



## EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES

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## Community colleges expanded role into awarding bachelor's degrees

Traditionally the domain of four-year institutions, a growing number of states now allow community colleges to award bachelor's degrees as one strategy to meet workforce demands, address affordability and increase access to educational opportunities.

The expanded role of community colleges into the bachelor's degree arena is not without controversy. Concerns center on the historically distinct missions of the two postsecondary sectors, competition with four-year institutions, duplication of programs and quality of the bachelor's degrees conferred by community colleges, among others.

A [new policy analysis](#) from the Education Commission of the States examines state policies that allow community colleges to offer four-year degrees, summarizes arguments for and against these policies, and offers key policy considerations related to community college bachelors degree programs.

"As more states consider allowing community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees to support workforce needs and education goals, they will have to weigh the pros and cons of this policy strategy," said Mary Fulton, a policy analyst for the Education Commission of the States. "We identified several core elements included in these policies and also presented fundamental questions for state leaders to take into account."

### ***Some important takeaways from this report:***

- Twenty-three states allow community colleges to award bachelor's degrees; in most states, however, only a few institutions offer the programs.
- Community college bachelor's degree programs are designed to meet local workforce needs and expand access to four-year degrees to a broad range of students.
- States typically place limits on the type and number of bachelor's degrees that community colleges can offer to avoid program duplication and competition with nearby four-year institutions.

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