

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT[281]

Regulatory Analysis

Notice of Intended Action to be published: 281—Chapter 21
“Community Colleges”

Iowa Code section(s) or chapter(s) authorizing rulemaking: 256.139 as enacted by 2026 Iowa Acts, House File 2610

State or federal law(s) implemented by the rulemaking: Iowa Code section 256.139 as enacted by 2026 Iowa Acts, House File 2610

Public Hearing

A public hearing at which persons may present their views orally or in writing will be held as follows:

August 11, 2026
9 to 10 a.m.

Room B50
Grimes State Office Building
Des Moines, Iowa
Via videoconference:
meet.google.com/qjc-zbv-u-pmx
Or dial: (US) +1 410.995.8223
PIN: 697 039 136#

Public Comment

Any interested person may submit written or oral comments concerning this Regulatory Analysis, which must be received by the Department of Education no later than 4:30 p.m. on the date of the public hearing. Comments should be directed to:

Thomas A. Mayes, Rules Coordinator
Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
400 East 14th Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
Phone: 515.281.8661
Email: thomas.mayes@iowa.gov

Purpose and Summary

This proposed rulemaking implements 2026 Iowa Acts, House File 2610, by establishing a statewide common course numbering system and a statewide lower division general education framework for Iowa community colleges. This proposed rulemaking establishes processes for identifying equivalent courses, assigning common course numbers, developing common course descriptions and learning outcomes through a faculty process, and implementing a common lower division general education framework.

Analysis of Impact

1. **Persons affected by the proposed rulemaking:**
 - **Classes of persons that will bear the costs of the proposed rulemaking:**

The primary costs of this proposed rulemaking will be borne by Iowa community colleges, which will incur one-time implementation costs associated with reviewing and aligning courses and updating student information systems, registration systems, degree audit systems, catalogs, transcripts, advising materials, and other institutional processes.

- **Classes of persons that will benefit from the proposed rulemaking:**

Students enrolled in Iowa community colleges will be the primary beneficiaries of the proposed rulemaking through increased transparency regarding course equivalencies and transferability, more consistent lower division general education requirements, improved academic advising, reduced duplication of coursework, and more efficient pathways toward certificate and degree completion.

2. Impact of the proposed rulemaking, economic or otherwise, including the nature and amount of all the different kinds of costs that would be incurred:

- **Quantitative description of impact:**

This proposed rulemaking is expected to affect all 15 Iowa community colleges; approximately 120,000 community college students enrolled annually in credit-bearing coursework; thousands of transferable lower division courses offered statewide; and student information systems, registration systems, degree audit systems, advising resources, catalogs, and transcript processes maintained by each community college.

- **Qualitative description of impact:**

The expected impacts of this proposed rulemaking include increased transparency regarding course equivalencies and transferability; greater consistency in lower division general education requirements; improved academic advising and degree planning; reduced duplication of coursework following student transfer; more efficient degree completion pathways; increased consistency among institutions while maintaining faculty participation in determining course equivalencies and learning outcomes; and improved statewide coordination among districts offering concurrent enrollment, community colleges and transfer institutions.

3. Costs to the State:

- **Implementation and enforcement costs borne by the agency or any other agency:**

The Department will incur administrative costs associated with implementation, including coordinating statewide faculty and institutional workgroups, developing and maintaining statewide guidance and implementation resources, maintaining statewide common course numbering information, providing technical assistance to community colleges, and monitoring implementation and compliance with statutory requirements.

- **Anticipated effect on State revenues:**

This proposed rulemaking is not expected to have a direct impact on State revenues.

4. Comparison of the costs and benefits of the proposed rulemaking to the costs and benefits of inaction:

This proposed rulemaking requires one-time implementation costs associated with updating institutional systems, aligning courses with statewide equivalencies and the common lower division general education framework, revising advising and catalog materials, and participating in statewide implementation activities. This proposed rulemaking is intended to improve student transfer between districts offering concurrent enrollment, Iowa community colleges, and transfer institutions; increase transparency regarding course equivalencies and general education requirements; reduce unnecessary duplication of coursework; improve advising efficiency and degree planning; support timely degree completion; and promote statewide consistency while preserving institutional responsibility for curriculum and instruction.

Failure to adopt this proposed rulemaking would prevent implementation of statutory requirements enacted by 2026 Iowa Acts, House File 2610.

5. Determination whether less costly methods or less intrusive methods exist for achieving the purpose of the proposed rulemaking:

The Department determined that rulemaking is the least costly and least intrusive method available to implement statutory requirements and provide statewide consistency.

6. Alternative methods considered by the agency:

• **Description of any alternative methods that were seriously considered by the agency:**

No other methods were seriously considered by the Department since the method proposed is the most cost-efficient and seamless for all entities involved.

• **Reasons why alternative methods were rejected in favor of the proposed rulemaking:**

Alternative methods were rejected because they would lead to additional burdens on educational entities and the Department.

Small Business Impact

If the rulemaking will have a substantial impact on small business, include a discussion of whether it would be feasible and practicable to do any of the following to reduce the impact of the rulemaking on small business:

- Establish less stringent compliance or reporting requirements in the rulemaking for small business.
- Establish less stringent schedules or deadlines in the rulemaking for compliance or reporting requirements for small business.
- Consolidate or simplify the rulemaking's compliance or reporting requirements for small business.
- Establish performance standards to replace design or operational standards in the rulemaking for small business.
- Exempt small business from any or all requirements of the rulemaking.

If legal and feasible, how does the rulemaking use a method discussed above to reduce the substantial impact on small business?

This proposed rulemaking is not expected to have an impact on small business.

Text of Proposed Rulemaking

ITEM 1. Rescind subrule 21.4(1) and adopt the following **new** subrule in lieu thereof:

21.4(1) General education. General education is intended to provide breadth of learning to the community college experience. General education imparts common knowledge, promotes intellectual inquiry, and stimulates the examination of different perspectives, thus enabling people to function effectively in a complex and changing world. General education courses are not intended to be developmental in nature. Each community college is responsible for local implementation, publication, and assessment of student learning of its general education courses while ensuring ongoing compliance with the statewide lower division general education framework.

a. Uniform framework. Effective July 1, 2027, all community colleges will implement the statewide lower division general education framework for associate of arts (AA) and associate of science (AS) awards pursuant to Iowa Code section 256.139 as enacted by 2026 Iowa Acts, House File 2610.

b. Core disciplinary categories. The statewide lower division general education framework shall be established by the department and consist of the following four core disciplinary categories: communications, humanities, social science, and mathematics and science. To ensure seamless systemwide transferability, the department will collaborate with community colleges and consult with the liaison advisory committee on transfer students and the board of regents on the administration of the framework. The department has final administrative authority over the inclusion and modification of these categories within the statewide lower division general education framework.

c. Credit allocation guidelines. The specific credit allocation and credit distribution rules in the core disciplinary categories identified in paragraph 21.4(1) "b" will be broadly aligned with the transfer standards developed pursuant to the statutory articulation pathways authorized by Iowa Code

section 262.9(31). The department shall coordinate with the community colleges and the board of regents to integrate these standards into the statewide lower division general education framework. The department-issued Iowa General Education Lower Division Framework Operational Guide will establish the administrative workflows necessary to submit, audit, and add courses, as well as the collaborative processes for updating credit allocations.

d. Statewide common course numbering integration. All courses approved to fulfill a distribution category requirement within the statewide lower division general education framework will follow the structural elements of paragraph 21.4(7) “a.”

ITEM 2. Adopt the following **new** subrule 21.4(7):

21.4(7) *Statewide common course numbering system.* To ensure statewide transfer and alignment, all credit-bearing community college courses shall comply with requirements of the statewide common course numbering system pursuant to Iowa Code section 256.139 as enacted by 2026 Iowa Acts, House File 2610.

a. Structural elements. A common course entry within the centralized statewide common course numbering directory consists of the following standardized elements:

- (1) Course prefix.
- (2) Course number.
- (3) Course name.
- (4) Course credit hours.
- (5) Course description.
- (6) Course learning outcomes.

b. Central registry and system maintenance. The department will maintain a centralized statewide common course numbering directory. Procedural guidance, submission timelines and administrative workflows will be established within the Iowa Common Course Numbering Operational Guide.

c. Equivalent course identification. The department will maintain a centralized statewide common course numbering directory. New courses will be submitted by institutions for department approval prior to adoption by a community college.

d. Statewide integration. Standardized course identifiers from the statewide common course numbering system will be utilized universally across all community college course catalogs, registration systems, and official student transcripts.

e. Rule of construction. Individual community colleges retain the autonomy to include additional learning outcomes to fulfill unique regional or transfer needs, provided the course includes all common course outcomes.