

Date of Hearing: April 25, 2018

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
Patrick O'Donnell, Chair  
AB 2979 (Burke) – As Amended March 22, 2018

**SUBJECT:** High school diplomas: State Seal of Career Technical Education Pathway Completion

**SUMMARY:** Establishes a State Seal of Career Technical Education (CTE) Pathway Completion is established to recognize high school graduates who have attained a high level of knowledge and proficiency in fields of study within one of the 15 industry sectors described in the California Career Technical Education Model Curriculum Standards. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Establishes the State Seal of CTE Pathway Completion (Seal) to recognize high school graduates who have attained a high level of knowledge and proficiency in fields of study within one of the 15 industry sectors described in the California Career Technical Education Model Curriculum Standards as adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE).
- 2) Establishes the purposes of the Seal as follows:
  - a) To encourage students to study CTE.
  - b) To encourage school districts to provide high-quality CTE pathways leading to industry-recognized certification or licenses.
  - c) To certify and recognize high achievement within CTE pathways.
  - d) To provide students with a tool to demonstrate occupational competency to employers.
  - e) To provide postsecondary educational institutions with a method to recognize and give academic credit to applicants seeking admission.
  - f) To prepare students with career-ready skills.
  - g) To engage students in career exploration at an early age.
- 3) States that the Seal certifies that a graduating high school student has attained a high level of proficiency in a CTE pathway and meets all of the following criteria:
  - a) Attained a 3.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale for a sequence of CTE courses taken in high school.
  - b) Has one of the following:
    - i. An industry recognized CTE credential or certificate.
    - ii. A score of 80 percent or higher on an approved CTE third party pathway assessment.

- iii. A grade of B or higher in a college-level CTE course taken through concurrent enrollment.
  - c) Participation in an extracurricular activity relating to the CTE pathway in which he or she is enrolled in, including any of the following extracurricular activities:
    - i. Active participation in a state recognized CTE student organization that meets regularly and either participates in or organizes events relating to the CTE pathway or related industry sector.
    - ii. Participation in CTE-based competitions.
    - iii. Internships with organizations or employers who work in the CTE field or fields in which the student is enrolled.
  - d) Participation in the research of an industry-related topic either done independently or in coordination with an industry professional.
- 4) States that the Seal is to be awarded by the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI).
  - 5) States that school district participation in the program is voluntary.
  - 6) Requires the SPI to do the following:
    - a) Prepare and deliver to participating school districts an appropriate insignia to be affixed to the diploma or transcript of the student indicating that the student has been awarded a Seal by the SPI.
    - b) Provide other information the SPI deems necessary for school districts to successfully participate in the program.
  - 7) Requires a school district that participates in the program to do both of the following:
    - a) Maintain appropriate records in order to identify students who have earned a Seal.
    - b) Affix the appropriate insignia to the diploma or transcript of each student who earns a Seal.
  - 8) Prohibits fees from being charged to a student to receive a Seal.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes the State Seal of Civic Engagement, to be affixed to the diploma of qualifying high school graduates, to recognize demonstrated excellence in civics education and participation and have demonstrated an understanding of the United States Constitution, the California Constitution, and the democratic system of government.

- 2) Establishes the State Seal of Biliteracy (SSB), which provides recognition to high school students who have demonstrated proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in one or more languages in addition to English. Requires each school district, county office of education, or direct-funded charter school that confers the SSB to maintain appropriate records in order to identify students who have met the established criteria for the award and to affix the SSB insignia to the diploma or transcript of each qualifying student.
- 3) Establishes the Golden State Seal Merit Diploma (GSSMD), which provides recognition to public high school graduates who have demonstrated mastery of high school curriculum in six designated subject areas, four of which must be mathematics, English language arts, science, and United States history. Eligibility requirements for the GSSMD include a combination of course grades, results from assessments produced by private providers or local education agencies (LEAs), and/or qualifying Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment of California Standards Tests scores for use by LEAs to award the GSSMD to graduating students.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:**

***Need for the bill.*** The author's office states, "Assembly Bill 2979 establishes the State Seal of Career Technical Education Pathway Completion to recognize high school graduates who have attained a high level of knowledge and proficiency in a Career Technical Education Pathway. CTE programs not only prepare students to be college and career ready but they can also provide students with a pathway to a lifelong career. We must ensure all Californians have the opportunity to gain the skills necessary to obtain a job that provides economic security for their families and we must support a strong and growing middle class. AB 2979 recognizes the accomplishments of graduates who complete a CTE Pathway by awarding them the State Seal of Career Technical Education Pathway Completion on their diploma and transcript."

***Defining Career Technical Education.*** According to the CDE, "CTE is a program of study that involves a multiyear sequence of courses that integrates core academic knowledge with technical and occupational knowledge to provide students with a pathway to postsecondary education and careers. CTE programs in California have been organized into 15 industry sectors, covering 58 pathways that identify the knowledge and skills students need. Partnerships are usually developed between high schools, businesses, and postsecondary schools, providing pathways to employment and associate, Bachelor's and advanced degrees.

CTE prepares students for the world of work by introducing them to workplace competencies, and makes academic content accessible to students by providing it in a hands-on context. Along the way, students develop career-relevant, real-world 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills."

***College and career readiness is a state priority.*** Each local educational agency's Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) must demonstrate, among other priorities, how they are ensuring that all students are being prepared to be college and career ready. The College and Career Readiness Index displayed on each LEA's dashboard includes data on the number of students completing a CTE pathway. CDE notes that over 90% of districts report that CTE is now embedded into their LCAP.

**How many CTE courses are offered in California?** Data from the California Department of Education (CDE) on schools, courses, and A-G approval rates, during the 2016-17 school year, are shown on the table to the right. These data show that the most commonly offered subjects were Information and Communication Technologies, and Arts, Media, and Entertainment.

2016-17 Subject	Number of Schools	Courses Taught	A-G approved
Agriculture and Natural Resources	586	4,803	1,975
Arts, Media, and Entertainment	1,252	8,825	5,696
Building and Construction Trades	590	2,347	138
Business and Finance	845	3,760	540
Education, Child Development, and Family Services	871	5,106	784
Energy and Utilities	174	414	157
Engineering and Architecture	740	3,049	1,712
Fashion and Interior Design	283	700	117
Health Science and Medical Technology	846	4,759	1,743
Hospitality, Tourism, and Recreation	862	4,064	631
Information and Communication Technologies	1,306	6,447	1,576
Manufacturing and Product Development	585	1,928	258
Marketing, Sales, and Service	507	1,660	410
Public Services	618	2,276	508
Transportation	551	2,360	158
Work Experience	529	2,044	17

This bill proposes to recognize CTE pathway completion. A CTE pathway is a sequence of CTE courses in an industry sector. There does not appear to be statewide data regarding the number of students who complete a CTE pathway.

**Opportunity gaps in extracurricular CTE activities?** This bill requires that, to be eligible to receive a diploma seal, students must have completed an extracurricular CTE activity. Eligible activities include: active participation in a state recognized CTE student organization that meets regularly and either participates in or organizes events relating to the CTE pathway or related industry sector; participation in CTE-based competitions; and internships with organizations or employers who work in the CTE field or fields in which the student is enrolled. Such activities can have clear academic and career benefits for students.

It is unclear how widespread such opportunities are in California. However, research related to out-of-school STEM opportunities suggests that an opportunity gap may exist. With regard to STEM programs, according to a 2014 study commissioned by the Association of Children’s Museums Committee on Successful Out-of-School STEM Learning, titled *Broadening Access to STEM Learning through Out-of-School Learning Environments*, “there are still significant challenges to ensuring youth in low socioeconomic communities have equitable access to out-of-school STEM learning opportunities, most of which revolve around issues of finances and funding.”

The report notes that most out-of-school programs – including STEM-focused programs – are fee-based in some form, and even when the fees are nominal or nonexistent, “participation still requires a significant amount of resource investment from families in terms of time and resources.” The report notes that transportation is a particularly troublesome issue when programs are based at sites beyond the neighborhood, and that while many out-of-school programs work to ensure affordability, “there is growth in high-profile and high-visibility robotics programs, which require a buy-in cost in the thousands of dollars, and also require the recruitment of multiple STEM professional volunteers, multiple adult coordinators, etc. – all

structural requirements that are well outside the reach of most youth, but especially those in low socio-economic status communities.”

As noted above, robotics teams are a popular out-of-school high school STEM activity. A review of the fundraising plans for three high school robotics teams indicates that the cost for robot parts and other materials, trailers for transporting robots, competition fees, and travel, requires between \$20,000 and \$40,000 most of which are recurring annual costs. This estimate does not include staff and parent time and facility costs, and assumes that skilled staff and parents are available to coach the team. High school robotics teams typically fundraise by seeking community and corporate sponsorship.

***Access to dual enrollment opportunities.*** This bill establishes, as one criterion, the receipt of a grade of B or higher in a college-level CTE course taken through concurrent enrollment, means of establishing eligibility to receive a diploma seal.

According to a June 2014 study by the Education Commission of the States titled *Dual enrollment: Challenges in Rural Areas*, rural areas face unique challenges in providing high-quality dual enrollment programs. Students also face access issues based on their geography or ability to get to and from a college campus. Other issues include covering program costs, a lack of available technology or equipment necessary for the coursework, and access to qualified teachers. While some urban and suburban high school offer dual enrollment courses led by postsecondary faculty who travel to the high school campus, the report notes that longer travel distances in rural areas can render these arrangements unfeasible.

***Third party assessments.*** This bill establishes a score of 80 percent or higher on an approved CTE third party pathway assessment as one way a student can demonstrate proficiency for purposes of earning a diploma seal. It is not clear what is meant by third party assessments, or which entity has approved them. It is also not clear whether a score of 80 percent is an appropriate threshold on a range of assessments. ***Staff recommends*** that this provision be removed.

***What benefit does a diploma seal have to students?*** CTE pathways can lead to industry certificates, licensure, and other forms of recognition which have real value to students in the job market because they are recognized by employers. In comparison, it is not clear what benefit would be conferred to students by a State Seal of CTE Pathway Completion.

Because diploma seals can influence students' course taking, assessments, and extracurricular choices, and because these choices involve trade-offs, it's important to ensure that diploma seals confer value to students in terms of postsecondary education and employment opportunities.

So what is the effect on students if a diploma seal is designed so that it confers no to students beyond high school? It may be instructive to consider the Golden State Seal Merit Diploma in this context. When originally authorized in the 1990's, Governor Wilson argued that this diploma would serve as recognition of outstanding achievement that would both shape teaching and inspire students. It was envisioned as California version of the New York's Regent's Diploma, conferring advantages in UC and CSU admission. The state created a series of assessments, called the Golden State Merit Examinations, which were taken by hundreds of thousands of students, who spent time and resources preparing to take the exams. These

examinations were eliminated in 2009, and now the GSSMDs are awarded based on grades, SBAC scores, and, in some cases, local assessments.

Each year over 50,000 students work toward achieving the special diploma, taking the time to prepare for and take assessments. But the GSSMD appears to confer no advantage to students in terms of postsecondary education or employment. *The Committee may wish to consider* whether it is fair to encourage students to work toward a diploma seal which confers no clear benefit to them.

***Achievement thresholds.*** Forms of special recognition in high school, such as the honor roll, valedictorian awards, or an International Baccalaureate diploma, recognize outstanding achievement. Because the threshold for achieving this recognition is set high, it's widely understood that these forms of recognition represent outstanding achievement.

But if the bar is set too low – for example, recognizing that a student has taken a required course and received a passing grade – a diploma seal ceases to carry any significance. In addition, schools already provide recognition, in the form of grades or test scores, for proficiency in a given subject. *The Committee may wish to consider* the importance of using diploma seals to recognize outstanding achievement, particularly achievement not already recognized by schools in other ways.

***Guiding questions for this Committee's review of diploma seal bills.*** Staff recommends that this Committee consider the following questions when evaluating any measure seeking to establish a diploma seal meet the following criteria:

- Does the diploma seal confer a benefit to the student through recognition by postsecondary institutions, employers, or other institutions outside of high school?
- Is the diploma seal designed so that all students have an opportunity to earn it?
- Does the diploma seal recognize excellence or outstanding achievement, not simply proficiency in a required or widely studied subject?
- Is eligibility for the diploma seal based primarily on achievement which is already recognized through grades or other standard measure of student achievement?

***Recommended amendments.*** Staff recommends that this bill be amended to require that implementation of the act be contingent upon a declaration by the State Board of Education that all of the following conditions have been met:

- 1) All California students have reasonably equal opportunity to engage in the coursework and other requirements necessary to earn the diploma seal
- 2) The diploma seal confers value to the student through recognition by postsecondary educational institutions or employers
- 3) The diploma seal is earned through recognized excellence or outstanding achievement in the field of study
- 4) The diploma seal is not based primarily on achievement which is already recognized through other means, such as grades, assessment results, other measures of academic achievement, or industry certifications

***Proliferation of diploma seals.*** In recent years the state has established two state diploma seals, in biliteracy and civic engagement. This year two measures propose new diploma seals, in

STEM and CTE. If this legislation is enacted (and perhaps even if it isn't), it is likely that this Committee will continue to see similar measures to establish Seals in other subject areas. *The committee may wish to consider* the policy implications of numerous options for students to earn diploma seals.

**Related and prior legislation.** AB 1743 (O'Donnell) of this Session would extend funding for the Career Technical Education Incentive Grant (CTEIG) Program at \$500 million per year and establishes funding of \$12 million per year for regional technical assistance.

AB 2265 (Obernolte) of this Session would establish a State Seal of STEM to recognize high school graduates who have attained proficiency in STEM content.

AB 24 (Eggman) Chapter 604, Statutes of 2017 established a State Seal of Civic Engagement, to be affixed to the diploma of qualifying high school graduates, based on a demonstration of excellence in civics education and participation.

AB 2072 (Chang) of the 2015-16 Session would have established the State Seal of STEM to recognize high school graduates who have attained proficiency in STEM content. This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 815 (Brownley), Chapter 618, Statutes of 2011 established the State Seal of Biliteracy to recognize high school graduates who what attained a high level of proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in one or more languages in addition to English.

SB 253 (Wyland) of the 2009-10 Session would have authorized school districts and county offices of education to offer students a CTE certificate upon meeting specified requirements. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

California Agricultural Teachers Association  
State Building and Construction Trades Council of California

### **Opposition**

California Right to Life Committee, Inc.

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