Calif. needs a million grads with bachelor’s by ’25

By Kathryn Baron, Hechinger Report

MODESTO — When Emily Littleton was growing up, she was often awoken at night by the sound of her younger sister wheezing and struggling for breath from an asthma attack. Littleton would grab the nebulizer, hook it up for her sister and get her dad.

The experience remained deeply rooted in Littleton’s memory, resurfacing several years after she graduated from high school as a calling for a career. The first time she attended community college, Littleton said she vacillated from major to major finally earning a two-year degree in natural sciences. Then, while working at an assisted living facility, she heard about the respiratory therapy program at Modesto Junior College, and her past echoed, directing her choice of a career. In December, Littleton and her 23 classmates will graduate with their associate’s degrees.

But those degrees are already on the verge of becoming obsolete as respiratory therapy and other skilled fields increasingly require a higher level of education in order to meet rapidly expanding demands for greater technical know-how and knowledge. An associate’s degree just won’t cut it anymore.

“I’ve been watching with great concern the fact that many employers who previously required associate degree level training now require bachelor’s degree level training,” said Constance Carroll, chancellor of the San Diego Community College District.

Carroll helped launch a campaign to make it easier for students to earn bachelor’s degrees in these key areas. Last

year, after two failed efforts, the state Legislature gave the go-ahead for some community colleges to offer bachelor’s degrees on a limited basis.

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