

Date of Hearing: April 12, 2016

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Jose Medina, Chair

AB 2521 (Cooley) – As Amended March 17, 2016

**SUBJECT:** Los Rios Community College Pilot Program to Support Special Needs Students.

**SUMMARY:** Authorizes the Los Rios Community College District to establish the Los Rios Community College Pilot Program to Support Special Needs Students (Pilot). Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Finds and declares the following of the Legislature:
  - a) Providing comprehensive support services to special needs students empowers them to advocate for themselves, master the skills needed to live independently, and make daily life decisions. In doing so, these students also develop rewarding and appropriate relationships with peers and adults; and,
  - b) With coaching from an independent living skills instructor, special needs students can learn to use public transportation, manage their money, pay bills, shop for groceries, prepare meals, clean their apartments, and do their laundry. These individualized supports complement these students' higher education goals and prepares them to transition confidently to independent living, employment, and adulthood.
- 2) Creates the Pilot and specifies that the Los Rios Community College District may provide access to learning supports for students with special needs, such as autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), including Asperger Syndrome, social and emotional maturation issues, and other related disabilities.
- 3) Specifies that as part of the Pilot program, the district may contract with public or private programs that provide a network of comprehensive services, including the support of resident advisors, tutors, mentors, psychologists, academic liaisons, site directors, and others to help special needs students become more self-sufficient, independent, confident, and successful in their academic endeavors.
- 4) Requires the Pilot program to provide special needs students with all of the following:
  - a) Comprehensive academic support that includes helping them apply to community college and register and enroll in community college classes;
  - b) An independent living skills instructor and encouragement and support in seeking apartments near campus with one or more roommates; and
  - c) An individually assigned mentor, ideally a graduate student in psychology, to provide additional academic and personal support; and,
  - d) Additional support provided by a dedicated team that includes the program's director, a psychologist, additional tutors and mentors, and a resident assistant, as appropriate.

- 5) Specifies that individuals who provide support, as specified, shall submit progress reports for their special needs students participating in the Pilot program to the Los Rios Community College District; and requires the district to compile the information in these reports and post it on the district's Internet Web site for parents and teachers to access.
- 6) Requires the Pilot program to allow special needs students who have not completed high school to simultaneously earn a high school diploma, or its equivalent, and college credits at community colleges within the district.
- 7) Specifies that funding for the Pilot program may be derived from any source, including, but not limited to, state and nonstate funding sources.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Authorizes the California Community Colleges (CCC) Board of Governors (BOG), the California state University Trustees, and the University of California Regents to do the following: a) work with the Department of Finance to develop formulas or procedures for allocating funds as specified; b) adopt rules and regulations necessary to the operation of programs funded; c) maintain present intersegmental efforts to coordinate the planning and development of programs for students with disabilities; and, e) develop and implement as system for evaluating state-funded programs and services for disabled students on each campus at least every five years. Requires, commencing January 1990, and every two years thereafter, the BOG to submit a report to the Governor and the education policy committees of the Legislature describing its efforts to serve students with disabilities (Education Code (EC) 67312).
- 2) Specifies that a student with disabilities shall not be coerced toward a particular program or service and not denied an education because he/she chooses not to receive state funded disabled student programs and services (DSPS) (EC 67313).
- 3) Requires the BOG to adopt rules and regulations for the administration and funding of educational programs and support services to be provided to disabled students by community college districts, as specified. Defines "disabled students" as persons with exceptional needs enrolled at a community college who, because of a verified disability, cannot fully benefit from classes, activities, and services regularly provided by the college without specific additional specialized services or educational programs (EC 84850).
- 4) Establishes the Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act, which declares California's responsibility for providing an array of services and supports to meet the needs of each person with developmental disabilities in the least restrictive environment, regardless of age or degree of disability, and to support their integration into the mainstream life of the community (Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 4500, et seq.).
- 5) Establishes a system of nonprofit regional centers to provide fixed points of contact in the community for all persons with developmental disabilities and their families, to coordinate services and supports best suited to them throughout their lifetime (WIC 4620).

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:** *Background.* The DSPPS program provides support services, specialized instruction, and educational accommodations to students with disabilities so that they can participate as fully and benefit as equitably from the college experience as their non-disabled peers. A Student Educational Contract is developed for each student which links student's goals, curriculum program, and academic accommodations to his/her specific disability related educational limitation. The specific disability must be verified, and there must be an educational limitation that precludes the student from fully participating in general education without additional specialized services.

Examples of services available through DSPPS include test-taking facilitation, assessment for learning disabilities, specialized counseling, interpreter services for hearing-impaired or deaf students, mobility assistance, note taker services, reader services, speech services, transcription services, transportation, specialized tutoring, access to adaptive equipment, job development/placement, registration assistance, special parking and specialized instruction.

*Autism spectrum disorder (ASDs).* The developmental disorders known as ASDs include autism, Asperger's syndrome, Rett's syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified. ASDs are characterized by three distinctive types of behavior, which can range from mild to disabling. The main features of ASDs are impaired social interaction and communication, an inability to empathize, and failure to understand social cues. Other characteristics include repetitive behaviors, such as rocking, twirling, and head banging; and narrow, obsessive interests. Persons with ASDs also often have numerous co-occurring conditions, including behavioral disorders and particular health problems, such as sleep disorders, gastrointestinal problems, and immune system deficiencies.

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) estimates that, between two and six per 1,000 children have ASDs and males are three to four times more likely to have ASDs than females. NIMH states that ASDs can often be reliably detected at three years of age and in some cases as early as 18 months. Early diagnosis is crucial because, although there is no cure for ASDs, evidence indicates that intensive early intervention in optimal educational settings for at least two years during the preschool years results in improved outcomes in most young children with ASDs. While there is no single best treatment package for individuals with ASDs, most respond best to highly structured, specialized programs.

*Need for this measure.* According to the author, students with disabilities face unique challenges as they endeavor to further their education. The author states, "While some CCC students who have disabilities may not request services from Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPPS), this alone is not likely to account for the significant degree of underrepresentation in the CCC system. Outreach to students with special needs have decreased as the CCC struggles to serve students with reduced state funding. As a result, Community College Districts are looking for ways to better serve students on their own."

This measure authorizes the Los Rios Community College District to establish a pilot program to support students with special needs—including, but not limited to, ASDs, specific learning disabilities or social and emotional maturation issues, and other related disabilities. Additionally, this measure allows for the district to partner with public or private programs which offer various comprehensive services, including tutors, psychologists, and independent living skills instructors.

*Current practices of the CCC.* Taft Community College is presently the only college in

California with an occupational and living skills residential program specifically for students with ASDs; however, eight other CCC campuses have similar programs but do not provide for on-campus living. According to Taft Community College, in the last five years, 116 students have matriculated through the program. A wait list exists; if the student is age 18 and above, the average wait time is one year. Presently, three individuals are on the wait list.

According to the CCC Chancellor's Office, Taft Community College utilizes the Kern Regional Center as a sponsoring agency. To note, Kern Regional Center funds the program.

*Policy consideration.* As presently drafted, this measure is silent as to when the Pilot program will begin and end.

***Committee staff recommends, and the author has accepted, the following amendment: Specify that on or by July 1, 2017, the district shall have the Pilot program fully implemented; and, that the program will sunset on June 30, 2022, unless legislation extends the pilot prior to the repeal date.***

*Related legislation.* AB 2383 (Medina), which is pending a hearing in this Committee, would, among others, establish the Autism Employment and Education Program and Fund.

#### **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

##### **Support**

College Living Experience (sponsor)  
Los Rios Community College District

##### **Opposition**

None on file.

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