

## Your Question:

You inquired about state policies that allow community or technical colleges to offer bachelor's degrees.

## Our Response:

Our response indicates the number of states that permit two-year institutions to offer bachelor's degrees; identifies core elements of these policies; provides selected examples of enacted state policies; and summarizes state legislative activity from 2015-18.

Presently, 24 states allow community colleges to award bachelor's degrees and several have proposed legislation in recent years. In most cases, community college bachelor's degrees are intended to fill gaps in local workforce needs, especially in high-demand fields.

## **Core elements of state policies**

State policies that allow community college bachelor's degree programs can be analyzed through various lenses. An Education Commission of the States review found that most states' policies address one or more of the following core elements:

- Location of institutions offering programs (for example, proximity to a campus offering similar programs).
- Number of participating institutions.
- Number and type of degree programs.
- Program demand by employers and students.
- Approval process.
- Cost effectiveness or available resources.
- Data collection and reporting.

The following state examples reflect the degree to which the core elements are included in policies. California and Florida address all the elements; Colorado and Washington's policies incorporate most of the components; and Michigan's policy only specifies the types of degree programs that can be offered.

### **California**

[Senate Bill 850](#) (Cal. Educ. Code §78040), enacted in 2014, authorized the California Community College board of governors, in consultation with the California State University (CSU) and the University of California (UC), to establish a statewide bachelor's degree pilot program at 15 community college districts. The participating districts are limited to offering a single degree program and must meet a set of criteria to receive approval from the board of governors. The bachelor's degree programs cannot be offered at a nearby CSU or UC campus and must be in subject areas with

## **Additional Resources**

An Education Commission of the States' [policy paper](#), *Community colleges expanded role into awarding bachelor's degrees*, examines state policies that allow community colleges to offer four-year degrees, summarizes arguments for and against these policies, and offers key considerations for community college bachelor's degree programs.

unmet workforce needs. As part of the pilot evaluation, data will be collected on the number of programs, enrollments, completion, impact on underserved populations, costs and job placement.

### **Colorado**

In 2010, the legislature enacted [S.B. 101](#) (Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann. §23-71-133), allowing Colorado Mountain College, which does not have a four-year campus in its service area, to offer up to five bachelor's programs to meet workforce demands. Under [S.B. 4](#) (Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann. §23-1-133) of 2014, lawmakers granted authority to the Colorado Community College System and Aims Community College to offer technical, career and workforce development Bachelor of Applied Science degree programs that address the local workforce needs. No limits are placed on the number of programs offered by these community colleges. As part of the approval process, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education will consider whether the bachelor's program is sufficiently distinguishable from programs at nearby four-year institutions, among other criteria.

### **Florida**

A 2001 law, S.B. 1162, (Fla. Stat. Ann. [§1007.33](#)) amended state statute to authorize a limited number of community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees in specified program areas to meet workforce needs. Legislation enacted in 2008, [S.B. 1716](#), opened the door for Florida's 28 community colleges (state colleges) to award bachelor's degrees. The state Board of Education must approve the degree programs contingent upon documented demand, unmet need in the area and the community college demonstrating it has the necessary facilities and academic resources. In addition, nearby four-year institutions must be consulted. The Florida College System issues an annual report that summarizes the status of the programs and progress on several performance measures.

### **Michigan**

In 2012, Michigan lawmakers enacted [H.B. 4496](#) (Mich. Comp. Laws §389.121), which authorizes the state's 28 community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees in energy production, concrete technology, maritime technology and culinary arts. The legislation does not address the other core policy elements, most likely due to the decentralized and independent nature of Michigan's community colleges. Individual institution's boards of trustees may decide to undergo a review process by the regional accrediting agency and receive authority to offer bachelor's programs.

### **Washington**

The Washington legislature enacted [H.B. 1794](#) in 2005, which created a community and technical college applied bachelor's degree pilot program. The statute was revised in 2010 under [S.B. 6355](#) that allowed all campuses to award bachelor's degrees. The degree programs must be approved by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC). Under statute [RCW 28B.50.810](#), the institutions must demonstrate a commitment of resources to build and sustain a high-quality program, the ability to engage qualified faculty to deliver a high-quality a curriculum, sufficient student demand to make the program cost-effective and feasible to operate, employer demand to make the program cost-effective for students and that the program is not offered by a nearby four-year institution. The SBCTC produces an annual report that summarizes the status and outcomes of the bachelor's degree programs.

## **State policy activity and examples: 2015-18**

In 2015, **Michigan** introduced a bill to expand the degree programs offered under their existing policy, but the measure died. Similarly, **California** proposed legislation in 2016 to allow 16 instead of 15 community college districts

to offer bachelor's degrees, but this bill also failed. In 2015, **Texas** lawmakers introduced at least three bills to expand a pilot program allowing a limited number of junior colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees, but none were enacted.

In 2016, **New Jersey** and **Ohio** proposed legislation to permit community colleges to offer baccalaureate degree programs, although both bills failed.

Between Jan. 1, 2017 and April 30, 2018:

- Thirteen states introduced 54 bills related to community college bachelor's degrees.
- Four states enacted legislation.
- Thirty-nine legislative actions failed, one was vetoed and 10 are pending.

The states that introduced legislation include: **California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Maryland, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina** and **Texas**. Some states proposed companion bills in the House and Senate, and Texas accounted for 29 of the legislative actions.

Except for Florida and Maryland, the proposed legislation allows, revises or expands the authority of two-year institutions to award bachelor's degrees. In some cases, the four-year degrees are limited to specific fields of study, such as nursing or other high-demand programs. The Florida governor vetoed a 2017 bill that would have capped enrollment in upper-level courses at community colleges. A 2018 Maryland bill would have prohibited community colleges from offering bachelor's degrees, but the legislation failed.

In 2017-18 (as of April 30, 2018), the following states enacted community college bachelor's degree legislation:

**Colorado:** [H.B. 18-1086](#) (2018) allows, with governing board approval, a community college that is part of the state system of community and technical colleges to offer a bachelor of science degree in nursing as a completion degree. In considering a request from a community college to offer a nursing degree, the governing board must consider student and workforce demand, cost effectiveness for students, and accreditation and licensing requirements.

**Idaho:** [H.B. 73](#) (2017) amends existing law to provide correct terminology and clarify that upper division courses and programs offered by community colleges are subject to certain approval requirements.

**Ohio:** The 2018-19 budget bill, [H.B. 49](#), requires the Chancellor to establish a program under which community and technical colleges can apply to the Department of Higher Education to offer applied bachelor's degree programs. The proposed programs must meet specified criteria to receive approval, or demonstrate a unique approach to benefit the higher education system or the state. See [budget summary](#) for the Department of Higher Education, page 4.

**Texas:** [S.B. 2118](#) (2017) allows the higher education coordinating board to authorize baccalaureate degree programs at one or more public junior colleges that offer a degree program in the field of applied science, including applied science with an emphasis in early childhood education, applied technology or nursing, and that demonstrate a workforce need. With some exceptions, a junior college may not offer more than three baccalaureate degree programs at any time.