

CLIENT NEWS BRIEF

Baccalaureate Degrees Soon to Be Available at Select California Community Colleges

In late September 2014, Governor Brown signed Senate Bill (SB) 850, granting California community colleges the authority to award certain baccalaureate degrees. This brings California in line with twenty-one other states. The new legislation will be found in Education Code sections 78040, *et seq.*

Beginning January 1, 2015, the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges may establish a pilot baccalaureate degree program at no more than 15 community colleges. The Board of Governors must adopt regulations by March 31, 2015, detailing the funding model for the program. Each of the participating colleges will be limited to establishing one baccalaureate degree program. There are several requirements participating districts must satisfy in order to establish a baccalaureate degree program, including but not limited to the following:

- The baccalaureate degree offered must not be offered by the University of California (UC) or California State University.
- The district is limited to one baccalaureate degree which shall only be available at one campus in the district.
- The district must identify and document unmet workforce needs in the subject area that the baccalaureate degree program will be offered.
- The district must have the expertise, resources, and student interest to offer a quality program.
- A community college must commence its pilot program no later than the 2017-2018 calendar year.

SB 850 will provide additional opportunities for students drawn to educational programs unique to the community college system and creates a more affordable option for a baccalaureate degree. That said, the new legislation raises several key questions. The California community college system has been able to provide affordable quality education in the face of rising tuition fees and costs in the UC and California State University systems. Whether community colleges will be able to keep tuition costs low while providing baccalaureate degrees remains to be seen. There is also some concern that if successful, the baccalaureate degree programs will detract from the two-year degree programs which have historically been the foundation of the community college system. Finally, there will be questions about the specific funding formula for this program that will have to await adoption of new regulations. These and other questions will likely be answered over the life of the pilot program, which is set to expire in 2023.

If you have any questions regarding this legislation or community college issues in general, please contact one of our [eight offices](#) located statewide. You can also visit our [website](#), follow us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#), or download our [Client News Brief App](#).

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