

**House File 2649 - Introduced**

HOUSE FILE 2649  
BY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER  
EDUCATION

(SUCCESSOR TO HSB 533)

**A BILL FOR**

1 An Act establishing a pilot program that authorizes eligible  
2 community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees.  
3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF IOWA:

1 Section 1. SHORT TITLE. This Act shall be known and may be  
2 cited as the "Removing Education Access Challenges in Higher  
3 Education (REACH) Act".

4 Sec. 2. Section 260C.1, Code 2026, is amended by adding the  
5 following new subsection:

6 NEW SUBSECTION. 13. Degree programs that lead to  
7 baccalaureate degrees, as authorized in this chapter.

8 Sec. 3. Section 260C.2, subsection 3, Code 2026, is amended  
9 to read as follows:

10 3. "*Community college*" means a publicly supported school  
11 ~~which may offer~~ that does one or more of the following:

12 a. Offers programs of adult and continuing education,  
13 lifelong learning, community education, and up to two years  
14 of liberal arts, preprofessional, or occupational instruction  
15 partially fulfilling the requirements for a baccalaureate  
16 degree but confers no more than an associate degree, ~~or which~~  
17 offers, except as provided in paragraph "c".

18 b. Offers as the whole or as part of the curriculum ~~up~~  
19 ~~to two years of~~ career and technical education, training, or  
20 retraining to persons who are preparing to enter the labor  
21 market.

22 c. Offers a degree program that leads to a baccalaureate  
23 degree, subject to the requirements established in section  
24 260C.25.

25 Sec. 4. Section 260C.14, subsection 2, Code 2026, is amended  
26 to read as follows:

27 2. Have authority to determine tuition rates for  
28 instruction.

29 a. Tuition for residents of Iowa shall not exceed the  
30 lowest tuition rate per semester, or the equivalent, charged  
31 by an institution of higher education under the state board  
32 of regents for a full-time resident student. However, except  
33 for students enrolled under [section 261E.6](#), if a local school  
34 district pays tuition for a resident pupil of high school age,  
35 the limitation on tuition for residents of Iowa shall not

1 apply, the amount of tuition shall be determined by the board  
2 of directors of the community college with the consent of the  
3 local school board, and the pupil shall not be included in the  
4 full-time equivalent enrollment of the community college for  
5 the purpose of computing general aid to the community college.

6 b. Tuition for nonresidents of Iowa shall not be less than  
7 the marginal cost of instruction of a student attending the  
8 college. A lower tuition for nonresidents may be permitted  
9 under a reciprocal tuition agreement between a merged area and  
10 an educational institution in another state, if the agreement  
11 is approved by the director.

12 c. Tuition for residents of Iowa, for upper-level courses  
13 offered as part of a baccalaureate program, shall not exceed  
14 one hundred fifty percent of the tuition charged to such  
15 students under paragraph "a".

16 d. The board may designate that a portion of the tuition  
17 moneys collected from students be used for student aid  
18 purposes.

19 Sec. 5. Section 260C.14, Code 2026, is amended by adding the  
20 following new subsection:

21 NEW SUBSECTION. 27. If the community college will offer a  
22 degree program that leads to a baccalaureate degree, establish  
23 or modify any policies, seek any accreditation, and employ any  
24 staff necessary to offer such a degree program.

25 Sec. 6. NEW SECTION. **260C.25 Pilot program for community**  
26 **college baccalaureate degrees in geographically isolated regions.**

27 1. The department of education shall administer a pilot  
28 program that authorizes eligible community colleges to offer  
29 baccalaureate degrees subject to the requirements established  
30 in this section.

31 2. The state board of education shall adopt rules under  
32 chapter 17A prescribing standards and procedures for the  
33 authorization and oversight of the pilot program as well as an  
34 application and approval process.

35 3. *a.* The rules adopted pursuant to subsection 2 must

1 provide that a community college shall not offer a degree  
2 program that leads to a baccalaureate degree unless the  
3 community college's main campus is located at least fifty miles  
4 from the main campus of an institution of higher education  
5 governed by the state board of regents or the main campus  
6 of a private institution of higher education that is already  
7 offering the degree program that the community college proposes  
8 to offer.

9     *b.* For purposes of this paragraph, distance shall be  
10 measured as the shortest practical driving distance using  
11 publicly available mapping software, as determined by the  
12 department of education.

13     4. The rules adopted pursuant to subsection 2 must provide  
14 that a community college shall not offer a degree program that  
15 leads to a baccalaureate degree unless the degree program  
16 satisfies all of the following requirements:

17     *a.* Consists of accredited programs of study or academic  
18 majors that lead to jobs that address a high-demand, sustained,  
19 and unmet workforce need within the community college  
20 region, as demonstrated by multiple workforce indicators,  
21 including current and projected job openings, wage data,  
22 workforce shortages, credential attainment gaps, labor market  
23 projections, and documented employer support for such programs  
24 of study or academic majors, as shown by the community college.

25     *b.* Is in any one of the following fields:

- 26         (1) Education.
- 27         (2) Nursing.
- 28         (3) Information technology.
- 29         (4) Public safety.
- 30         (5) Business.
- 31         (6) Health care management.
- 32         (7) Agriculture.
- 33         (8) Dental hygiene.

34     *c.* The instruction provided in courses within the degree  
35 program is not delivered entirely over the internet.

1 5. The rules adopted pursuant to subsection 2 must prohibit  
2 a community college from offering more than three baccalaureate  
3 degrees.

4 6. *a.* On or before December 1 of each year following the  
5 initial enrollment of students in a degree program that leads  
6 to a baccalaureate degree, each community college participating  
7 in the pilot program must submit a report to the department of  
8 education and to the general assembly that includes information  
9 related to all of the following:

10 (1) Enrollment and retention in the degree programs.

11 (2) The number of students who have completed the degree  
12 programs.

13 (3) The workforce outcomes of students who have completed  
14 the degree programs.

15 (4) Employer engagement with students in the degree  
16 programs and the community college.

17 (5) The alignment of the degree programs with regional  
18 workforce needs.

19 (6) Tuition levels within the degree programs.

20 (7) The financial sustainability of the degree programs.

21 (8) Challenges encountered during implementation of the  
22 pilot program.

23 (9) Recommendations related to statutory or rules changes  
24 needed to make the pilot program more effective.

25 *b.* The legislative services agency shall provide copies  
26 of the reports submitted to the general assembly pursuant  
27 to paragraph "a" to the chairpersons of the senate standing  
28 committee on education and the house standing committee on  
29 education.

30 *c.* The department of education shall compile the reports  
31 submitted by the community colleges pursuant to paragraph "a",  
32 create a summary of the reports, and submit the summary to the  
33 general assembly.

34 7. Upon the graduation of the first full cohort of students  
35 from baccalaureate degree programs under this pilot program,

1 the general assembly shall review the outcomes of the pilot  
2 program and consider whether to modify or expand the pilot  
3 program.

4 8. As used in this section:

5 a. "*Main campus*" means the primary campus designated by an  
6 institution of higher education governed by the state board of  
7 regents, or by a private institution of higher education, for  
8 governance purposes.

9 b. "*Private institution of higher education*" means an  
10 institution of higher learning located in this state that  
11 satisfies all of the following requirements:

12 (1) Is accredited by any federally recognized accreditor of  
13 postsecondary educational institutions.

14 (2) Is exempt from taxation under section 501(c)(3) of the  
15 Internal Revenue Code.

16 (3) Is authorized to award associate degrees or  
17 baccalaureate degrees in this state.

18 EXPLANATION

19 The inclusion of this explanation does not constitute agreement with  
20 the explanation's substance by the members of the general assembly.

21 This bill establishes a pilot program that authorizes  
22 eligible community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees.  
23 The pilot program is to be administered by the department of  
24 education pursuant to rules adopted by the state board of  
25 education.

26 The bill establishes requirements related to the rules  
27 adopted by the state board of education, including requiring  
28 that the rules provide that a community college shall not  
29 offer a degree program that leads to a baccalaureate degree  
30 unless the community college's main campus is located at least  
31 50 miles from the main campus of an institution of higher  
32 education governed by the state board of regents or the main  
33 campus of a private institution of higher education that is  
34 already offering the degree program that the community college  
35 proposes to offer. In addition, the rules must provide that

1 a community college shall not offer a degree program that  
2 leads to a baccalaureate degree unless: the degree program is  
3 in certain specified fields; instruction provided in courses  
4 within the degree program is not delivered entirely over  
5 the internet; and the degree program consists of accredited  
6 programs of study or academic majors that lead to jobs that  
7 address a high-demand, sustained, and unmet workforce need  
8 within the community college region. The bill establishes  
9 reporting requirements related to the pilot program.

10 The bill defines "main campus" and "private institution of  
11 higher education".