



# LAO Recommendations on Implementation Of California State University Doctor of Education Degree Programs

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Recent legislation authorized the California State University (CSU) to independently offer Doctor of Education (Ed. D. ) degrees. A report prepared earlier this month by CSU, the Department of Finance (DOF), and the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) described and assessed the early implementation of the new doctorate programs. In this brief, we provide our recommendations on the Legislature's oversight of CSU's doctoral programs. Our main recommendation is that the Legislature make further expansion of these programs contingent on specific authorization in the annual budget act.

In 2005, new legislation authorized CSU to independently award the Ed.D. This is a departure from the differentiation of functions specified in California's 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education, which accorded the University of California sole authority to independently award the doctoral degree.

The legislation—Chapter 269, Statutes of 2005 (SB 724, Scott)—directs CSU, DOF, and the LAO to jointly conduct a statewide evaluation of the new programs. A joint report was submitted to the Legislature and Governor in January 2011 in compliance with this requirement. This report is available on the LAO website at [www.lao.ca.gov](http://www.lao.ca.gov).

As discussed in a letter accompanying the report, the joint evaluation process was valuable and the parties reached consensus on most issues.

It was not possible, however, for the three organizations to agree on recommendations for improving or expanding these programs. As a result, the joint report includes a description and evaluation of CSU's program implementation, but stops short of providing recommendations.

This brief provides the Legislative Analyst's independent recommendations to the Legislature regarding further implementation of CSU's education doctoral programs. We extend our recommendations to encompass two additional CSU doctoral degree programs authorized in 2010.

## FINDINGS OF JOINT EVALUATION

The joint evaluation report concludes that the design of CSU's education doctoral programs is consistent with the goals of Chapter 269 in most

respects. The programs are focused on education leadership, include significant participation from public school and community college partners, and are geared toward working professionals.

Compliance with financial provisions of the law is less clear. These provisions generally seek to ensure that creation of the new programs not come at the expense of other enrollment priorities. They require funding for the programs to come from enrollment growth resources, not from existing programs; limit subsidies for doctoral student enrollment; require that startup funds come from existing budgets without adversely affecting undergraduate programs; and direct CSU to maintain its existing ratio of graduate instruction to total instruction.

These provisions clearly reflect the Legislature's concern, expressed as SB 724 made its way through the legislative process, about the potential for the introduction of doctoral programs to reduce the resources available for undergraduate enrollment. Chapter 269 does not address every circumstance CSU may encounter, however. For example, it specifies that the programs should be funded from enrollment growth, but does not specify how CSU should proceed when the budget does not provide for enrollment growth. Nor does it specify whether Ed.D. programs can be funded by redirecting enrollment funds from other programs that have excess capacity. As a result, it is unclear whether CSU's expansion at five campuses in 2008 and 2009 without enrollment growth funding met the Legislature's intent in enacting Chapter 269.

Finally, the evaluation team concluded that it is too soon to assess the impact of the CSU Ed.D. programs on education reform and student achievement, as directed in Chapter 269. Only a few months have passed since the first students graduated with independent CSU Ed.D. degrees,

and more time is needed to meaningfully assess program outcomes.

As noted, the evaluation team did not arrive at joint recommendations to address these concerns. In the next section, we provide the LAO's separate recommendations to the Legislature.

## LAO RECOMMENDATIONS

Our primary recommendation centers on limiting further expansion of CSU independent doctoral programs, particularly in the absence of enrollment growth funding. Additionally, we recommend that the Legislature require CSU to report on program outcomes in five years, by which time several cohorts of students will have graduated. These recommendations are summarized in the box on page 4.

### *Place Conditions on Further Expansion.*

We recommend that the Legislature amend Chapter 269 to make further expansion of CSU Ed.D. programs (beyond those in operation as of June 30, 2011) contingent on specific authorization in the annual budget act. The legislation could also clarify the circumstances under which further expansion of independent education doctoral programs would be justified.

The availability of enrollment growth funding should be one such consideration for authorizing new programs. When enrollment growth funding is not available, the state could permit CSU to expand doctoral program enrollment by redirecting enrollment funds from other programs that are undersubscribed, as has been the case in recent years with postbaccalaureate teacher credential programs. However, it should be noted that CSU could otherwise use the same funds to support undergraduate enrollment. In addition, this could create future budgetary pressure when the demand for these programs recovers.

Even when enrollment growth funding or redirected funds are available, it is not necessarily the case that CSU should be permitted to proceed with expansion to the remaining campuses. We observed in our evaluation some drop-off in enrollment demand following an initial surge of interest, and the longer-term trend in demand remains unclear. Clearly, the sustainable level of demand in each region, and alternative ways to address that demand, should be additional considerations. A collaborative model being developed by CSU's Bakersfield and Fresno campuses is a promising approach to meeting demonstrated demand while reducing duplication of administrative and faculty resources and making better use of existing capacity. Other multi-campus, off-campus, and online options could similarly expand access in ways that are more cost-effective than creating new independent programs. The Legislature could consider all of these factors in determining whether to authorize expansion of Ed.D. programs to new CSU campuses.

***Require CSU to Report on Outcomes in Five Years.*** We recommend the Legislature require CSU to identify a limited number of common indicators that will be used to assess program effects on system reform and student achievement, and report on program outcomes in 2016. By this date we anticipate that six cohorts of students will have graduated, and there will be more than 1,000 CSU independent Ed.D. graduates working in leadership positions in California public schools and community colleges. This reporting requirement could be achieved through supplemental report language.

Similarly, we recommend amending the reporting requirements in Chapters 416 and 425 concerning the Doctor of Nursing Practice and Doctor of Physical Therapy degrees to (1) limit the joint report from LAO, DOF, and CSU to a description and evaluation of CSU's program implementation and its adherence to statutory requirements, and (2) require CSU to include an outcome reporting process as described above, to be completed after at least three cohorts of students have graduated from the new programs. Given the difficulty experienced by the joint evaluation team in arriving at joint recommendations on Ed.D. program implementation, we believe this approach—which leaves each party free to offer independent recommendations—would better serve policymakers with a range of perspectives and insights.

The proposed outcome evaluation, following the report on implementation, would help guide the state's decision about whether to expand the programs beyond the three pilot campuses. More broadly, outcome evaluation will be important as the state considers the evolving structure of its public higher education system. The expansion of CSU's degree-granting authority to include three doctoral programs is a departure from the Master Plan, approved in response to changing workforce needs. It will be important to monitor whether this modification to the university's traditional role is effective in best meeting the state's education and workforce needs.

## **IMPLEMENTING CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY'S (CSU'S) NEW DOCTORAL PROGRAMS: SUMMARY OF THE LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Place Conditions on Further Expansion of CSU Doctoral Programs**

- Make further expansion of CSU Doctor of Education degree programs contingent on specific authorization in the annual budget act.
- Specify conditions for expansion, including: the availability of enrollment growth or redirected funding, a sustainable level of demand for programs, and consideration of alternative ways to meet that demand (such as including multi-campus, off-campus, and online options).

### **Require CSU to Report on Outcomes in Five Years**

- Require CSU to identify a limited number of common indicators to assess the effects of its education doctorate programs on system reform and student achievement, and report on outcomes in 2016.
- Amend reporting requirements in Chapters 416 and 425 concerning the Doctor of Nursing Practice and Doctor of Physical Therapy degrees at CSU to:
  - Limit the joint report to a description and evaluation of compliance.
  - Include a similar outcome reporting process, to be completed after at least three cohorts of students have graduated from the new programs.

### **LAO Publications**

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This report was prepared by Judy Heiman, and reviewed by Steve Boilard. The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) is a nonpartisan office which provides fiscal and policy information and advice to the Legislature.

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