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# SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Benjamin Allen, Chair

2017 - 2018 Regular

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**Bill No:** SB 539 **Hearing Date:** April 19, 2017  
**Author:** De León & Portantino  
**Version:** April 3, 2017  
**Urgency:** No **Fiscal:** Yes  
**Consultant:** Olgalilia Ramirez

**Subject:** The Community College Student Achievement Program

## SUMMARY

This bill, commencing with the 2017-18 academic year, would establish the California Community College (CCC) Completion Incentive Grant Program for the purpose of establishing guided pathways and a new grant award for community college students, to assist students in the completion of an associate degree, certificate program or transfer to a four-year university in a timely manner.

## BACKGROUND

Existing law establishes the mission and function of the CCC as 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 degree. The community colleges are also required to offer remedial instruction, English as a Second Language instruction, and adult noncredit instruction, and support services which help students succeed at the postsecondary level. (Education Code § 66010.4)

## ANALYSIS

This bill, commencing with the 2017-18 academic year, would establish the CCC Completion Incentive Grant Program for the purpose of establishing guided pathways and grant award for community college students to assist students in the completion of an associate degree for transfer, transfer to a four-year university or a career technical education certificate. Specifically, it

### *Completion Incentive Grant Program*

- 1) Establishes the Completion Incentive Grant program under the administration of the Chancellor of the CCC for purposes of establishing guided pathways to accomplish all of the following objectives:
  - a) Assist students in completing a program of study leading to an associate degree for transfer, transfer to a four-year university, or a career technical education certificate.
  - b) Improve student completion rates.
  - c) Reduce time to degree.

- d) Increase student ability to obtain high-paying jobs.
- 2) Requires, in order to be eligible for funding under the program, the governing board of a community college district to demonstrate in its application for funding that each participating community college within the district will develop a plan to implement all of the components for a guided pathway that includes all of the following elements:
- a) A completed implementation and readiness assessment for the guided pathway, as provided by the chancellor for each participating college.
  - b) A process and timeline for developing each component of the guided pathway.
  - c) The college's detailed policies regarding the use of information from high school records and other assessment measures to determine each student's course placement and academic support needs.
  - d) A description of:
    - i) How the community college district plans to:
      - i) Work with school districts to ensure high school student are prepared for college-level courses, as specified.
      - ii) Collaborate with the University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU) to develop transfer pathways to UC and CSU.
    - ii) How basic skills programs will ensure that students who are deemed unprepared for college level math or English receive intensive curriculum support to complete a guided pathway in a timely manner.
    - iii) How the community college plans to coordinate its existing programs with the implementation of the guided pathway plan.
    - iv) The community college's expenditure plan for evaluating its existing programs in order to determine how best to coordinate purposes and outcome goals with the implementation of the guided pathway plan.
- 3) Declares the Legislature's intent to appropriate funds through the Budget Act of 2017 to support the Community College Completion Incentive Grant Program.

#### *Student Grant Award*

- 4) Commencing with the 2017-18 academic year, requires each participating community college to provide a grant award to a student who meets the specified

requirements for purposes of assisting students with additional financial aid to offset his or her total cost of attendance.

- 5) Requires, in order to be eligible for a grant award, that a student meet all of the following requirements:
  - a) Has received an award under the Full-Time Success Grant program established under the Budget Act of 2015 as specified.
  - b) Be enrolled in a program of study and has completed an education plan identifying courses, sequences of courses, key progress milestones and other requirements the student must complete to earn an associate degree or certificate or meet transfer requirements.
  - c) Not be incarcerated.
  - d) Not be in default of any student loan and has not failed to repay a federal or state student grant or loan when required to do so.
  - e) Be a California resident or be exempt from paying nonresident tuition, as defined.
  - f) Maintains a grade point average of at least 2.0, and complies with either of the following:
    - i) Enrolls in 15 units or more credit units per semester, or the equivalent number of units per quarter, to be considered on track to obtain an associate degree for transfer or otherwise transfer to a four-year university, within two academic years.
    - ii) Enrolls in a sufficient number of units per semester or quarter, as determined by the community college, to be considered on track to receive a certificate for a career technical education program within the published length of time.
  - g) Earns a sufficient number of credits per award year to be considered on track to complete an associate degree for transfer, or to otherwise transfer to a four-year university within two academic years, or complete a career technical education certificate within the published time
- 6) Specifies the grant award amount to be \$4,000 and requires that an award be based on the financial need of the applicant and prohibits the grant award from exceeding the calculated financial need of the applicant.
- 7) Requires awarding of the grant, to the extent practicable, at the same time as the overall financial aid package, clarifies that the grant is a supplemental grant, prohibits the grant from supplanting any other grant, fee waiver or scholarship received by the student.

- 8) Requires each participating community college to administer the grant award pursuant to the provisions in the bill.
- 9) Provides that the grant award program requirements are not operative in a fiscal year unless funding has been provided for that purpose in the annual Budget Act or other statute.
- 10) Requires the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges to report to the Legislature, by April 1, 2019, on information related to outcomes of award recipients.

*Definition of Guided Pathways*

- 11) Defines various terms for the purpose of the provisions outline in the bill including, "Guided Pathway," to mean a comprehensive set of community college programs and services focused on improving student success that includes all of the following:
  - a) Clearly structured, coherent academic program maps for all academic programs that meet all of the following:
    - i) Reflect curriculum aligned with university transfer programs and labor market needs.
    - ii) Provide detailed course sequences and progress milestones.
    - iii) Represent the most efficient path for students to complete academic programs while maintaining the quality of these programs.
  - b) Student advising and support services that help students transition from high school to community college, explore academic and vocational fields, chose a major, develop a full education plan, and obtain contextualized, integrated academic support to help them pass program gateway courses.
  - c) Procedures and systems to track students' progress in following their education plans, identify students at risk of not progressing in a program, and intervening promptly with advising, academic, and other supports to help those students resume progress or develop a more viable education plan.
  - d) Program-specific student learning outcomes aligned with student goals for transfer or employment, effective teaching practices, and applied learning experiences.

*Other*

- 12) States legislative findings and declarations relative to existing research on workforce needs, Community College transfer and remediation rates.

**STAFF COMMENTS**

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, the Community College Completion Incentive Grant established by this bill is based upon research that reveals how a student's lack of financial resources affects his or her ability to enroll full-time (12 units or more) or complete a degree program or career pathway at a community college. Research also shows that in addition to more financial aid, a key component to success is the student's ability to stay on track and take the necessary, relevant units to reach their educational goals. The author highlights the state's recent investments in California Community College (CCC) student success programs, all of which are designed to increase student completion, particularly for low-income and underserved students. However, more work can be done to ensure these initiatives are working together in a cohesive, integrated manner to establish a system focused student completion. This bill proposes to create clearly structured and coherent program pathways and address the financial needs of CCC students for the purpose of assisting students to reach their educational goals in a timely manner.
  
- 2) ***Guided pathways initiative and related budget activity.*** The guided pathways initiative is backed by national research and numerous community colleges and universities across the country involved in organized guided pathways initiatives. In California, several community colleges are implementing pathways on their own. In order for the guided pathways initiative to succeed, CCCs must integrate their existing student success programs to support a cohesive system focused on helping the student stay on path and complete college.

Citing current efforts related to improving student success programs and services, the Governor's 2017-18 budget proposes additional resources for implementation of Guided Pathways to support community colleges to develop an integrated, institution-wide approach to student success. The initiative is meant to implement systemic change at each college to do the following: improve student knowledge of what course to take to meet their completion objectives, monitor student progress toward completion, and develop clear learning outcomes for students. According to the Governor's proposal, the expectation is to improve completion rates, reduce-time-to degree, increase California students' employment opportunities, and reduce student debt. This bill seeks to compliment these efforts.

- 3) ***Community College Completion Incentive Grant Program eligibility.*** This bill outlines various eligibility criteria for college districts and colleges seeking to participate in the Community College Completion Incentive Grant Program including the development of a plan to implement all of the components for a guided pathway. Plans must include a description of how the community college district plans to work with k-12 school districts and collaborate with the University of California and the California State University, how basic skills programs will ensure that student are provided with the appropriate support and how the community college plans to coordinate its programs.

This bill declares the intent of the Legislature to appropriate funds through the Budget Act of 2017 to support the Community College Completion Incentive Grant Program.

- 4) ***Student completion award.*** Grant programs like the one outlined in the bill have been adopted by several universities. According to a 2013 report by Complete College America, *The Game Changers: Are states implementing the best reforms to get more college graduates?*, the University of Hawaii's "A 15 to Finish" campaign educated students on the benefits of taking 15 units per semester and increased the number of freshmen enrolling at that level from 15 percent to 24 percent systemwide, and from 38 percent to 56 percent at its flagship campus. Additionally, Adams State University in Colorado increased the number of credits taken by its students by 11 percent in two years after offering \$500 scholarships to students who completed 30 credits per year.

According to a recent report by the Legislative Analysts' Office, in 2014-15 approximately 34 percent of California Community College (CCC) students were enrolled full-time (12 or more units). CCC program completion rates have declined slightly in the last few years, from 49 percent in 2014-2015 to 47 percent in 2015-16. Similarly, 49 percent of students graduate from the community college system after six years. While 12 units meet the "full-time" requirement for financial aid eligibility, a CCC student must complete an average of 15 units each semester in order to be on pace to graduate within two years. It appears many students forgo the additional units in order to accommodate time to work to meet the costs of their education, while some students are unaware that completing 15 units each semester is necessary to graduate within two-years. This bill proposes to improve completion rates at CCC by increasing the amount of aid available for students who enroll in the requisite number of units necessary to complete their degrees within two years.

According to the author, the intent of the grant award program is to offer students who complete 30 credits per year the \$4,000 grant award thereby allowing summer enrollment to count towards eligibility. Consistent with this intent, **staff recommends** that the bill be amended as follows:

- *88912(b)(5)(C): Enrolls in summer coursework after enrolling in 12 or more credits per the primary semester or quarter, or the applicable number of units per quarter, to be considered on track to receive an associate degree for transfer, associate degree or to otherwise transfer to a four-year university, within two academic years.*
- 88912(b)(5)(B): Enrolls in a sufficient number of units per semester or quarter or *summer coursework*, as determined by the community college, to be considered on track to receive a certificate for a career technical education program within the published length of time.
- Allow for credits earned while participating in a dual enrollment program to count toward the requisite number of units.

- 5) **Why is this important?** Aside from benefitting the state through increased access and more efficient movement of students through the Community College system, timely degree completion also reduces the over cost of higher education for students and families. According to a related report by the Campaign for College Opportunity, a student who takes four years to earn an associate degree can spend as much as \$15,200 more on fees and other expenses, and will earn \$33,500 less than someone who graduated in two years. As a result of these additional years, this student would incur \$48,700 in extra expenses and lost wages.

As mentioned, several initiatives are underway at community colleges to address student success and timely completion including the associate for transfer, Student Success and Support program, Full-time Success Grant, Student Success for Basic Skills program, Strong Workforce program and others. Notably the associate degree for transfer established by SB 1440 (Padilla, Chapter 428, Statutes of 2010) requires community colleges to create two-year (60 unit) degrees that are fully transferable to California State University (CSU). Students who earn such a degree are guaranteed admission into the CSU system with junior standing.

This bill provides an additional tool for California Community Colleges (CCC) to improve completion rates, reduce time to degree and increase a student's ability to obtain high-paying jobs.

- 6) **Who is eligible?** This bill outlines various eligibility criteria for the student completion award, including receipt of an award under the Full-Time Success Grant program established under the Budget Act of 2015. The Full-Time Student Success Grant provides an annual supplemental award of \$600 to community college Cal Grant B recipients who have already received a full-time Cal Grant B award payment. Because the Board of Governor's fee waiver covers tuition for Cal Grant B eligible students, a recipient of Cal Grant B receives \$1,656 for access costs (i.e. books and supplies). Coupled with the proposed completion grant award (\$4,000) a student could be eligible for an annual award of up to \$6,256.
- 7) **Is there a need?** According to the California Student Aid Commission, "non-tuition" costs exceed \$18,000 annually for CCC students living independently. Research by the Institute for College Access and Success reveals a student's ability to pay the full cost of attendance is an important factor in his or her success. As such, a student who cannot afford to fully cover access costs such as textbooks, transportation, food and housing may make choices that undermine their ability to complete their education. For example, they may need to work more hours at the expense of studying. This bill proposes to address affordability by providing an additional source of grant funding to meet costs other than fees for students who already receive grants and scholarships for this purpose.
- 8) **Technical amendments.** Consistent with the author's request, **staff recommends** the bill be amended as follows:

- a) Throughout the bill strike “incentive,” from “Community College Completion Incentive Grant Program”.
- b) On page 5 line 3 after, “transfer,” insert associate degree.
- c) On page 5 line 4 strike, “associate degree or.”
- d) On page 8 line 3 after “associate degree for transfer,” insert associate degree.
- e) On page 8 line 11 after, “for transfer,” insert associate degree.
- f) On page 9 line 5 after “transfer,” insert associate degree.
- g) On page 9 line 28 strike, “Community College Student Achievement,” Program, insert “Community College Completion Grant Program.”

**SUPPORT**

The Campaign for College Opportunity  
The Institute for College Access and Success

**OPPOSITION**

None received.

**-- END --**