



AB 1942: Fair Accreditation Practices for Community Colleges

The Accreditation Reform Bill Promoting Transparency, Accountability, Fairness and Due Process

ISSUE

AB 1942 restores fair accreditation practices to California's community colleges, the largest system of higher education in the United States, serving 2.4 million students annually.

BACKGROUND

Higher education accreditation ensures that colleges provide an education that meets acceptable levels of quality. Accreditation is required for students to receive state and federal financial aid and colleges to obtain federal support. The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) was appointed as the accreditor for California's community colleges. The ACCJC is authorized to operate by the U.S. Department of Education and is the only accrediting agency for California due to current state regulations.

The ACCJC currently requires community colleges to meet a significantly higher number of standards than is required by federal law. While the federal government requires that colleges meet 9 basic standards, ACCJC demands compliance with nearly 50. In addition, ACCJC has issued sanctions at a rate substantially higher than accrediting entities throughout the nation. In 2009, the ACCJC accounted for 44% of the total sanctions given to all higher education institutions in the nation. Many of these sanctions have been inconsistent between the community colleges the Commission accredits. For example, City College of San Francisco failed to meet 9 out of 11 standards identified by the ACCJC and now it is on the verge of being disaccredited; however 2 other colleges failed all 11 standards and were only given a warning. In addition, existing law does not require any notice, to the public or the community college under review, disclosing accreditor evaluations or reasons for sanctions.

The federal government has recognized the need for change on this issue. On January 28, 2014, the U.S. Department of Education notified ACCJC it was in violation of 15 federal regulations, including those concerning due process, notification of accrediting decisions, and review and enforcement of standards. Without proper competition and minimum standards for public transparency, accountability, and due process, the ACCJC's actions may continue to have a negative impact on community colleges throughout California, and make it difficult for students to attain an affordable education.

SOLUTION

AB 1942 will allow community college districts to choose their own accrediting entity. This competition will help ensure fair accreditation process for all community colleges. AB 1942 also restores accountability and transparency to the accreditation system by requiring accreditation decisions to be made at public hearings, and for the accrediting agency to provide due process and notice to the public and colleges about evaluations. It will also restore fairness by allowing colleges to appeal penalties. Transparency is further ensured by requiring the accreditor to annually disclose to the public information regarding charges to member institutions, and fiscal data for the accreditor's employees and contractors, including the source and amount of income and expenditures. AB 1942 also eliminates conflicts of interest concerning members of the accrediting board, lobbying activities and accreditation actions.

SUPPORT

California Federation of Teachers (sponsor)
San Francisco City Attorney, Dennis J. Herrera

OPPOSITION

None on file.