**Lawmakers consider more community college bachelor degrees**

Momentum appears to be building to expand a pilot program that allows community colleges to offer four-year bachelor degrees to help meet a projected shortage of educated workers in California.

That was the central theme of speakers who addressed state lawmakers meeting at City College this week to discuss the future of the program.

The pilot program was created in 2014 by Senate Bill 850, which authorized 15 community colleges to offer the degrees. MiraCosta College and Mesa College are among the schools in the program, which is schedule.to end Jan. 1, 2024.

One state Assembly member and three state senators, including SB 850 author [Marty Block](http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/topic/politics-government/government/marty-block-PEPLT00008557-topic.html) of San Diego, attended the Tuesday hearing and heard calls for the program to continue and be expanded to help meet a projected shortfall of 1.1 million workers with bachelor degrees needed in the workforce by 2030.

“Even ramping things up, we’re going to be 600,000 individuals short,” said Community College League of California President Larry Galizio, one of the speakers at the hearing. “It’s frightening. There’s just no way we’re going to meet the demands.”

Besides a need to increase the number of workers with four-year degrees, Galizio said the pilot program is addressing an demand for affordable higher education in California.

Others at the hearing said the program also should be expanded because it benefits students and their families and addresses the changing needs in the state.

Among the people testifying for the program to continue were Sunny Cooke, president/superintendent of MiraCosta College, and Constance Carroll, chancellor of the San Diego Community College District, which includes Mesa College.

Democratic state Sens. [Jerry Hill](http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/topic/politics-government/government/jerry-hill-PEPLT00008581-topic.html) of San Mateo and Benjamin Allen of Redondo Beach and Assemblyman Jose Medina, D-Riverside, appeared receptive to the idea of continuing and possibly expanding the program. Block, who did not seek re-election, said the future fight for expanding the program would be left to the other legislators.

“The camel’s nose is under the tent,” he said. “It’s up to you to get the rest of the camel in.”

In this case, the camel was a four-year nursing program. Early interest in a bachelor program at community colleges was driven by a need for more nurses with four-year degrees, but was excluded following opposition from the California State University and the California Nursing Association.

Mesa is offering a degree in health information management, and MiraCosta will begin a four-year degree in biomanufacturing next year.

The need for more nurses with four-year degrees has not dwindled, however.

Grossmont College President Nabil Abu-Ghazaleh said drones and brewing sciences are among the four-year degrees his school would like to offer, but he also said the time has come to consider bachelor degrees in nursing.

“I think for good, pragmatic reasons it was excluded from the community college bachelor program, but it’s one that’s very important to talk about,” said Abu-Ghazaleh, who was president of West Los Angeles College when it was chosen as one of the 15 schools in the pilot program.

Abu-Ghazaleh said Grossmont College offers associate degrees in healthcare, but graduates are beginning to find difficulty in getting hired because more hospitals are demanding four-year degrees.

Carroll also said a demand from employers for workers with bachelor degrees was among the reason the San Diego Community College District wanted to participate in the pilot program.

“Our greatest hope would be that the legislator would consider simply allowing a change in mission to allow community colleges to offer bachelor degrees on an as-need basis,” she said, noting that colleges and universities add and drop degrees all the time without legislative involvement.

She also asked the lawmakers to consider delaying the scheduled sun-setting of the pilot program and expedite final reports from the Legislative Analyst’s Office that are required for lawmakers to consider expanding the program.

Cooke said MiraCosta College is preparing to hold information sessions about its new four-year degree next month, and said there have been more than 500 inquiries into the 30-student initial class.

“I think there is way more demand than we can meet,” she said, adding that there is strong evidence that more nurses with four-year degrees also are needed locally.

Following the hearing, Carroll sent an e-mails to colleagues in her district to say she was pleased to report that legislators were enthusiastic about the prospect of expanding the program.

“Given the obvious needs and given the positive nature of this hearing, I am encouraged that progress may be made sooner rather than later,” she wrote.

At the end of the hearing, Hill indicated that he was ready to face obstacles that may be ahead in trying to introduce nursing into the pilot program.

“We’ll fight the politics when the time comes,” he said.

Allen told Block that the pilot program would be his legacy, and said he saw many reason for it to continue and expand.

Block acknowledged that some have seen the pilot program as drifting from the community college’s mission, but said he disagreed.

“I don’t see it as a change in the community college mission,” he said. “Industry has changed and now demands four-year degrees.“

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