

Building Pathways to AB 540

Building Pathways to AB 540 is a resource series discussing opportunities available for different educational institutions to build pathways for individuals who do not yet meet the eligibility for AB 540. Read on to learn why pathways are important, their benefits for students and institutions, and suggested institutional solutions to implement at California Community Colleges, adult schools, and noncredit programs.

Overview of Why Pathways Are Needed

Tuition barriers that undocumented students face

Nonresident student fees cost approximately three times more than the California resident tuition rate, and nonresident students can expect to pay thousands more per semester. Specifically, documented nonresidents and undocumented students who are not yet eligible for [AB 540](#) are classified as “[nonresidents for tuition purposes](#)” and charged nonresident student fees when they enroll in credit courses. See chart below for examples of cost differences.

Average Resident & Nonresident Fees at California Community Colleges (2023-24)

	Nonresident fees	CA resident fees	Cost difference
6 units	\$2,326 per semester \$4,652 per year	\$292 per semester \$583 per year	\$2,304 per semester \$4,069 per year
12 units	\$4,652 per semester \$9,034 per year	\$583 per semester \$1,166 per year	\$4,069 per semester \$8,138 per year

Students who cannot afford to pay resident fees

One of the greatest barriers to enrollment for individuals who do not yet meet the eligibility for AB 540 is their inability to pay nonresident fees. Without AB 540, these students might delay or stop pursuing their academic goals. Too many college-ready students can be impacted in the following ways:

- Inability to enroll in courses because they cannot afford the cost.
- Delayed completion or inability to complete academic plan or transfer to a four-year university within six years.
- Being forced to take breaks from school to save up for tuition costs.
- Needing to prioritize work over education to pay for the exorbitant cost of courses.
- Enrolling in noncredit courses that are not part of their education plan because they are free.

Benefits of Building Pathways to AB 540

Building pathways to AB 540 provides multiple benefits to the individual student, the institution, and the surrounding community. Implementing AB 540 at a California Community College or SB 554 at an adult school or noncredit high school program often increases enrollment and brings previously untapped funding into the school. It also provides educational opportunities for college-ready individuals who would otherwise be unable to attend due to the high cost of nonresident fees.

Benefits to an Individual Student

- **Attending college and taking credit courses becomes a viable option for students who would otherwise never have been able to afford nonresident fees and attend college!** Students eligible for EC 76140 or SB 554 can take all ESL courses, certificate programs, or other courses of interest that lead to degrees or transfer without being charged nonresident fees. Students who qualify under 76140 save an average of \$2,304 each semester or \$4,069 annually!
- **Taking credit courses is a faster track to completing AB 540 requirements!** Students save time by completing credit courses to satisfy the AB 540 attendance requirement rather than taking 420-1,260 hours of noncredit courses that are not required for their education plan but are free and count towards AB 540 attendance.
- **Students are encouraged to “stay on track” and take credit courses required for their education plan!** Credit courses are required to satisfy the majority of students’ educational plans. By making credit courses more affordable, students can “stay on track” to complete required and relevant courses for their degree, certificate, or transfer.

Benefits to the Institution

Campuses benefit from expanding pathways for students to meet AB 540 eligibility by:

- **Increasing enrollment of students** who otherwise could not afford to attend college.
- **Increasing student retention** and increasing the number of students who successfully complete a degree, certificate, or transfer. By eliminating cost barriers, students can take any class without restrictions and complete their educational plan.
- **Strengthening the pathway from high school, adult school, and noncredit programs to community college.** Starting at community college is an affordable path to earning a degree, certificate, or transfer. EC 76140 makes community college an affordable pathway for nonresident students and creates an opportunity for them to enroll consistently.
- **Expanding opportunities to learn by attracting a diverse student population** who might begin taking classes part-time but are excited to build a path toward full-time attendance.
- **Bringing additional funding to CCCs through FTES and the supplemental funding formula.** California Community Colleges receive supplemental allocations for students who meet eligibility for AB 540, the California College Promise Grant, or the Pell Grant. Therefore, building pathways to increase the number of AB 540 students who are also eligible for the Promise Grant will bring future dollars to the institution.

Benefits to Our Community

Building pathways to AB 540 benefit our community by:

- **Encouraging community members to take ESL courses** and become proficient in English and other languages that wouldn't have been accessible if they could not pay the costs of credit courses.
- **Increasing representation of undocumented professionals** within their communities and careers that require advanced degrees, occupations, and training.

In addition,

- **Attaining professional degrees and certificates** increases the opportunity for undocumented and other eligible students to enter professional careers, earn higher incomes, own a home, and/or start a business.
- **Community members can take individual Career Technical Education (CTE) courses** or obtain certificates that build important skills and help them advance within the workforce.

Institutional Solutions to Increase Pathways to AB 540

Choose a solution that best fits with your program:

- [Solutions for Noncredit Programs](#)
- [Solutions for Adult Schools with high school or GED programs](#)
- [Solutions for California Community Colleges](#)

This resource series was co-created by Nancy Jodaitis and Gladys Puente Valentine, who collaborated on the research, writing, and envisioning. Gladys served as a community researcher with Immigrants Rising and formally was the Undocumented Student Coordinator at Sierra College. The layout and design is by Grace Yeo, with copyediting support from Keziah Aurin.

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Immigrants Rising helps you make decisions based on your potential, not your perceived limits. Visit our website so you can see what's possible: immigrantsrising.org. For inquiries regarding this resource, please contact Nancy Jodaitis, Director of Higher Education at nancy@immigrantsrising.org. Published 3/2024.