

**House File 2649 - Reprinted**

HOUSE FILE 2649  
BY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

(SUCCESSOR TO HSB 533)

(As Amended and Passed by the House March 4, 2026)

**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:

unofficial

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 degree  
16 but confers no more than an associate degree; ~~or which offers,~~  
17 except as provided in paragraph "c".

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

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

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

26 2. Have authority to determine tuition rates for instruction.

27 a. Tuition for residents of Iowa shall not exceed the lowest  
28 tuition rate per semester, or the equivalent, charged by an  
29 institution of higher education under the state board of regents  
30 for a full-time resident student. However, except for students  
31 enrolled under section 261E.6, if a local school district pays  
32 tuition for a resident pupil of high school age, the limitation  
33 on tuition for residents of Iowa shall not apply, the amount of  
34 tuition shall be determined by the board of directors of the  
35 community college with the consent of the local school board,

1 and the pupil shall not be included in the full-time equivalent  
2 enrollment of the community college for the purpose of computing  
3 general aid to the community college.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

33 3. a. The rules adopted pursuant to subsection 2 must  
34 provide that a community college shall not offer a degree  
35 program that leads to a baccalaureate degree unless the community

1 college's main campus is located at least fifty miles from the  
2 main campus of an institution of higher education governed by  
3 the state board of regents or the main campus of a private  
4 institution of higher education that is already offering the  
5 degree program that the community college proposes to offer.

6 b. For purposes of this paragraph, distance shall be measured  
7 as the shortest practical driving distance using publicly  
8 available mapping software, as determined by the department of  
9 education.

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

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

22 b. Is in any one of the following fields:

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

31 c. The instruction provided in courses within the degree  
32 program is not delivered entirely over the internet.

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

1 6. The rules adopted pursuant to subsection 2 must provide  
2 that the instruction provided in the upper-level courses in the  
3 degree program that leads to a baccalaureate degree must be  
4 provided at the community college's primary campus designated by  
5 the community college for governance purposes.

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

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

13 (2) The number of students who have completed the degree  
14 programs.

15 (3) The workforce outcomes of students who have completed the  
16 degree programs.

17 (4) Employer engagement with students in the degree programs  
18 and the community college.

19 (5) The alignment of the degree programs with regional  
20 workforce needs.

21 (6) Tuition levels within the degree programs.

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

23 (8) Challenges encountered during implementation of the pilot  
24 program.

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

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

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

1 8. Upon the graduation of the first full cohort of students  
2 from baccalaureate degree programs under this pilot program, the  
3 general assembly shall review the outcomes of the pilot program  
4 and consider whether to modify or expand the pilot program.

5 9. As used in this section:

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

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

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

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

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