



*One voice for accessible excellence in education*

## **Bachelor's Degree Recommendations October 2025 Final Report**

### Introduction

Iowa faces significant workforce gaps, especially in important fields like healthcare, IT, advanced manufacturing, education, and skilled trades. Many of these high-demand careers lack adequate, affordable bachelor's-level pathways in every part of the state. Large areas are "educational deserts" with no affordable public four-year options nearby, forcing rural and place-bound students to relocate, pay higher tuition at private institutions, or stop at an associate degree. Community college-led bachelor's programs would increase accessibility, affordability, and workforce alignment for underserved populations.

---

*Projections show that by 2031, 72 percent of jobs nationally will require a bachelor's degree. Currently, 42 percent of Iowa jobs require a bachelor's degree, yet only 22 percent of Iowans currently hold one.*

---

In January 2025, in his role as Chair of the Iowa House of Representatives Higher Education Committee, State Representative Taylor R. Collins issued a letter calling on Iowa's community college presidents to conduct a comprehensive study on the feasibility of establishing community college baccalaureate degrees in the State. The letter requested that the colleges prepare an interim report by May 31, 2025, and a final report by October 31, 2025. The interim report was previously released and included information on unmet needs, capacity, funding models, best practices, potential impact, cost analysis, and potential outcomes. [It can be found here.](#)

This final report addresses the remaining questions, including:

- The feasibility of allowing community college baccalaureate degree programs in Iowa
- Lessons from other states
- Recommendations for scope, structure, and legislative changes

## Feasibility

### Faculty & Accreditation

About 63% of Iowa's community college instructors already meet qualifications to teach at the bachelor's level; however, most are already teaching the maximum number of hours. Some policy adjustments would be needed, especially for career and technical education faculty, to address workload capacity concerns and ensure recruitment of qualified faculty is possible.

### Facilities & Resources

Iowa's community colleges would need investment in labs, clinical spaces, and technology for upper-division coursework. Particularly in the start-up phase of new programs, resources would be needed to make this possible.

### Funding

Community colleges in the state are funded primarily through tuition (47%) and state appropriations (35%). Other states have used seed funding, differentiated tuition, or weighted state funding formulas for community college baccalaureates (CCBs). Iowa could adapt these models, balancing affordability with sustainability.

### Mission Alignment

Careful planning would be required to ensure community colleges expand without undermining their traditional role of open-access, affordable associate and certificate education.

Overall, Iowa's community colleges have some of the academic capacity and infrastructure necessary to offer bachelor's programs, but thoughtful funding models and policy changes would be necessary. Part of our analysis has meant looking at the 24 states nationally already offering community college bachelor's degrees to understand the impact and lessons learned.

## Lessons from Other States

Much can be learned from the 24 states nationally that have already taken this approach to filling workforce skills gaps. The interim report previously released provided in-depth information on the lessons from those states. Below are a few highlights of relevance to Iowa.

---

*Nationally, there are 203 community colleges in 24 states now offering 736 baccalaureate degrees. This growing trend comes from concern about the accessibility and affordability of these degrees at a time when more and more careers require them.*

---

- **Florida:** All 28 community colleges offer bachelor's degrees (nearly 200 programs) in workforce-aligned fields like nursing, education, and business. Nearly 8,000 degrees were conferred in one year, showing strong demand.
- **Washington:** Expanded CCBs to all 34 community and technical colleges, prioritizing equity and rural access. Results show high employment rates and wage gains for graduates.
- **California:** Pilots demonstrated high graduation rates (67–78%) and clear post-graduation wage growth, reinforcing affordability and economic mobility benefits.
- **Texas & Nevada:** Have adopted innovative funding models that recognize CCBs as “credentials of value,” tying funding to labor-market outcomes.

Across states, graduates achieve strong job placement rates, competitive wages, and high employer satisfaction, especially when programs are closely aligned with local industry needs.

Iowa's workforce gaps, educational deserts, and affordability challenges demonstrate a case for community college bachelor's degrees. With adequate planning around faculty qualifications, facilities, funding, and mission alignment, Iowa could feasibly implement programs modeled after other states' successes.

## Recommendations

Should the state choose to pursue bachelor's degrees, we recommend the following for funding models, scope, and structure.

### Tuition Models

Tuition should be structured to reflect the advanced nature of upper-division coursework. Community colleges should be permitted to set differentiated tuition rates for upper-division courses designated as bachelor's level courses, with the requirement that such tuition not exceed 150% of the institution's existing lower-division tuition rate. This approach balances program sustainability with affordability for students.

### State Appropriations

While we are not recommending a new source of ongoing funding at this time, robust State General Aid will be key to keeping these programs affordable and accessible. Additionally, to support the successful launch of CCB programs, we recommend a one-time appropriation of \$20 million to be allocated over five years. These funds would serve as seed grants to assist institutions in developing new programs, ensuring that resources are available for faculty, facilities, and student support services.

### Program Approval and Accreditation

CCB programs should be authorized for all of Iowa's community colleges and utilize the existing approval processes managed by the Iowa Department of Education and continue

to rely on the regional accreditation process. If authority is granted, specific programs and timelines should be determined by locally elected boards of trustees. The earliest any new program could be implemented would be Fall of 2028 if authority is granted in early 2026. No additional layer of state-level accreditation should be required, thereby streamlining implementation while maintaining rigorous academic and quality standards.

### Metrics for Success

The effectiveness of CCB programs should be measured through clear, outcome-driven indicators, including:

- Graduate Employment Outcomes: Job placement rates and post-graduation earnings of CCB completers.
- Statewide Impact: Contribution of CCB programs to Iowa's educational attainment goals, workforce participation, and graduate retention within the state.

### Conclusion

Iowa has both a need and an opportunity to expand bachelor's degree access through its community colleges. Workforce shortages, regional educational deserts, and affordability barriers are leaving too many Iowans without pathways to high-demand careers. Experiences from other states demonstrate that when community colleges offer bachelor's degrees, graduates see significant employment and wage gains, local economies benefit, and equity gaps narrow.

With thoughtful planning around tuition models, faculty support, state appropriations, and accreditation processes, Iowa may be able to replicate these successes. Authorizing community college baccalaureate programs would not only strengthen the state's talent pipeline but also ensure that all Iowans, especially those in rural and underserved communities, can pursue meaningful, affordable, and career-aligned higher education close to home.