

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:

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

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

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

16 (2) The number of students who have completed the degree
17 programs.

18 (3) The workforce outcomes of students who have completed
19 the degree programs.

20 (4) Employer engagement with students in the degree
21 programs and the community college.

22 (5) The alignment of the degree programs with regional
23 workforce needs.

24 (6) Tuition levels within the degree programs.

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

26 (8) Challenges encountered during implementation of the
27 pilot program.

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

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

35 *c.* The department of education shall compile the reports

1 submitted by the community colleges pursuant to paragraph "a",
2 create a summary of the reports, and submit the summary to the
3 general assembly.

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

9 9. As used in this section:

10 a. "*Main campus*" means the primary campus designated by an
11 institution of higher education governed by the state board of
12 regents, or by a private institution of higher education, for
13 governance purposes.

14 b. "*Private institution of higher education*" means an
15 institution of higher learning located in this state that
16 satisfies all of the following requirements:

17 (1) Is accredited by any federally recognized accreditor of
18 postsecondary educational institutions.

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

21 (3) Is authorized to award associate degrees or
22 baccalaureate degrees in this state.