
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Carol Liu, Chair
2015 - 2016 Regular

Bill No: AB 404
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Version: June 10, 2015
Urgency: No
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Hearing Date: July 1, 2015
Fiscal: Yes

Subject: Community colleges: accreditation

SUMMARY

This bill requires the regional accrediting agency for the California Community Colleges (CCC) to report to the CCC Board of Governors (BOG) the date by which the agency's application for continued recognition is due and requires the CCC BOG to conduct a survey of community colleges, as specified, to develop a report, transmitted to specified entities, that reflects a systemwide evaluation of the regional accrediting agency.

BACKGROUND

Existing law confers upon the CCC BOG the ability to prescribe minimum standards for the formation and operation of community colleges and exercise general supervision over the community colleges. (Education Code § 66700 and § 70901)

As such, regulations (Title 5 California Code of Regulations (CCR) § 51016) have been adopted to require each community college within a district to be an accredited institution – with the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) determining accreditation.

ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Requires the regional accrediting agency for the community colleges to report, as specified, to the CCC BOG the date by which the agency's application for continued recognition is due.
- 2) Requires the CCC BOG to conduct a survey of community colleges including faculty and classified personnel to develop a report that reflects a systemwide evaluation of the regional accrediting agency based on the criteria use to determine an accreditor's status.
- 3) Specifies that the report shall be transmitted to the United States Department of Education (USDE) and the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI).

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, current law provides no mechanism for a CCC system-wide performance review of the CCC's regional accrediting body and providing the overseeing federal entities with such a review increases accountability of the accrediting agency and improves participation by CCC faculty and personnel in the process. This bill seeks to provide a method for collecting stakeholder feedback during an accrediting agency's performance review.
- 2) ***Accreditation, how it works.*** Accreditation is a voluntary, non-governmental peer review process used to determine academic quality. Accrediting agencies are private organizations that establish operating standards for educational or professional institutions and programs, determine the extent to which the standards are met, and publicly announce their findings.

Under federal law, the United States Department of Education (USDE) establishes the general standards for accreditation agencies and is required to publish a list of recognized accrediting agencies that are deemed reliable authorities on the quality of education provided by their accredited institutions. There are three basic types of accreditation:

- a) ***Regional Accreditation.*** There are six USDE-recognized regional accrediting agencies. Each regional accreditor encompasses public, the vast majority of non-profit private (independent), and some for-profit postsecondary educational institutions in the region it serves. California's regional accrediting agency is separated into two commissions: the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) and the Senior College and University Commission (WASC-Sr.).
 - b) ***National Accreditation.*** National accreditation is not based on geography, but more focused to evaluate specific types of schools and programs. National accreditation is designed to allow nontraditional colleges (trade schools, religious schools, certain online schools) to be compared against similarly designed institutions. Different standards and categories are measured, depending on the type of institution.
 - c) ***Specialized/Programmatic Accreditation.*** Offered by accrediting agencies that represent specific fields of study, these agencies do not accredit entire colleges but instead accredit the programs within colleges that prepare students for the specific field or industry. In most cases, specialized accreditation alone does not enable participation in state and federal financial aid programs.
- 3) ***Accreditation of California community colleges.*** After an initial accreditation, colleges must have their accreditation reaffirmed every six years. This process includes a self-study, a site visit by a team of peers, a recommendation by the visiting team and an action by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC). In addition to these core components, colleges must submit a midterm report every three years and annual progress reports. The college/district may also have to submit follow-up reports and host visits as required

by the Commission. There are three levels of sanction prior to termination of accreditation: Warning, Probation, and Show Cause. Follow up reports and accreditation visits are required to retain full accreditation.

Many California community colleges have faced various levels of accreditation sanctions. Most recently the sanctions imposed on City College of San Francisco have drawn attention to ACCJC and its accreditation process. The heightened attention lead to an audit by the California State Auditor, who on June 26, 2014, issued a report on California Community Colleges Accreditation. This audit report provided both a review of the ACCJC and the accreditation process in general, as well as a more in-depth examination of recent events related to City College of San Francisco. The report raised some concerns of the ACCJC and the accreditation process and made a series of recommendations to address the identified concerns. After the release of the State Auditor's report, the Chancellor's Office reconvened its Accreditation Task Force consisting of community college stakeholders. The Accreditation Task Force is charged with providing input through a report to the Chancellor's Office regarding the accreditation process, including addressing the State Auditor's recommendations. The Accreditation Task Force held its final meeting at the end of May and is in the process of finalizing and submitting its final report later this year.

This bill collects and processes information that may compliment the work of the Accreditation Task Force.

- 4) ***National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI).*** NACIQI advises the United State Department of Education on matters related to postsecondary accreditation and the eligibility and certification process for higher education institutions to participate in Federal student aid programs. Its primary function is to provide recommendations to the U.S. Secretary of Education concerning whether accrediting entities' standards are sufficiently rigorous and effective in their application to ensure the entity is a reliable authority regarding the quality of the education provided by the institutions or programs it accredits. To meet that standard, accrediting entities must demonstrate compliance with all the criteria for recognition. Once a recommendation is made, this process allows for public comment. This bill seeks to provide California Community College (CCC) faculty and personnel a method for providing feedback and remain anonymous during the accrediting agencies performance review.

5) ***Related and prior legislation.***

AB 1385 (Ting, 2015) requires notification to the California Community College (CCC) Board of Governors (BOG) before an accrediting agency increases membership fees, special assessments, or other payments charged to a community college. AB 1385 is pending in this Committee.

AB 1397 (Ting, 2015) requires the accrediting agency for the CCC to meet specified operational standards. AB 1397 is pending in this Committee.

SB 1068 (Beall, 2014) would have required the BOG CCC, by January 1, 2016, to report on the feasibility of creating an independent accrediting agency to accredit the

California Community Colleges (CCC) and other 2-year private postsecondary educational institutions, and to make recommendations relative to CCC accreditation. SB 1068 was held on the Senate Appropriations suspense file.

SUPPORT

American Federation of Teachers, Local 2121
California Community College Independents
California Federation of Teachers
California School Employees Association
California Teachers Association
Faculty Association of California Community Colleges

OPPOSITION

None received.

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