



AB 1920 (Gonzalez)

California College Promise

Summary

AB 1920 clarifies eligibility under the California College Promise Program to ensure students are not penalized for earning certificates that are part of a structured pathway toward an associate degree. The bill specifies that a certificate awarded as part of a course sequence leading to an associate degree does not make a student ineligible for a Promise fee waiver.

Background

The California College Promise Program was established to increase college access, encourage full-time enrollment, and support timely completion by providing eligible first-time, full-time community college students with up to two years of enrollment fee waivers.

Many California Community College programs are intentionally designed with stackable credentials, allowing students to earn certificates along the pathway to an associate degree. These certificates:

- Recognize progress toward completion
- Provide workforce value and employable skills
- Support guided pathways and structured program design

Problem

Education Code Section 76396.3 states that students who have “previously earned a degree or certificate” are ineligible for the Promise fee waiver. In practice, this language has created uncertainty for colleges and students when a certificate is awarded during enrollment as part of a degree pathway.

Without clarification, students working toward an associate degree through a structured sequence could risk losing Promise eligibility simply for earning an interim certificate, creating:

- Potential financial penalties for academic progress
- Disincentives for colleges to award pathway-aligned certificates
- Confusion in program implementation across colleges

Solution

AB 1920 adds targeted statutory clarification to Education Code Section 76396.3. This clarification ensures:

- Students remain eligible for Promise fee waivers when earning stackable certificates within an associate degree pathway
- Colleges can continue awarding pathway-aligned certificates without risking student aid eligibility

- Statute is applied consistently with the structured design of guided pathways programs
- The Promise Program continues to support completion and workforce-aligned progress

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