

TO: Chief Executive Officers
Chief Instructional Officers
Chief Student Services Officers
Chief Business Officers
Admissions and Registrars Professionals
Academic Senate Presidents
Financial Aid Directors
Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement Directors

FROM: James E. Todd, Ph.D., Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs

RE: Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA) Program Regulations

On Nov. 18, 2024, the California Community Colleges Board of Governors approved the adoption of a new subchapter 3, sections 56300–56304, of title 5, division 6, chapter 7 of the California Code of Regulations, formally establishing the Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA) Program in the California Community Colleges. The [regulations](#) were filed with the Office of Administrative Law and the Secretary of State on Sept. 18, 2025, and became effective on Oct. 18, 2025. In accordance with title 5, section 52010, college districts have up to 180 days from the effective date—until April 26, 2026—to bring local policies and procedures into alignment with these regulatory requirements.

Background

For decades, the MESA program has been one of California’s most effective and transformative models for advancing equity and excellence in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Through structured academic support, mentoring, and community, MESA programs established at community colleges help underserved and underrepresented students majoring in calculus-based STEM fields prepare for successful transfer to four-year universities and thrive in baccalaureate-level studies. The program has long demonstrated how intentional design and support can open pathways that have too often been closed to first-generation and low-income students.

In 2023, the Legislature enacted Senate Bill 444 (Newman), directing the California Community Colleges to develop regulations for the MESA program. In response, the Chancellor’s Office led a comprehensive and collaborative process, drafting the regulations with input from MESA Program Directors, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC), and the Consultation Council, which includes institutional, labor, and student representatives. The adopted and approved regulations formally codified MESA within title 5, establishing a clear and consistent

statewide framework that honors the program’s proven history while positioning it for continued growth and innovation.

These new regulations ensure that MESA’s mission—to cultivate diverse talent in STEM, expand transfer opportunities, and close long-standing equity gaps—is now embedded in the structure of the community college system itself. They strengthen local capacity, affirm MESA as a vital instrument of Vision 2030, and reinforce our shared belief that equitable access to STEM education is essential to California’s future prosperity.

New Regulations

At the center of these regulations, [§ 56300](#) establishes the overarching purpose of the MESA program: to ensure that community colleges provide the structure, guidance, and community that help students—particularly those affected by social, economic, and educational disadvantage—prepare for successful transfer in STEM majors. This section emphasizes that MESA programs are not only about expanding participation, but about deepening student success through targeted academic, career, and personal support that enables persistence, confidence, and achievement in rigorous STEM pathways.

The definition of eligible students is detailed in [§ 56301](#), which provides a clear and inclusive framework for participation. MESA participants are qualified through several equity-focused criteria such as being a first-generation college student, attending underperforming high schools, receiving need-based financial aid, participating in programs like EOPS, CARE, CalWORKs, or TRIO, living in households at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level, or being current or former foster youth. Colleges may also designate up to ten percent of participants under “special circumstances,” recognizing that each student’s path to higher education is unique and may not fit a single profile.

Operational expectations are outlined in [§ 56302](#), which requires district governing boards to adopt policies and procedures that ensure consistency and quality in MESA implementation. Colleges are asked to expand participation in STEM majors, strengthen outreach and partnerships with local high schools, and build transfer pipelines that shorten time to degree completion. The section also highlights the importance of collaboration—with University of California and California State University MESA programs, MESA College Prep, and the California Alliance for Minority Participation (CAMP)—to establish seamless mentorship, transfer, and career networks that support students from enrollment through university transfer and beyond.

Integration across existing student success programs is guided by [§ 56303](#), which directs colleges to align MESA with the Student Equity and Achievement (SEA) Program, Student Success and Support, counseling, transfer centers, and leadership development initiatives. This alignment ensures that MESA is not an isolated program, but a coordinated and essential component of each

college's equity infrastructure, reinforcing the principle that equitable STEM achievement depends on integrated, student-centered systems of support.

Finally, [§ 56304](#) governs the use of funds and accountability. MESA program implementation is ultimately a local responsibility, and each college has the authority—and the obligation—to determine how best to design and deliver MESA in ways that meet the needs of its students and community. Districts receiving MESA funding must locally determine and ensure that programs are adequately staffed and supported, that expenditures comply with funding requirements, and that resources are used strategically to expand and strengthen MESA services. Thoughtful local evaluation and continuous improvement will be essential to ensuring that program investments translate into measurable gains in equity, transfer, and STEM workforce participation.

Together, these sections create a coherent and equitable framework for scaling MESA systemwide. They promote consistency and accountability while allowing colleges the flexibility to innovate—ensuring that every MESA program reflects the distinct strengths of its local community and the shared mission of the California Community Colleges to prepare a diverse generation of scientists, engineers, and innovators.

Advancing Equitable Stem Success: Next Steps for Colleges

These regulations are more than administrative requirements—they represent a collective commitment to student opportunity and success. MESA provides the structure and community that turn potential into achievement: academic enrichment, mentorship, exposure to research and professional pathways, and a network of peers and role models who sustain persistence. These are the very conditions that close equity gaps and expand California's innovation economy.

Colleges should review the new regulations and align local policies, procedures, and evaluation processes accordingly. Each district should ensure that:

- Eligibility and intake processes reflect the criteria in § 56301.
- Program operations and board-approved procedures align with § 56302.
- MESA is intentionally connected with equity, counseling, and transfer initiatives in accordance with § 56303; and
- Fiscal practices and staffing meet the expectations of § 56304, with local evaluation to guide improvement.

Districts are encouraged to approach implementation collaboratively, drawing upon the expertise of MESA directors, faculty, and classified professionals who understand their students' needs best.

Additional Guidance

The Chancellor's Office will be maintaining a Frequently Asked Questions document to address questions related to the implementation of title 5 regulations for MESA. The document is to be updated routinely as questions arise and as additional guidance is released. The first iteration of the FAQ will be available by Oct. 31, 2025 on the [CCCCO MESA website](#).

Conclusion

By embedding MESA into title 5, California strengthens one of its most powerful tools for educational equity and STEM achievement. These regulations affirm that the path to innovation begins with access, that access requires structure and support, and that success depends on the collective leadership of our colleges.

The Chancellor's Office extends its gratitude to the students, educators, and partners who continue to build and sustain MESA across the state. Together, we reaffirm our shared mission: to ensure that every student, regardless of background, has the opportunity to thrive in STEM and contribute to California's future.

For questions regarding this memorandum, please contact Program Specialist Cora Rainey at MESA@CCCCO.edu.

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