduate and graduate instruction and has exclusive jurisdiction in public higher education over graduate instruction in the professions of law, medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine. The UC is also the primary state-supported academic agency for research.
 - c) The independent institutions of higher education are required to provide undergraduate and graduate instruction and research in accordance with their respective missions.
 - d) The mission and function of the CCC is the offering of academic and vocational instruction at the lower division level, and the CCC are authorized to grant the Associate in Arts and the Associate in Science degrees. The community colleges are also required to offer learning supports to close learning gaps, English as a Second Language instruction, and adult noncredit instruction, and support services which help students succeed at the postsecondary level. (Education Code (EDC) Section 66010.4)

- 2) 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 CCDs, 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.* According to the author, “Our community colleges are a vital part of California’s higher education system. With more than 100 colleges serving roughly 2 million students, they are pillars of our communities and a pathway to professional growth. In 2021, the Legislature passed AB 927 to allow California Community Colleges to offer baccalaureate degree programs, expanding their role while making bachelor’s degrees more accessible and affordable. However, an extensive approval process has delayed the implementation of these programs across the state. AB 2136 authorizes the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges to approve three baccalaureate degree programs at Cerritos Community College, allowing the college to move forward and offer bachelor’s degrees that respond directly to local workforce needs.”

Cerritos College. Cerritos College was founded in 1955 and is one of the five largest community colleges in Los Angeles County, situated on a 135-acre campus in the City of Norwalk. The college serves a broad service area encompassing the cities of Artesia, Bellflower, Cerritos, Downey, Hawaiian Gardens, La Mirada, Norwalk, and South Gate, among others, drawing students from Southeastern Los Angeles County and North Orange County. Cerritos College offers more than 180 areas of study and 87 degree and certificate programs, and through the CCC Baccalaureate Degree Program has received approval for two bachelor's degree programs in Dental Hygiene and Field Ironworker Supervision.

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 independently offer doctoral degrees.

Notwithstanding the differentiation of the mission envisioned by the Master Plan, as outlined in statute, the Legislature authorized the CSU to go beyond its original mission to offer six professional doctoral degrees which include the Au.D, Ed.D, D.P.T., DNP, OTD, and Dr.PH. Each program was individually approved through legislation. Fees were capped at the rate charged at the UC, no additional funding was provided by the state, and these programs were to be implemented without diminishing or reducing enrollment in undergraduate programs. Additionally, the CSU programs that offer applied doctorates were not duplicative of degrees offered by UC.

Parallel expansion. 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 CCDs 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.

AB 927 (Medina and Choi), Chapter 565, Statutes of 2021 made the original pilot program (SB 850 (Block) Chapter 747, Statutes of 2014) permanent, perpetually approving the original pilot programs and authorizing as many as 30 new baccalaureate degrees per year.

As of publication of this analysis there are a total of 60 approved programs across 45 colleges. Most participating campuses currently offer one program, although some campuses offer as many as three. Consistent with the provisions of SB 850 (Block), AB 927 (Medina and Choi) mandates that none of the CCC baccalaureate degree programs can duplicate programs offered by the CSU or UC.

AB 656 (McCarty), Chapter 663, Statutes of 2023, authorizes the CSU to award professional or applied doctoral degrees statewide that do not duplicate UC doctoral degrees and satisfy certain requirements.

Arguments in support. Cerritos College wrote in support, stating that “this bill is not about adding programs. It is about changing what is possible for our students. By offering bachelor’s degrees in Automotive Technology, Paralegal, and Public Safety Management, Cerritos College creates a clear pathway from college to higher-paying, long-term careers. For many students, this represents the difference between stopping at an associate degree and achieving a bachelor’s degree that opens doors to better job opportunities and financial stability.”

Cerritos College continues, stating that “...equally important, AB 2136 responds to urgent and rapidly growing workforce demands across our region. California continues to face a persistent shortage of automotive technicians, with dealerships reporting an average of four unfilled

technician positions per location. At the same time, paralegal employment is projected to grow by 12% through 2032, driven by increased demand for legal services across both public and private sectors. Public safety careers remain critical, with California representing more than 10% of the nation's public safety workforce, and the Los Angeles region accounting for nearly one-third of those jobs. With major global events on the horizon, including the FIFA World Cup, Super Bowl LXI, and the 2028 Olympic Games, the demand for trained public safety professionals will only intensify. The need is not future-focused; it is immediate."

Arguments in opposition. The CSU Chancellor's Office wrote in opposition, stating that "State law has authorized—with the passage of Assembly Bill 927 (Medina)—that the California Community Colleges (CCC) may establish up to 30 baccalaureate degree programs per academic year, provided that the program or program curricula is not already offered by the CSU or University of California (UC). AB 927 requires the CCC to consult with and seek feedback from the CSU, UC and the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities on proposed baccalaureate degree programs to identify and prevent duplication, and to provide documentation of the collaborative approaches these institutions have taken to meet regional workforce needs. Through this process more than 80% of the degree programs submitted through the first six cycles have been approved, leading to the creation of more than 50 baccalaureate degree programs offered at community colleges across the state."

The CSU Chancellor's Office continues, noting that "...the CSU has maintained a strong partnership with Cerritos Community College District, resulting in a transfer acceptance rate of 91% of students from Cerritos College to the CSU for the Fall 2025 term. However, AB 2136 would undermine the collaboration at the heart of this partnership. The bill also raises several concerns about the potential impacts on California's higher education segments. AB 2136, like several measures introduced this session, expands or alters higher education authorities without fully accounting for the operational, financial, and administrative impacts on institutions and the state. We believe that any proposal that shifts institutions' roles should include, at minimum, statewide duplication standards to ensure efficient use of state resources and quality metrics to ensure positive student outcomes. Additionally, a full fiscal analysis across higher education segments and K-12 to understand how these degree expansions will impact Prop. 98 funding distributions and each segment's core mission."

The California Faculty Association wrote in opposition, adding that this legislation "...will have many unintended consequences, especially for faculty employment and job stability. As the exclusive collective bargaining representative for CSU faculty employees, it is our responsibility to protect faculty jobs. Expanding baccalaureate degrees in the community college level will undoubtedly shift upper-division enrollment away from the CSU, potentially leading to reduced instructional demand. This could have unintended consequences for faculty workforce stability, including fewer course offerings and potential impacts on faculty positions. We fear that over time it will lead to fewer course offerings and jeopardize faculty positions. CFA continues to fight against faculty layoffs, and we fear that these bills will only exacerbate future layoffs."

Committee comments. The California Community Colleges Baccalaureate Degree Program operates under a structured approval process that evaluates workforce need, program quality, non-duplication of UC and CSU offerings, and institutional capacity - criteria deliberately established by the authorizing legislation to ensure new programs serve genuine workforce gaps without undermining California's broader higher education ecosystem. AB 2136 (Pacheco)

bypasses this process by granting a specific CCD an exemption, raising serious concerns about the integrity of the framework as a whole.

A similar concern was raised in opposition to AB 664 (Alvarez) earlier this session, which sought a comparable exemption for Southwestern Community College District. If district-specific legislation becomes an accepted pathway to program approval, it sets a precedent that effectively makes the established process optional - disadvantaging districts that follow it while rewarding those with greater legislative access. *Over time, this dynamic could make the review process meaningless, as individual carve-outs accumulate and the standards the law requires are applied inconsistently across the system. If there are legitimate deficiencies in the current process, the appropriate remedy is reform through careful study, deliberation, and legislation.*

Related legislation. AB 664 (Alvarez) authorizes the Chancellor of the California Community College (CCC) to allow the Southwestern Community College District (SWCCD) to offer no more than four workforce-aligned baccalaureate degrees programs, as provided. Requires interim and final reports from the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), and sunsets the provisions on January 1, 2035. AB 664 is currently pending a hearing in the Senate Committee on Education.

AB 2053 (Ta) authorizes the Chancellor of the CCC to authorize the Coast CCD to offer a workforce-aligned cybersecurity baccalaureate degree program at Coastline College, as provided. Require the LAO to, on or before July 1, 2030, conduct and present to the Legislature and the Governor an interim evaluation of the baccalaureate degree program that is offered pursuant to that authorization and, on or before July 1, 2034, a final evaluation of that degree program, as provided. AB 2053 (Ta) is scheduled to be heard in the Assembly Committee on Higher Education on April 21st, 2026.

AB 2301 (Soria) requires the CCC Chancellor's Office to develop a Baccalaureate Degree in Nursing (BSN) Pilot Program that authorizes select CCDs to offer a BSN degree. The bill would limit the pilot program to 10 CCDs statewide and would require the CCCCO to identify and select eligible CCDs based on specified criteria. AB 2301 (Soria) is scheduled to be heard in the Assembly Committee on Higher Education on April 21st, 2026.

AB 2694 (Alvarez) changes the standard governing when CCDs may offer baccalaureate degree programs, replacing a hard prohibition on duplicating CSU or UC programs with a more flexible "substantially similar within the geographic region" test that includes exceptions for unmet workforce need and lack of CSU or UC enrollment from that region. The bill also modifies the objection and consultation process, narrowing the required consultation to programs that may be substantially similar to nearby CSU or UC offerings and streamlining the written agreement process when an objection is filed. AB 2694 (Alvarez) is scheduled to be heard in the Assembly Committee on Higher Education on April 21st, 2026.

SB 960 (Cabaldon) limits the prohibition on CCC duplication of CSU baccalaureate degree programs to instances where a CSU's campus local admission area includes or overlaps with the CCC district's territory, except when the CSU program has been impacted for at least three consecutive years. SB 960 is currently pending hearing in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

Prior legislation. AB 1400 (Soria), of 2025, would have required Chancellor of the CCC to develop a BSN Pilot Program that authorizes select community college districts to offer a BSN degree. AB 1400 was vetoed by the Governor. The veto read, in part:

“Last year, I vetoed a nearly identical bill, citing two primary reasons that continue to persist. First, the 2024 Budget Agreement included \$60 million per year, from 2025-26 to 2028-29, for the Rebuilding Nursing Infrastructure Grant Program, which may be used to develop or expand BSN partnerships with UC, CSU, and independent nonprofit higher education institutions. These partnerships have proven successful in expanding BSN access for community college students and increasing the number of BSN degree recipients. All segments of higher education must continue to collaborate on building these programs, and returning this bill will ensure those collaborative efforts are not undermined.”

The Governor continued that, “...in recent years, both the CCC and the CSU have been authorized to offer independent programs outside of their traditional roles, provided they do not duplicate degree offerings of other public segments. I encourage the CCC system to focus on implementing this expanded authority and to ensure that it can continue to make progress on the unique and vital role the CCC plays in serving its students and the state. Given these significant changes, a pause should be maintained to understand their full impact before additional authorities are granted.”

AB 1098 (Fong and Padilla), Chapter 446, Statutes of 2025, establishes the California Education Interagency Council (Council) within the Government Operations Agency (GovOps) to align education and workforce systems, support adult skill development, and address the changing nature of work and the economy. The Council would adopt strategic and workforce plans, issue recommendations to the Governor and Legislature, and create a faculty and employer advisory committee.

SB 155 (Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 71, Statutes of 2024, created Rebuilding Nursing Infrastructure Grant Program to expand nursing programs and partnerships, address nursing shortages, and increase, educate, and maintain the next generation of registered nurses through the community college system. The Budget Act of 2024 supported this program with \$60 million Proposition 98 General Fund per year for five years, starting in 2024-25, with CCC Strong Workforce Program funding.

AB 2401 (Soria) of 2024, would have required Chancellor of the CCC to develop a BSN Pilot Program that authorizes select community college districts to offer a BSN degree. AB 2401 (Soria) was vetoed by the Governor.

SB 895 (Roth) of 2024, would have required the CCC Chancellor’s Office to establish a Community College BSN Pilot Program that would authorize 10 community college districts to offer a BSN degree. AB 895 (Roth) was vetoed by the Governor, and the veto message was substantively similar to the veto message of AB 2401 (Soria) detailed on page 9 of this analysis.

AB 656 (McCarty), Chapter 663, Statutes of 2023, authorized the CSU to award professional or applied doctoral degrees statewide that do not duplicate UC doctoral degrees and satisfy certain requirements. Required a CSU campus seeking authorization to offer a professional or applied doctoral degree to submit specified information on the proposed doctoral degree for review by

the office of the Chancellor of the CSU, and approval by the CSU Board of Trustees, as provided.

AB 1311 (Soria), Chapter 126, Statutes of 2023, required the LAO to conduct an assessment, on or before January 1, 2025, evaluating the efficacy of existing programs in allied health jointly offered between campuses of the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California. Required the final assessment to be reported, in writing, to the Legislature and the Governor on or before January 1, 2025, as specified.

SB 684 (Hueso), Chapter 936, Statutes of 2022, authorized CSU to offer the DrPH degree, and specified that DrPH degree programs offered by the CSU will focus on health and scientific knowledge translation and transformative community leadership.

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.

AB 829 (Bloom), Chapter 183, Statutes of 2019, authorized CSU to offer the OTD degree, and specifies that OTD degree programs offered by the CSU will focus on preparing occupational therapists to provide health care services and to be consistent with the standards for accreditation set forth by the appropriate accrediting body.

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.

AB 422 (Arambula), Chapter 702, Statutes of 2017, authorized CSU to offer the DNP degree programs, and specified that the DNP offered by the CSU shall focus on the preparation of nursing faculty to teach in postsecondary nursing education programs and may also train nurses for advanced nursing practice or nurse leadership.

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.

AB 2317 (Mullin), Chapter 267, Statutes of 2016, authorized the CSU to offer the Au.D degree, and specifies that the Au.D degree programs at the CSU shall be focused on preparing audiologists to provide health care services and shall be consistent with the standards for accreditation set forth by the Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology.

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 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.

AB 661 (Block) of 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) of 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.

AB 2382 (Blumenfield), Chapter 425, Statutes of 2010, authorized the CSU to offer the D.P.T. degree, and specified that the D.P.T. degree programs at the CSU shall be focused on preparing physical therapists to provide health care services, and shall be consistent with meeting the requirements of the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education.

SB 724 (Scott), Chapter 269, Statutes of 2005, authorized the CSU to independently award the Ed.D degree focused solely on preparing administrative leaders for California public K-14 schools.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

ABC Unified School District
California School Employees Association
Cerritos College
City of Bellflower
City of Cerritos
City of Hawaiian Gardens
City of LA Mirada
Downey Unified School District
LA Mirada Chamber of Commerce
Norwalk Chamber of Commerce
Santa Fe Springs Chamber of Commerce
Selaco Workforce Development Board

Opposition

California Faculty Association
California State University, Office of the Chancellor

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