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[HF 2649](#) – Community Colleges, Baccalaureate Degrees (LSB5229HV.2)  
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Fiscal Note Version – As amended and passed by the House

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## Description

[House File 2649](#) establishes a pilot program under the Department of Education (DE) to offer baccalaureate degrees at eligible community colleges. The State Board of Education will establish administrative rules necessary to administer this pilot program. The Bill also prohibits the creation of any baccalaureate degree program if there is an equivalent degree program offered at the main campus of a Regents institution or private, nonprofit college or university within 50 miles of the community college's main campus. The upper-level courses are also required to be provided only at a community college's primary campus location. All new degree programs must pertain to the following degree fields: education, nursing, information technology, public safety, business, health care management, agriculture, or dental hygiene.

Under the bill, tuition for Iowa residents for upper-level courses offered as part of a baccalaureate program is not to exceed 150.0% of the lowest tuition rate per semester charged by an institution of higher education under the State Board of Regents for a full-time resident student.

## Background

In October 2025, Iowa community colleges released the results of a [College Student Baccalaureate Degree Feasibility Study](#) evaluating the feasibility of authorizing community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees in Iowa. The analysis cites projected workforce demand, noting that while 42.0% of Iowa jobs currently require a bachelor's degree, only 22.0% of Iowans hold one, and identifies educational deserts, particularly in rural areas, where access to affordable public four-year options is limited. The report concludes that Iowa community colleges possess partial academic and infrastructure capacity to offer bachelor's programs but would require policy changes related to faculty workload, targeted investments in facilities and technology, and careful alignment with their traditional open-access mission.

Drawing on experiences from 24 states where community college baccalaureate programs are already authorized, the report recommends:

- Allowing differentiated tuition for upper-division coursework, capped at 150.0% of lower-division tuition.
- Using existing program approval and regional accreditation processes with locally elected boards determining program offerings and identifying employment outcomes and statewide educational attainment as key metrics for evaluating program effectiveness.
- An earliest potential implementation date of fall 2028, assuming statutory authority is granted in 2026.

The DE utilizes the State of Iowa Curriculum System (STICS) as a centralized curriculum database and program approval system. The STICS is used by Iowa's community colleges to approve Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, to approve Arts and Sciences courses, and to maintain the Iowa Community College Course Numbering System. The STICS

is also used at the secondary level for approval of CTE programs offered by Iowa public school districts. The system is not currently configured to support baccalaureate degree programs.

### **Assumptions**

- The new baccalaureate programs will be integrated into the current STICS and will incur associated IT costs for the expansion.
- The baccalaureate program will be tuition-driven, and the community colleges will be allowed to charge differentiated tuition for upper-division coursework, capped at 150.0% of lower-division tuition.
- The number of colleges participating in the pilot program and the number of initial pilot programs is unknown; however, the Iowa Association of Community College Trustees confirmed each community college would be eligible for at least one pilot program.

### **Fiscal Impact**

The fiscal impact of the Bill is unknown and will vary depending on how quickly and how many new baccalaureate programs are created during the pilot program. The DE estimates a one-time cost of \$100,000 to expand STICS. Any additional costs to implement the requirements of this Bill will be absorbed by existing staff within the Bureau of Community Colleges.

### **Sources**

Department of Education  
Iowa Association of Community College Trustees

/s/ Jennifer Acton

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March 16, 2026

Doc ID 1602209

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The Fiscal Note for this Bill was prepared pursuant to [Joint Rule 17](#) and the Iowa Code. Data used in developing this fiscal note is available from the Fiscal Services Division of the Legislative Services Agency upon request.

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