

Good news on the CA state budget front for implementing purposeful pathways

July 2026

The adopted 2026-27 California state budget includes many items that support implementation and scaling of purposeful pathways. The budget supports the expansion and integration of key pathway elements, especially dual enrollment and student supports.

Overall, the adopted education K-12 and community college budget items support implementation of the new Master Plan for Career Education with a focus on college and career pathways.

Highlights

Dual enrollment funding

- \$100M for another round of competitive K-12 grants supporting dual enrollment.
- \$10M for a community college early college demonstration initiative.
- \$35M to support the community college Rising Scholars Network; these programs utilize the dual enrollment and Guided Pathways frameworks.
- \$35M to establish the Pathways to Bilingual Teaching Program, which includes dual enrollment.

Policy changes related to dual enrollment

- Allow 180 instructional minutes for students in dual enrollment, making it easier for partnerships to schedule college classes during the school day.
- Support high school students in dual enrollment programs to receive dual credit (i.e., both college credit and credit for high school requirements).
- Authorize regional occupational centers or programs to establish middle college high schools or enter into CCAP partnerships.
- Initial steps to include dual enrollment in the California College Guidance Initiative and the California Cradle-to-Career Data system.

Funds supporting integration of key pathway strategies

- \$5B one-time K-12 Student Support and Professional Development Discretionary Block Grant. Although funds are flexible, LEAs are encouraged to use them for state priorities including “expanding career pathways and dual enrollment.”
- Ongoing \$1B for the California Community Schools Partnership Program, which includes \$50M in one-time funding for the Secondary School Redesign Pilot Program.

Details are on the following pages. More information can be found in the adopted legislation—including the [omnibus K12 trailer bill](#) (AB 126) and [the higher education trailer bill](#) (SB 135). The full 2026-27 budget will be posted on the [Department of Finance](#) website once all sections are available.

Dual Enrollment Funding

K-12 grant program

The K-12 budget adds \$100M for another round of College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP) and Middle College or Early College (MC/EC) competitive grants. LEAs can apply for grants of:

- \$100K to establish CCAP partnerships.
- \$250K to plan and start up a new MC/EC, or \$100K to expand an existing MC/EC high school or program.
- Grantees using these funds to expand dual enrollment opportunities directly to justice-involved youth in county-operated facilities can receive an additional \$50K.

Note that dual credit requirements are included in this new round of funding. Courses offered pursuant to this section shall be “part of structured, well-sequenced pathways and count toward postsecondary certificate or degree requirements, and are **counted toward high school graduation requirements in equivalent subject areas.**” [emphasis added]

Application priority

For all grants, priority will be given to LEAs serving higher than the state average of low income or underserved youth and homeless, foster or justice-involved youth; LEAs with lower than the state average rate of A-G completion; and LEAs that have not received grants through previous rounds of funding.

Other requirements

- Grantees will be required to provide a written plan for continued financial and administrative support for the funded coursework for a period of no less than three years after the end of the grant period.
- Funds are to be distributed on or before January 1, 2027
- Additional reporting requirements include courses taken, courses taken and completed, disaggregated by type of program and student demographics.

Early College Demonstration Initiative

The 2026-27 community college budget included a one-time allocation of \$10M for a **California Early College Demonstration Initiative** to support dual enrollment. More details are expected, but the demonstration project will be modeled after comprehensive early college high school partnerships such as the one between McFarland High School and Bakersfield College.

Rising Scholars

\$35M is allocated to continue support for the **Rising Scholars Network** of community colleges serving incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students. Participating colleges may implement the program’s components on a phased timeline, but “must utilize both Dual Enrollment and Guided Pathways frameworks.”

New Pathways to Bilingual Teaching Program

\$35M is budgeted to establish the **Pathways to Bilingual Teaching Program**. The program includes partnerships with community colleges to use “dual enrollment, including early and middle college programs, to enable ... candidates to earn part or all of their associate’s degrees or bilingual authorization before graduation.”

Dual Enrollment Policy Changes

Instructional minutes change

The minimum school day in a high school is 240 minutes. For high school students enrolled in community college courses, however, the budget contains language reducing that to 180 minutes, as follows:

“A day of attendance for a pupil enrolled in an early college high school, a middle college high school, or dual enrollment courses offered by a local educational agency with or without a College and Career Access Pathways partnership agreement who is also a special part-time student enrolled in a community college and who will receive academic credit upon satisfactory completion of enrolled courses, is 180 minutes of attendance.”

- This means that LEAs will be able to collect full ADA for students enrolled in community college courses if they meet the required 180 minutes of high school instructional time, while the college can collect apportionment for the college courses.
- This will make it easier to schedule and embed more college courses in college and career pathways throughout the school day.

Dual credit

For the first time, the budget added language to Ed Code to the effect that high school students earning college credit via dual enrollment shall also earn dual credit toward their high school requirements. (For more background on dual credit in California, see CLPs recent report, [Credit Where Credit is Due](#)).

Section 76001.5 is added to the Education Code, to read:

- (a) Courses offered through a dual enrollment program offered by the local educational agency, with an agreement with an institution of higher education, shall be deemed dual credit courses.
- (b) A dual credit course offered pursuant to subdivision (a) may be counted simultaneously toward both of the following:
 - (1) High school credit on an official transcript from the participating local educational agency.
 - (2) Postsecondary credit on an official transcript at the participating institution of higher education.

Also, as noted in the funding section above, courses funded via the CCAP and MC/EC grant program are to be counted toward high school graduation requirements in **equivalent subject areas**. That means they are not counted solely as elective courses.

Additional policy changes

- The budget bill authorizes regional occupational centers or programs to establish middle college high schools or enter into CCAP partnerships.
- The bill gives LEAs the responsibility of flagging dual enrollment courses in data files submitted to CCGI. CCGI will support LEAs with technical assistance.
- The legislature stated its intent that future K-12 and community college dual enrollment outcome and data reporting be linked through the California Cradle-to-Career Data system.

Integrating Key Strategies: Dual Enrollment, Pathways and Community Schools

The budget indicates support for the integration of effective practice, connecting dual enrollment, pathways and advising with high school redesign and community school funding. This is evident in several places in the discretionary funding priorities, community school funding, and an additional carve out for secondary school redesign, as follows:

- **\$5B one-time allocation for the K-12 Student Support and Professional Development Discretionary Block Grant.** The block grant is flexible and should help LEAs cover rising operational costs and enrollment declines. Additionally, LEAs are encouraged to use these flexible funds for state priorities including: professional development, teacher recruitment/retention, and “[e]xpanding career pathways and dual enrollment efforts, consistent with the Master Plan for Career Education.” [emphasis added]
- **Ongoing \$1B for the California Community Schools Partnership Program.**
 - The budget language stresses the importance of partnerships with business and higher education to support career pathways, dual enrollment and dual credit.
 - Of the community school funds, \$50 million in one-time funds is allocated to grants to develop, identify, and implement models of secondary school redesign pursuant to the [Secondary School Redesign Pilot Program](#).
 - This investment demonstrates the state’s growing commitment to school transformation that integrates the key elements of pathways, early college opportunities, and the supports that young people need to succeed and thrive.