

April 5, 2023

The Honorable Mike Fong  
Chair, Assembly Higher Education Committee  
1020 N Street, Room 173  
Sacramento, CA 95814

*Re: Support for AB 789 (Berman)*

Dear Chair Fong:

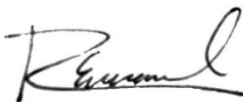
As a trusted source of research, design, and advocacy for student-centered policies that promote college affordability and accountability, The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS) writes in strong support of AB 789 (Berman). This bill will enable students who struggle academically to continue their education by removing barriers to maintaining financial aid and benefitting from institutional support.

Currently, the U.S. Department of Education requires academic institutions receiving federal financial aid funds to establish a “reasonable satisfactory academic progress (SAP) policy,” and many state programs, including the Cal Grant, are linked to these same standards. Students who do not meet SAP standards for two consecutive terms or one academic year are disqualified from receiving financial aid unless they successfully appeal to have aid reinstated. Yet, many institutions of higher education in California have SAP policies that impose stricter standards than federally required and unclear appeal processes that result in inconsistent treatment of students. This negatively impacts students’ ability to both meet their institutions’ SAP policies and successfully appeal to maintain financial aid.

Research conducted by John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY) and Educational Results Partnership in 2021 revealed that nearly 1 in 4 first-year California Community College Pell Grant recipients did not make SAP and that Black (34%) and Native American (32%) students did not make SAP at a rate double that of white and Asian students. Of those who failed to meet SAP, just 13 percent remained enrolled and continued to receive aid. Lastly, research also found that students who were not making SAP were equally as academically motivated as their peers but faced more responsibilities (childcare, employment, family responsibilities, etc.) and had fewer resources (family support, basic needs, flexible work schedule, etc.).

AB 789 will ensure that postsecondary institutions across California do not impose requirements stricter than those minimally required by federal law. It will ensure that institutions consider a broad range of extenuating circumstances as a basis for an appeal to reinstate aid and reflect the lived experiences of California’s students. Finally, AB 789 will also create a pathway for students who have disenrolled while on SAP disqualification to regain aid upon re-enrollment. These changes are critical for students given the enormous impact financial aid reception has on college enrollment and retention – especially for low-income students and BIPOC students. It is for these reasons, TICAS supports AB 789 (Berman) and asks for your AYE vote.

Respectfully,



Manny Rodriguez  
Director of Policy and Advocacy, California  
The Institute for College Access & Success

cc: Assembly Member Marc Berman  
Members of the Assembly Higher Education Committee  
Jeanice Warden, Chief Consultant, Assembly Higher Education Committee  
Lyndsay Mitchell, Policy Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus