



June 5, 2026

The Honorable Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair
Senate Education Committee
1021 O Street, Suite 6740
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 2121 (Berman), as amended on April 9, 2026

Position: Support

Dear Senator Pérez:

On behalf of the Association of California Community College Administrators (ACCCA), I am writing in strong support of Assembly Bill 2121 (Berman), the Defending Student Equity and Access Act. ACCCA represents administrators and educational leaders from California's 73 community college districts and advocates for policies that promote student success, educational equity, and institutional effectiveness. This measure would provide community college districts with essential flexibility to sustain federally defunded student support services without incurring a compliance penalty under California's 50% Law.

California's community colleges serve the most diverse student population in higher education, including large numbers of low-income, first-generation, veteran, foster youth, and historically underserved students. Federal Minority Serving Institution (MSI) and TRIO programs have long played a critical role in supporting these students through counseling, mentoring, tutoring, transfer assistance, and other evidence-based services that improve student persistence and completion. Recent federal efforts to eliminate or redirect funding for MSI and TRIO programs have created substantial uncertainty for colleges seeking to maintain continuity of support for vulnerable students. As a result, community colleges face significant challenges in planning for and sustaining services that many students rely upon to achieve their educational goals.

While many districts are willing to use local unrestricted resources to sustain these vital services if federal funding is reduced or eliminated, current law creates an unintended disincentive. Federal grant dollars used for these programs are excluded from California's 50% Law calculation. When districts replace lost federal funding with local unrestricted dollars, those replacement funds are no longer excluded and instead increase the current expense of education denominator, potentially placing districts at risk of noncompliance. As a result, districts that step forward to protect student services may face state compliance consequences for doing so.

AB 2121 addresses this issue through a narrow and temporary solution. The bill would allow local unrestricted funds used to backfill federally defunded student support programs to be treated neutrally under the 50% Law calculation, preventing districts from being penalized for maintaining services that students depend upon. The measure does not require any new state funding, create any state reimbursement obligation, or permanently alter the 50% Law.

Importantly, AB 2121 includes strong safeguards to ensure instructional programs and faculty remain fully protected. The bill prohibits the exclusion from being used to reduce instructional spending, diminish the quality of instruction, or circumvent existing faculty staffing requirements, including the Faculty Obligation Number and the 75/25 full-time faculty goals. It also limits the exclusion to student support programs previously funded with federal dollars and includes annual reporting and certification requirements. The provisions sunset automatically after five fiscal years or upon restoration of federal funding, whichever occurs first.

Without this flexibility, colleges may be forced to reduce services for students who already face the greatest barriers to degree completion, transfer, and economic mobility. Community college leaders are committed to preserving educational opportunity and student success, particularly during periods of fiscal uncertainty. AB 2121 provides governing boards and college administrators with a responsible and transparent mechanism to sustain critical student support services without creating unintended compliance risks under state law.

For these reasons, ACCCA respectfully urges your AYE vote on AB 2121.

Sincerely,



Dr. Claudia Lourido-Habib
Executive Director

cc: Members, Senate Education Committee
The Honorable Marc Berman
Michelle McKay Underwood, Legislative Advocate, School Services of California Inc.
Kyle Hyland, Legislative Advocate, School Services of California Inc.