

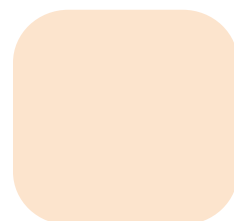


Higher Education and Workforce Alignment in Iowa: Final Report



Prepared for the Iowa Department of Education

March 6, 2026



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Introduction and Background

In December 2025, the Iowa Department of Education contracted with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to conduct “a comprehensive analysis of the State’s higher education system, including Regent institutions, all 15 community colleges, and private colleges and universities.” More specifically, the state requested NCHEMS to “assess the alignment of current program offerings with workforce needs, identify training gaps, and produce findings and recommendations to support data-driven policy and funding decisions.” A specific request was that NCHEMS produce quantitative data to form a foundational set of facts that the State of Iowa can rely on to make strategic decisions regarding policies that align educational supply generated by the state’s collection of public and private postsecondary institutions with workforce demand across the state. We complement the data with qualitative information shared by Iowa stakeholders. Finally, we offer recommendations aimed at reinforcing Iowa’s capacity to develop and use data and information to design, assess, and implement evidence-based policy.

The report is organized around the following sets of key questions:

- How is Iowa’s population changing? How will the potential audience for postsecondary education change in the future?
- What does the labor market look like in Iowa? How does it differ by region, and what future changes are expected? What does this all mean for postsecondary demand?
- Are the necessary postsecondary programs available to all students across the state? Where are the gaps in access?
- Where are the strengths and weaknesses in Iowa’s education-to-work pipeline?
- What is the alignment—or misalignment—between educational supply and workforce demand? Are there disciplines and/or regions in which Iowa’s postsecondary institutions are not graduating enough students to meet workforce needs?

In the Summary of Key Findings section, we briefly answer each of these questions and summarize our findings. The Methods section explains our approach and the information sources used. The Presentation of Data and Analytical Findings section then presents the detailed data exhibits and analysis that underpin our findings, organized by the same topics as the key questions. We conclude the report with our recommendations and an appendix that contains region-specific data for different areas of the state.

Summary of Key Findings

The evidence collected for this study points to a clear conclusion: Iowa’s public and private colleges and universities collectively have sufficient capacity to fulfill the state’s current and future needs for college-educated talent. Furthermore, the most recent data indicate that the current level of degree and certificate production more than adequately meets the state’s needs. Our analysis of quantitative data, complemented by stakeholder focus groups, suggests that, by and large, demand for educated workers in Iowa is not increasing rapidly. The state does not have widespread shortages in educational supply. It does not follow that this general observation means there are no locations or disciplines in which there are not enough college graduates,

however. Stakeholders in some regions reported difficulty in hiring for certain types of jobs and occupations. But these gaps—often relatively modest in scale—were reported to be most commonly found in specific occupational areas such as nursing and other health care, skilled trades, and upskilling opportunities for workers in frontline occupations. Even so, in many respects, it was not obvious whether these problems were the result of a lack of available capacity for supply, or if they were more likely due to other causes.

Most critically, in meeting its labor market needs, Iowa faces troubling population and migration trends that are likely a more significant root cause of workforce misalignment (and other challenges for the state). The population of 15-to-44-year-olds is shrinking in most parts of the state as the population ages and young people move to more urban/suburban parts of Iowa—or leave the state altogether—while the population in retirement ages is the fastest-growing segment, both in number and in proportion. As more than one of the stakeholders we interviewed described it, “there just aren’t enough people.” Worse, migration data show that Iowa is having the most difficulty retaining both young people early in their careers as well as well-educated residents. In particular, more young, educated Iowans are leaving than moving to the state. Stakeholders explained that employers are eager to hire recent high school graduates, which may reduce the demand for postsecondary education, at least the traditional variety that takes place full-time immediately after high school. The primary education and workforce challenges from a statewide perspective, therefore, are not how to produce more college graduates, or how to align programs with occupations better, but instead how to motivate college graduates to stay in Iowa, how to retain workers, and how to provide working adults with continuing education and upskilling while they remain employed.

In the relatively few cases where data and stakeholders identified real challenges, they were more likely to be locally based and highly specialized. The evidence we gathered also indicated that such problems with educational supply most commonly stemmed from difficulties attracting qualified instructors to support the expansion of the labor pool in the skilled trades and in some health care fields. Clinical instructors to train nurses were in short supply throughout Iowa, a lament common in other states as well. On the demand side, stakeholders also frequently cited a lack of interest or awareness among young people about in-demand jobs as they approached college age.

Finally, as we complete this report, it is impossible to miss the many articles about “education deserts” being a barrier to educational opportunity in Iowa. It is, indeed, a challenge to effectively deliver educational programs—especially specialized ones—where they are most needed or where potential students live, a problem for Iowa as it is for other states. Our analysis acknowledges this dilemma, especially relative to western portions of the state straddling Interstate 80 and along the southern border. Nevertheless, Iowa must consider how best to meet the educational needs of the population in those communities, as well as the needs of local employers for the right kind of talent. There have been several attempts to address those needs through both in-person and online instruction, offered by both Regent universities and private institutions, and via educational outposts operated by community colleges and (often overlooked) Iowa State University’s Cooperative Extension services. Stakeholders consistently described online instruction as a flawed approach to meeting those needs, expressing a strong preference for in-person instruction. But it is not clear if either workforce needs or student demand are reliably stable enough to justify

permanent investments as a solution to these challenges. Our assessment is that those conditions are likeliest to exist in locations with sufficient population in the southwestern part of the state.

There is a compelling argument that states have an obligation to ensure that locally relevant postsecondary opportunities are widely distributed, including to otherwise underserved, sparsely populated places within their borders. Yet states, Iowa included, are just beginning to test new concepts in how to make that happen in ways that are simultaneously effective, efficient, flexible, and affordable, using the full sweep of the educational assets available to them. At a time when demographic realities now and in the future make innovation in achieving these goals imperative, and where the “diameter” of the educational supply pipeline is less a problem than population and migration trends, Iowa is, by necessity, positioned to lead on developing this kind of innovation in educational delivery.

How is Iowa’s population changing? How will the potential audience for postsecondary education change in the future?

- Iowa’s population is aging. The number of residents aged 15-19 and 20-24, who represent traditional college-aged students and new labor market entrants, is expected to shrink. Only Central and East Central Iowa will see growth among younger working age people aged 25-44.
- Iowa is a net importer of college students, but a net exporter of residents with college degrees.
- Iowa’s overall level of college attainment is about equal to the nation’s as a whole. There is a sizeable population of adults without a bachelor’s degree who may be interested in additional education or training.

Key takeaways from these highlights suggest that postsecondary enrollment demand is likely to diminish gradually along with traditional-age populations. However, it will likely remain more stable in the regions where the Regent institutions are located. The number of working-age adults is expected to continue to rise and, particularly given expectations that economic and workforce demands will continue to require upskilling or reskilling, they represent a potential source of enrollment demand that helps offset the decline in traditional-age populations. Institutions in more rural communities across Iowa can anticipate the greatest changes among the prospective students that they will encounter. Young people in these areas may opt to enter the workforce instead of enrolling in college full-time; postsecondary providers will need to increasingly focus on serving working people.

Detailed analysis and graphs available in this report’s [Iowa’s Population and Potential Postsecondary Audiences](#) section.

What does the labor market look like in Iowa? How does it differ by region, and what future changes are expected? What does this all mean for postsecondary demand?

- Over the next 10 years, Iowa will see an increase in the educational requirements of its labor force. Jobs that require postsecondary education will increase, while jobs that do not require education beyond high school will decrease. Most of the growth will take place in Central Iowa.
- Iowa’s industry mix has changed over time, differs from that of the U.S., and varies by region. Health Care and Social Assistance has grown to become the industry that employs

the most lowans. Manufacturing has shrunk, as a share of employment, but remains the state's second-largest industry. Central Iowa, the area expected to grow the most in terms of population and employment, has a substantially different industry mix from the rest of the state.

- Among occupations that require bachelor's degrees, demand over the next decade is expected to be greatest in management, nursing, accounting, and education. For jobs that traditionally require an associate degree, demand is projected to be greatest among preschool teachers, legal aides, health-related positions, and agricultural and technical positions. Except in Central Iowa, most of these occupations are not growing; demand comes from turnover among current workers.
- Unemployment in Iowa is lower than the national average. Because of labor demand, new high school graduates may have more incentive to work than to study. We heard from stakeholders that employers are eager to hire workers directly out of high school. They may be willing to invest in ongoing training/education to upskill these employees over time, as long as they can continue to work while pursuing their education.
- In some regions of Iowa, wages are lower than in surrounding states, even after adjusting for cost-of-living differences. This creates an incentive for lowans to leave the state for work.

There are signs of a shift in the shape of Iowa's economy that is likely to boost demand for educated talent, most notably evident in changes to the industry mix that Iowa has been experiencing over the past quarter-century. The industries that have grown the most during that period, as shares of employment, tend to require postsecondary education: healthcare, professional/scientific/technical services, and education. The industries that have become smaller shares of employment include manufacturing and retail trade.

Most of the increased demand for educated workers will be located in Central Iowa. In other regions of the state, the greatest challenges will center around how to replace vacancies as the population of young people declines, how to retain workers in the region, and how to educate/upskill incumbent workers.

Detailed analysis and graphs are available in this report's [Labor Market Demand](#) section.

Are the necessary postsecondary programs available to all students across the state? Where are the gaps in access?

- Iowa has more institutions per 100,000 adult residents than 42 other states. Additionally, public postsecondary main or branch campuses, other locations connected to community colleges, private institutions, and extension sites operated by Iowa State University are scattered throughout Iowa. This means that nearly all parts of the state are close to some sort of postsecondary access point. Naturally, many of these outposts are small, narrowly scoped operations, easily distinguished from full-service campuses. Nevertheless, they are assets that could be leveraged to provide supports to students, even if not all are equipped to provide instruction. Instead, considering how to link the capabilities of these disbursed assets in ways tailored to meet local student needs may be a thoughtful approach, before too quickly resorting to investments in new infrastructure. This is especially true at a time when Iowa, like other states, is facing demographic shifts that will limit enrollment demand, at least among traditional-age students. Notwithstanding

this caution, a review of these assets shows that some of the most rural spaces in the southwestern part of the state are less populated with physical facilities capable of providing more comprehensive services. Participation data reflects this relative sparseness of institutions, but it does not account for students who may be enrolled in out-of-state institutions.

- The Iowa Board of Regents and private four-year institutions have been working to expand access to online degrees, sometimes with in-person support. Stakeholders from rural areas reported dissatisfaction with entirely online options.
- In line with national trends, postsecondary enrollment across the state has declined over many years, with decreases concentrated in the community college and private sectors. Increasing joint enrollment among high school students has offset part of the community college decline.
- About one-third of degree-seeking community college students are age 25 or older, while only 6% of public university students are age 25 or older. Iowa ranks highly among states in the participation rate of traditionally aged residents, but among the lowest-ranked in the participation rate of working-age adults. In our stakeholder engagement, institutions mostly emphasized the high school-to-college pipeline. Especially at four-year institutions (both public and private), there appears to be significant unrealized opportunity to serve adult learners.
- Men are also under-represented in Iowa's college population.
- Affordability, as indicated by net price, is lowest at Iowa's community colleges and highest at private institutions on average. However, net price varies significantly by institution and student income. Whether any particular student has access to an affordable option nearby will depend on their specific location, family income, and program of interest.

Prominent among these points is the extent to which Iowa's postsecondary infrastructure remains focused on traditional-aged students. Yet both demographic projections and economic realities are likely to force some of Iowa's institutions to shift their attention to focus more heavily on working adults as a source of enrollment in the years ahead, if institutions are going to continue to thrive by meeting the needs of the state and its employers and population. Already it is clear that institutions in the two-year and private sectors have been feeling the pressure of these realities, even if there are signs of a slight recovery in the most recent enrollment data.¹

Secondly, the data hint at the possibility of accessibility challenges that are most evident along the state's southern and western borders, where participation rates in Iowa postsecondary institutions are consistently lower than in most other counties. The availability of options in neighboring states, particularly affordable four-year institutions, may be both sufficient—and possibly preferred by—residents of those counties, given both proximity and the competitive tuition prices charged to Iowa residents. It is therefore difficult with data from Iowa only to draw a conclusion about the extent to which these counties have serious accessibility challenges. There

¹ National Student Clearinghouse.

are other, predominantly rural counties throughout the state where participation rates are comparably low, leading to important concerns about the degree to which Iowa is home to “education deserts” that render reasonable access to postsecondary education, and to a baccalaureate degree in particular, challenging.

There is no generally agreed-upon definition of an education desert, and multiple layers of information are important to consider. First, most definitions tend to identify places that lack a broad-access four-year institution within a certain radius. Our analysis shows that while residents of some areas of the state would have to travel a significant distance to reach the main campus of a public or private university, nearly everywhere is close to a community college main campus, an additional community college location, or a Cooperative Extension office. There exists the possibility that Iowa might be able to pursue policies and practices aimed at better aligning the programming and services at those locations to the specific educational needs of their communities. Further, demographic shifts are increasingly compromising institutions’ ability to impose selective admissions requirements, so additional institutions may become “broad access” over time.

The second consideration concerns students’ ability to access straightforward pathways through multiple institutions to find the programs they seek, including bachelor’s degrees. Our analysis suggests that transfer patterns from the community colleges through baccalaureate-granting institutions in Iowa—both public and private—have not improved in recent years, despite close ongoing collaboration between Iowa community colleges and the Board of Regents to improve transfer, and recent innovations such as the multilateral transfer agreement between a consortium of private institutions and Iowa’s community colleges. These are signs that the four-year institutions are starting to put greater priority on improving these pathways. Accelerating this progress is not only in the institutions’ best interest; it also can be a more concentrated focus of state policy with accompanying reporting and accountability. Backing these efforts with more effective and creative student supports for online learners, low-residency programming and scheduling, and other tools is vital to their success, as demonstrated by dissatisfaction among stakeholders in remote regions with current and prior attempts at online delivery inadequately supported by in-person services.

Here the community colleges can and should be seen as fully integrated partners. If the four-year institutions are going to meet the needs for bachelor’s degrees around the state, it is vital that they prioritize providing effective service to all parts of the state, including in areas far from their campuses. To do this successfully, they will need to partner with the community colleges in understanding and assessing the unique needs of diverse communities. The community colleges must be recognized as the experts in this area; they have deep connections with employers and community leaders that are important to understanding local needs and to connecting students with the work-based learning and job opportunities that allow them to stay in their home communities. Building or enhancing these collaborations, and shifting the habits required to sustain productive partnerships, may require new resources. Additionally, the state may need to consider how best to coordinate and monitor these activities to ensure goals are being met and residents in no spaces are being neglected.

Detailed analysis and graphs are available in this report’s [Postsecondary Access](#) section.

Where are the strengths and weaknesses in Iowa's education-to-work pipeline?

- As is typical elsewhere in the nation, the rate at which Iowa high school graduates enroll immediately in college has declined.
- Iowa has emphasized work-based learning in recent years. We heard numerous examples, from stakeholders in all college and university sectors, of efforts to incorporate more work-based learning opportunities into their curriculum. Data is incomplete, but the number of registered apprenticeships, one highly formalized type of work-based learning, has risen dramatically.
- The number of degrees awarded by Iowa colleges and universities, at all levels, has declined in recent years. The number of non-degree certificates and noncredit awards, however, has increased.
- The number of awards conferred in the health professions and business disciplines grew. At the same time, awards in the liberal arts and sciences declined substantially. This is evidence that students are self-selecting into programs more closely linked to immediate job opportunities and to signals of occupational demand.
- One-third of students who complete a transfer-oriented associate degree at an Iowa community college do not subsequently transfer to a four-year institution, and transfer rates have not improved in recent years. While we heard from stakeholders about promising collaborations to improve and streamline transfer, there is still room to strengthen multilateral transfer agreements and improve transfer rates.
- About 60% of Iowa community college graduates, and 40% of Iowa public university graduates, are employed in Iowa five years after graduation, indicating that many Iowa residents, in addition to college graduates originally from out-of-state, are leaving Iowa after college. Graduates in some disciplines, including education (at the baccalaureate level) and health care (especially at the associate level), are more likely to stay and work in Iowa than others.

Detailed analysis and graphs are available in this report's [Student Success and the Education-to-Work Pipeline](#) section.

What is the alignment—or misalignment—between educational supply and workforce demand? Are there disciplines and/or regions in which Iowa's postsecondary institutions are not graduating enough students to meet workforce needs?

- Based on statewide and sub-state regional comparisons of the number of expected job openings in each occupation to the number of college graduates in related disciplines, there do not appear to be widespread shortages in appropriately educated talent.
- Business/management occupations and accountants seem to be the largest areas in which educational supply is lower than labor market demand. The link between programs and occupations is typically looser for the former; in other words, employees in business positions are often hired from many academic programs, not exclusively business programs.
- There is also an unmet need for preschool teachers, though early childhood degrees may not produce a return on investment for students, since wages in this profession are low.
- The data do not show an undersupply of graduates in either nursing or elementary/secondary education. Stakeholders we engaged with consistently described those roles as difficult to hire for, but did not attribute that difficulty to a lack of new

college graduates. Instead, stakeholders pointed to out-migration, wage differences with surrounding states, and challenges hiring and retaining employees in specific types of roles within each occupation, such as bedside nurses working undesirable shifts and teachers of calculus and special education.

Detailed analysis and graphs are available in this report's [Supply-Demand Alignment](#) section.

What key questions are not answered in this report?

There are two important questions that we were not able to answer due to a lack of data availability.

First, we do not know the workforce outcomes of Iowa residents who leave to attend an out-of-state college or university. It would be useful to track the rates at which these individuals return to Iowa after completing their education, which would add detail to our understanding of in-migration and out-migration of college students and college-educated individuals. This is especially relevant in locations along Iowa's borders where residents have more ready access to an out-of-state institution than to an Iowa one. State leaders may wonder whether a closer in-state postsecondary option would lead more Iowans to stay and work in Iowa; we are not currently able to answer this question. Iowa's State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS), in partnership with Iowa Workforce Development, has the capability to gather the data needed for this type of analysis, at least for recent graduates of Iowa public high schools, but those data were not available within this project's timeline.

Second, we lack information on the post-college outcomes of graduates from private institutions. Many of the private institutions attempt to track their graduates through surveys, but alumni survey data tend to be unreliable and may not be collected or measured in a consistent way. Iowa's SLDS can partner with Iowa Workforce Development to track graduates into the workforce, as mentioned above, but only a subset of Iowa's independent institutions' students—those who graduated from a public high school in Iowa—are included in the state's SLDS. A small number of Iowa's independent institutions have begun to submit data on their graduates to the U.S. Census Bureau's Postsecondary Employment Outcomes project, which is a promising start. We are hopeful that additions to the SLDS or PSEO will improve data availability in this area in the future.

Additionally, our analysis identified that there is room to improve student transfer from community colleges to four-year universities. We also heard about promising partnerships and collaborations focused on improving transfer. Further study is needed to understand the primary barriers to transfer and what solutions would be needed to overcome those barriers.

What next steps should the State of Iowa take?

The rapid pace of this study, as well as its clearly stated intent to focus on the creation of a foundational data set, limits the specificity and detail of any recommendations we can make. Nevertheless, there are next steps that Iowa should consider taking as ways it can be better positioned to diagnose and respond to perennial questions that arise around how well its educational supply and workforce demand are calibrated. Among them are:

1. Improve the state's capacity for gathering and analyzing relevant data for use in designing and evaluating policy, but also to help institutions align programs to demonstrable needs.

2. Consider enhancing the state's ability to plan and coordinate how its higher education assets work separately and together to achieve state priorities.
3. Develop policies that promote the creation of capacity to deliver programs to remote sites on an as-needed basis.

Detailed explanation of each recommendation available in this report's [Recommendations](#) section.

Methods

This initial report relies primarily on the quantitative analysis of administrative data. We gathered and analyzed the following public data, which allowed us to take a comprehensive look at Iowa and its regions. In some cases, public data also facilitated comparisons with other states:

- Occupational and industry projections from JobsEQ (a proprietary data provider) and the Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce.
- Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by state and industry from the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis.
- Population history and projections from Woods & Poole Economics via the Iowa State Data center.
- Postsecondary attainment and migration data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.
- High school student demographics and high school graduate numbers from the Iowa Department of Education.
- High school graduate projections from the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education's (WICHE) *Knocking at the College Door* report.
- Projections of educational requirements of occupational demand produced by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.
- Data on postsecondary enrollment and graduates from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the federal government's foundational dataset on American higher education institutions.
- Post-graduation employment data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO).² Through a partnership with participating states, PSEO provides aggregated data that are based on matching individual postsecondary student records provided by state agencies with state and federal data. Currently, these data are only available for graduates of Iowa's public institutions.
- Data on potential adult student populations from CollegeAPP (a proprietary data provider).

We augmented these public data with a wealth of detailed data supplied by partners in Iowa, to whom we are grateful. This included:

² https://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/pseo_experimental.html

- Data about Iowa's community colleges from the Iowa Department of Education. These included credit and noncredit enrollment, graduates, transfer, programs, work-based learning, and industry-recognized credentials.
- Data about Iowa's public universities from the Iowa Board of Regents. These included enrollment, graduates, transfer, and programs.
- Data on private college students, graduates, and transfers from Iowa's State Longitudinal Data Center. The SLDS also provided some longitudinal attainment data about Iowa public high school students.

We analyzed the data for the state as a whole, as well by region within Iowa. We also examined trends over time and disaggregated data by various student and institutional characteristics of interest.

One significant challenge to conducting this study is that data for the Board of Regents institutions, the community colleges, and private institutions are not contained in a single repository. Data availability across institutional sectors varied. In particular, data on private institutions are not as complete and detailed as what are available for public institutions.

Additionally, in January 2026, NCHEMS conducted 13 group interviews with stakeholders to gain the perspectives of local experts; each group contained approximately 10 to 20 people. The first four groups provided a statewide perspective; they included leaders from Iowa's independent nonprofit institutions, Board of Regents leaders (at both system and institutional levels), community college leaders, and a smaller group of statewide experts in workforce and economic development.

We then conducted nine regionally-focused meetings organized around the nine analysis regions of Iowa we used throughout this project. These groups included leaders of public and private colleges/universities in the region, community college trustees, employers, workforce and economic development experts, K-12 leaders, and other business and civic leaders. The regional focus groups were intended to flesh out the picture of the challenges in matching labor demand with supply in each region's unique context. We began these regional discussions by sharing some of the results of our data analysis; participants were then able to provide us with suggestions for how to interpret the data and additional data analysis to consider. They also filled in gaps in our quantitative data with local, on-the-ground knowledge.

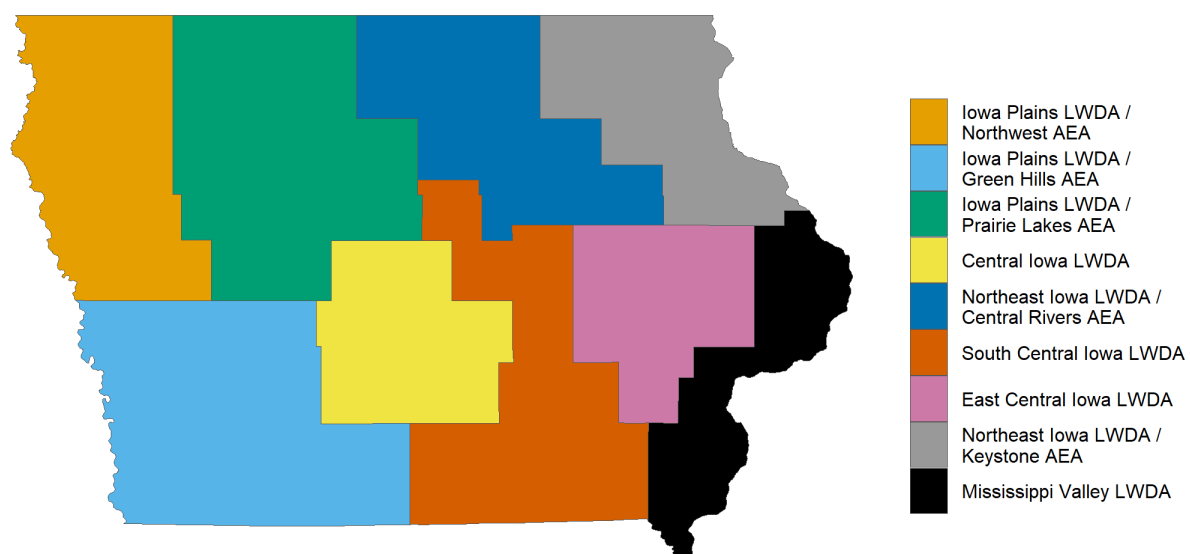
Additionally, we created an online form where stakeholders could provide us with additional information or feedback they considered relevant to our work. This form created an opportunity for us to receive input from individuals who were not able to attend a focus group. It also allowed those who did attend a chance to follow up with further thoughts. We received 24 responses with comments. We combined the comments received via this form with our notes from the focus groups, which we then analyzed for themes and relevant examples.

Our findings in this report are based first and foremost on our analysis of quantitative data. We then use the stakeholder engagement findings to add detail, examples, explanations, and context.

Presentation of Data and Analytical Findings

In order to examine the differences in access to education programs and their alignment to labor market needs, NCHEMS organized its analyses according to nine regions in Iowa (Figure 1). These regions correspond to the state's six Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDA). We have subdivided the largest LWDA, Iowa Plains, into three analysis regions, and the second-largest LWDA, Northeast Iowa, into two. Those subdivisions are based generally on Area Education Agency (AEA) and community college service area boundaries. These regional definitions were vetted with the Iowa Department of Education and other key stakeholders prior to use.

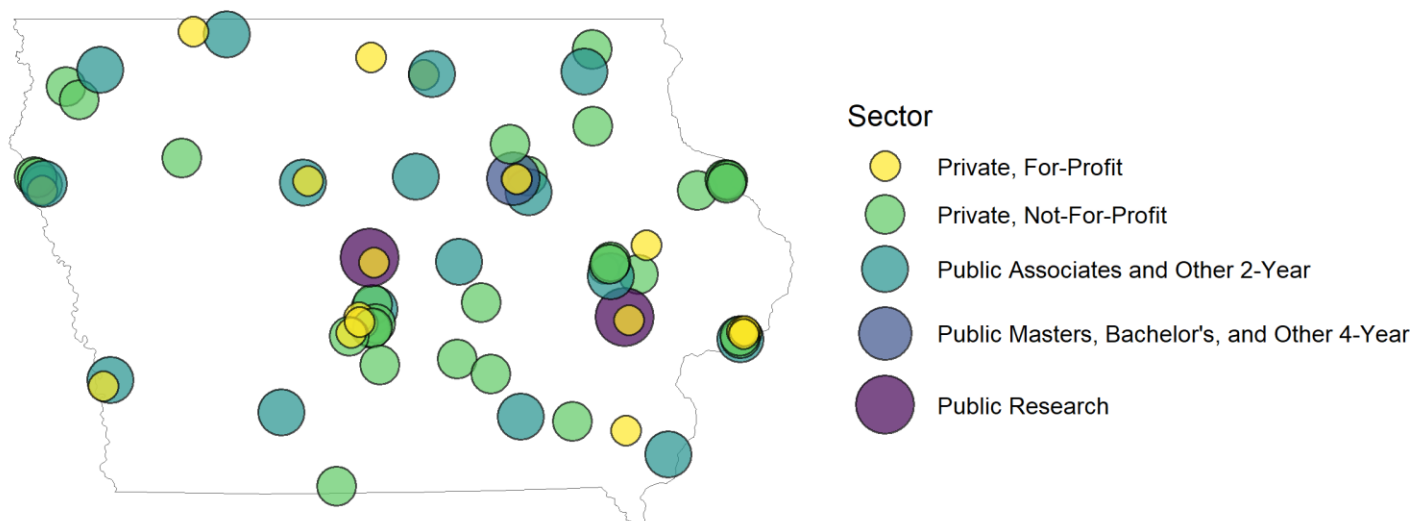
Figure 1. Iowa Analysis Regions



Regions are based on Iowa Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDA). The Iowa Plains LWDA and Northeast Iowa LWDA were subdivided based on approximate Area Education Agency (AEA) boundaries. Three counties were moved from their assigned AEA to match the Iowa Plains LWDA: Audubon, Carroll, and Guthrie.

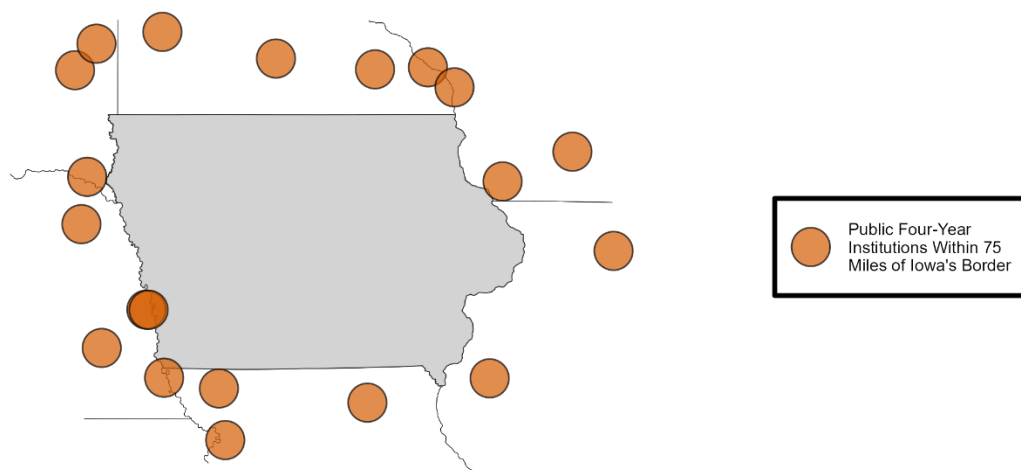
Additionally, Iowa is home to 74 Title IV eligible postsecondary institutions: three public universities, 15 community colleges, 34 private not-for-profit institutions, and 22 private for-profit institutions (Figure 2). These institutions are found across Iowa, with the exception of the Regent universities, which are exclusively in the eastern half of the state. The Iowa Plains LWDA, which encompasses the entirety of western Iowa, generally is home to fewer postsecondary institutions, particularly its Green Hills AEA portion. This relative lack will show up in subsequent data analyses.

Figure 2. Postsecondary Institutions in Iowa



However, it is worth noting that Iowa's surrounding states maintain public (and private) four-year institutions within close proximity to their borders with Iowa (Figure 3). Of particular note is the presence of the University of South Dakota, which sits less than 20 miles across Iowa's border, and South Dakota State University, which is just over an hour's drive away from Iowa's northwesternmost corner. These are of special interest because South Dakota charges in-state tuition rates to Iowa residents through its "South Dakota Advantage" program, which makes those two institutions less expensive for Iowa residents than the University of Iowa and Iowa State (though about \$1,000 more than the University of Northern Iowa). In addition, Northwest Missouri State University and the University of Nebraska-Omaha are on the border of the Iowa regions farthest from the Regent Universities. Iowans who live nearer to those campuses than to an Iowa institution that offers their preferred program may be disproportionately likely to leave Iowa for their postsecondary education, even if their intent is to settle back in Iowa upon completion.

Figure 3. Public Four-Year Institutions Within 75 Miles of Iowa's Border



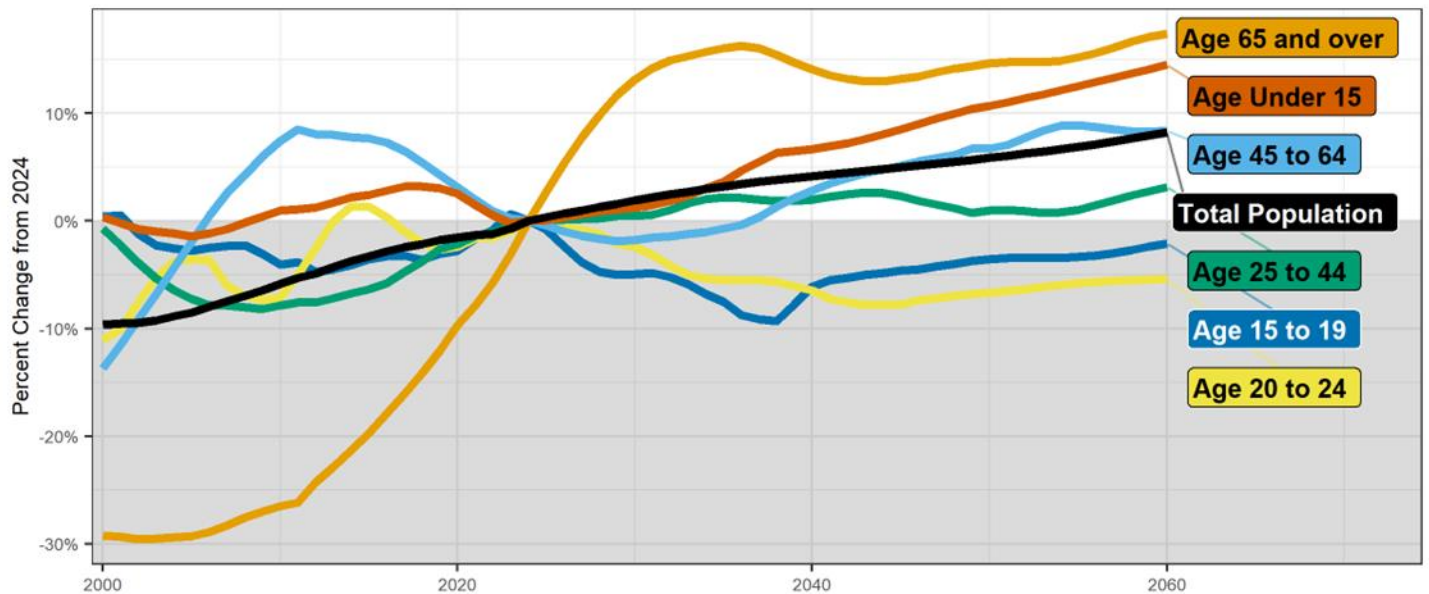
Iowa's Population and Potential Postsecondary Audiences

This section analyzes data designed to answer the questions: How is Iowa's population changing? How will the potential audience for postsecondary education change in the future? This demographic data provides additional contextual information important for assessing education and workforce alignment.

Population and Demographic Change

While Iowa's overall population has been growing, its population has also been aging. Residents aged 15–24 are projected to decline over the next 35 years, while the prime working-age group of 25–44-year-olds will grow only modestly. Iowans under the age of 15 and those 65 and older will increase the fastest. These two groups contribute only modestly to Iowa's workforce, rarely enroll in higher education, and disproportionately rely on public assistance and state-funded services. These trends will have major implications for Iowa's workforce, postsecondary enrollment, and state funding priorities (Figure 4.).

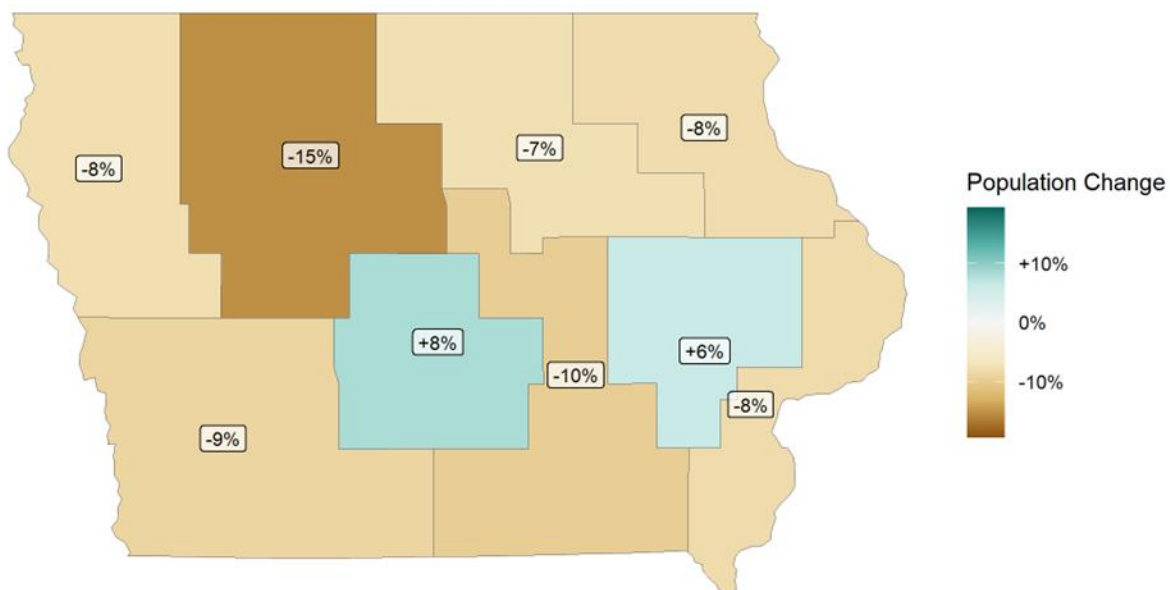
Figure 4. Projected Iowa Population Change from 2024, by Age Group



Source: 2025 Woods & Poole Economics, Inc. via the Iowa State Data Center.

Population growth is also projected to be very uneven across Iowa's regions, with Central Iowa and East Central Iowa responsible for most of the statewide increase, as well as all of the growth among young working-age groups. Most areas in the state will see a decline in the number of 25–44-year-olds (Figure 5). See the [Regional Data Appendix](#) for additional graphs.

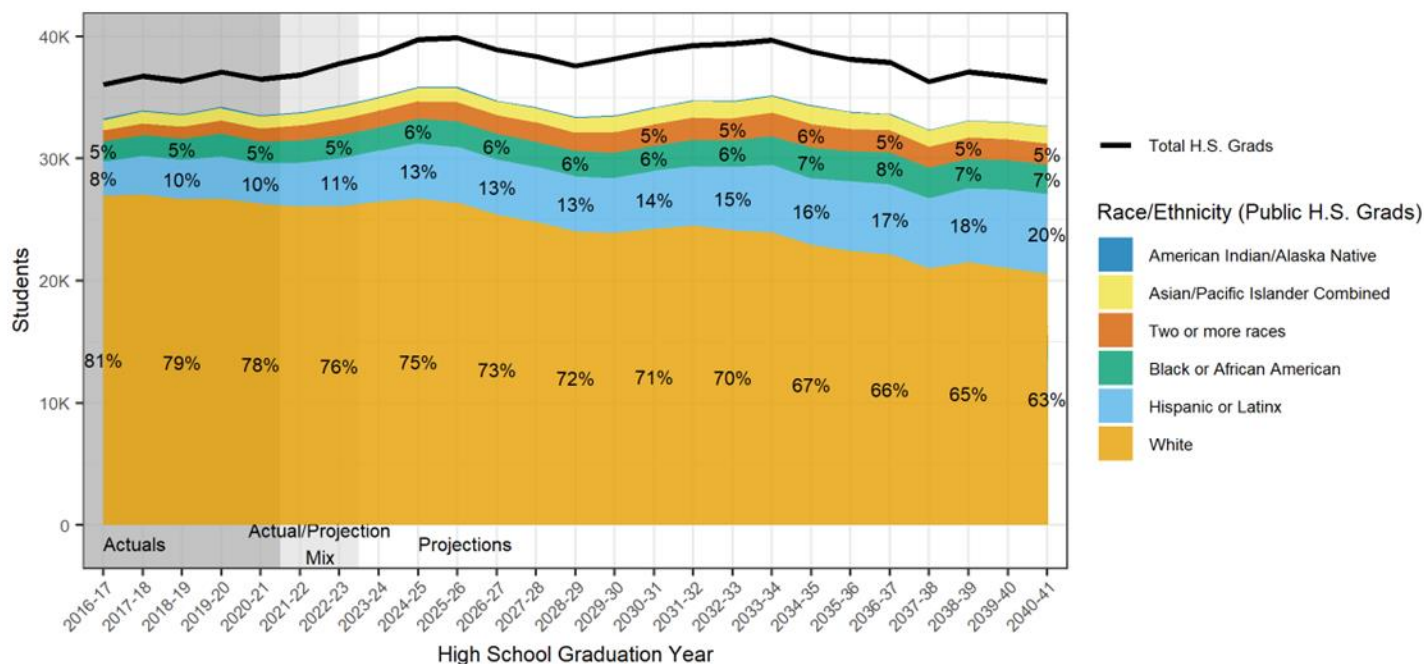
Figure 5. Projected Change in Age 15-44 Population by Region, 2024 to 2050



Source: 2025 Woods & Poole Economics, Inc. via the Iowa State Data Center. Only includes projections for residents age 15-44.

Projections of the number of high school graduates—the principal target market for most of Iowa’s public and private higher education institutions—are expected to decrease gradually through 2029. For the subsequent five years it will recover to current levels before entering a period of steady decline through at least 2041. Throughout this period, graduates of public high schools will grow substantially more diverse (Figure 6).

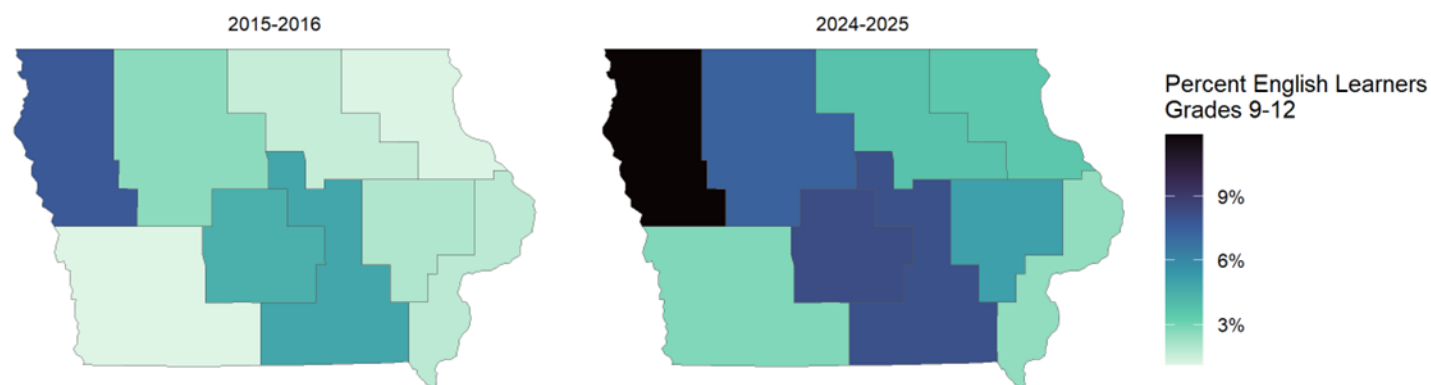
Figure 6. Projected Iowa High School Graduates, by Race/Ethnicity



Source: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates, 2024. <https://www.wiche.edu/knocking>. Notes: Race/ethnicity was only available for public high school graduates. Public total numbers are actuals through 2022-23. Public school Race/ethnicity includes actuals through 2021-22. Later years are projections. The difference between the total (line) and the races/ethnicities (colors) is private high school graduates. Percentages are based on public high school graduates only.

Iowa has seen a substantial increase in the share of high school students who are English-language learners in the past decade, which changes the audience that Iowa's postsecondary institutions will need to serve. These increases have been evident across Iowa (Figure 7).

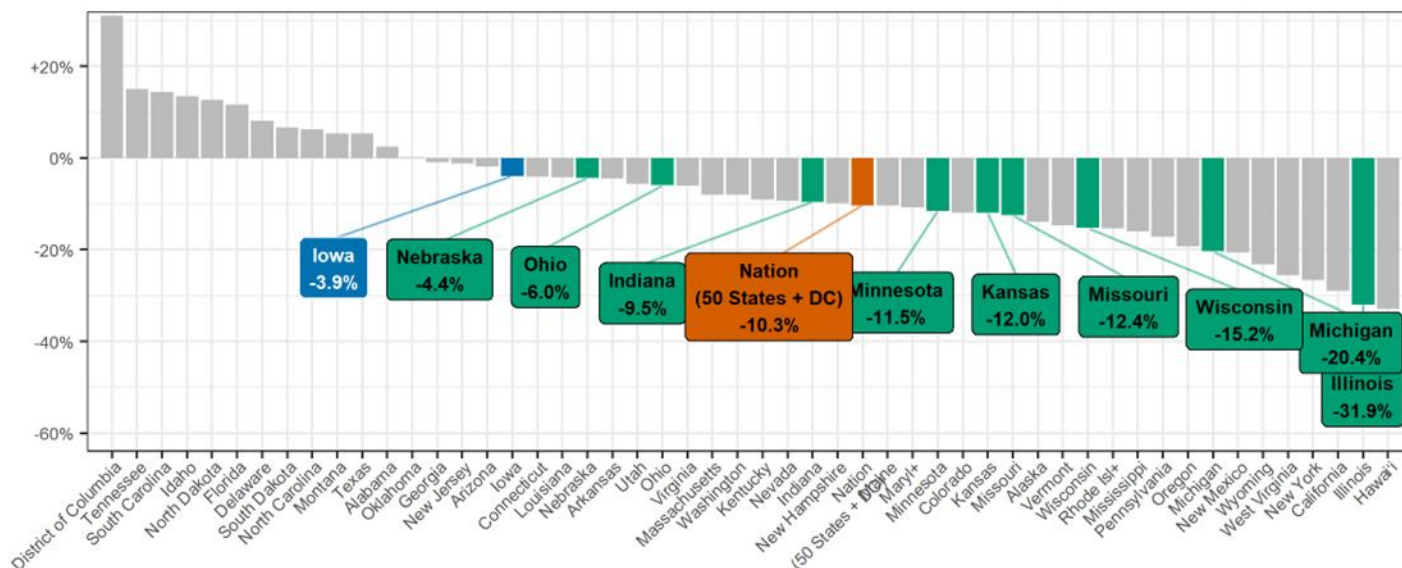
Figure 7. Percent of Public High School Students Who Were English Learners, by Region, 2015-2016 and 2024-2025



Source: Iowa Department of Education.

Overall, the nation as a whole and every midwestern state will experience a decline in the number of high school graduates through 2041. Compared with other Midwestern states, Iowa is fortunate to expect the smallest decrease. Since Iowa will have a smaller decline in the number of high school graduates than surrounding states, it will likely face rising competition for its own prospective students from those states facing more dire demographic futures. These circumstances will also make it more difficult for Iowa institutions to attract non-residents from surrounding states (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Projected Change in Total High School Graduates, 2022-23 to 2040-41, by State

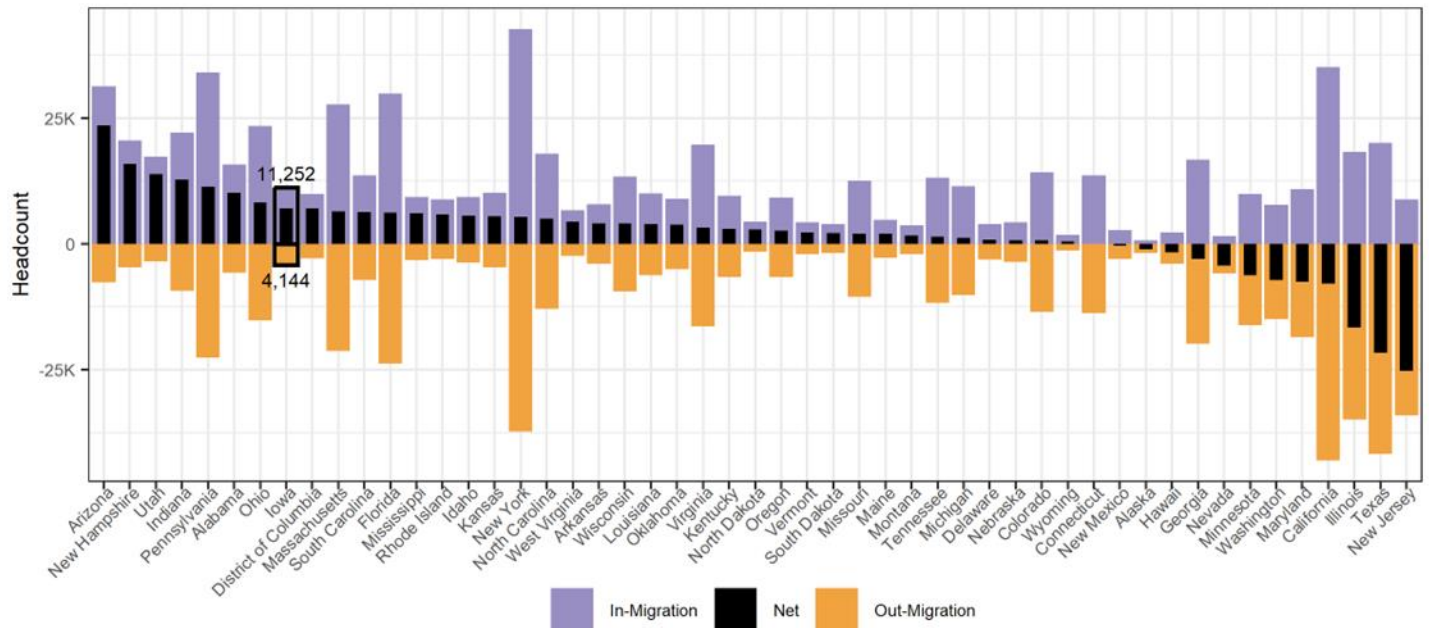


Source: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates, 2024.
<https://www.wiche.edu/knocking>

Migration

Iowa is a net importer of college students; many more students come to Iowa colleges and universities from out of state than leave the state to attend college elsewhere. Compared to other states, Iowa is the 8th largest net importer of college students (Figure 9). Most of those who enroll in Iowa's institutions from out of state come from Illinois, Minnesota, overseas, and Wisconsin, in that order, and primarily choose the University of Iowa or Iowa State University. In fall 2024, the 10 most common destinations for non-residents among Iowa's private institutions attracted over 2,500 first-time students to the state.

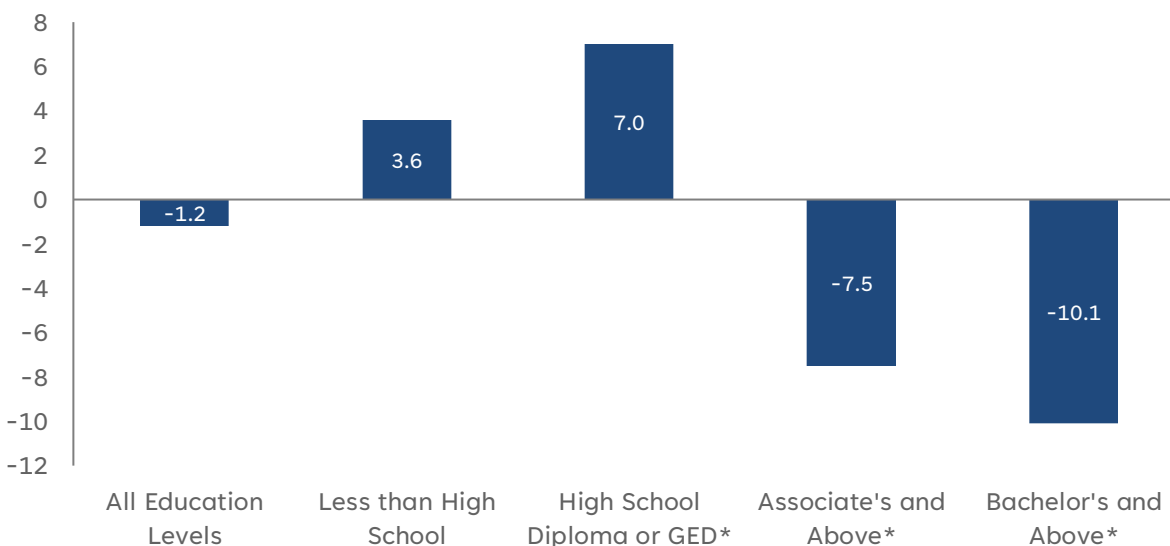
Figure 9. In-Migration and Out-Migration of First-Time Degree-Seeking Students by State, Fall 2024



Source: NCES IPEDS 2024 Fall Enrollment Survey, ef2024c provisional release file. Note: represents students attending Title-IV eligible U.S. institutions as first-time degree-seeking students. Excludes students whose state or residence is unknown and those attending an institution in the same state as their permanent residence.

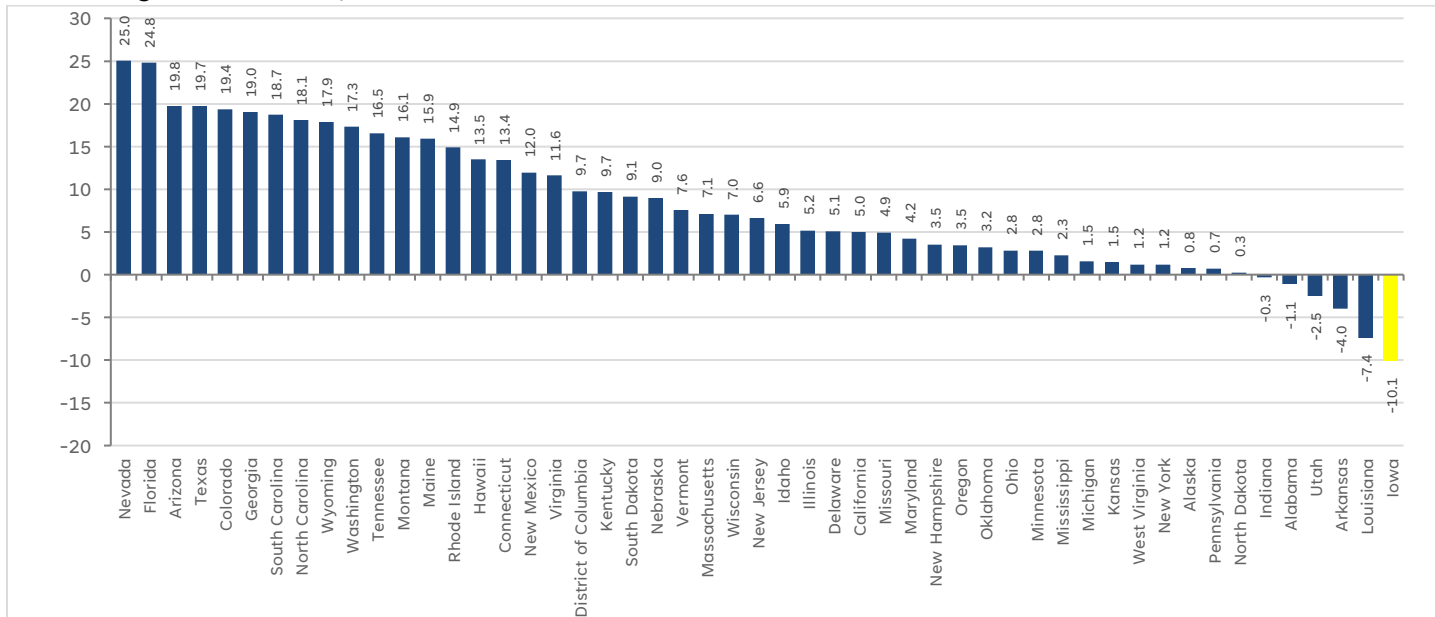
Simultaneously, Iowa is a net exporter of individuals with postsecondary degrees. On an annual basis, for every 1,000 individuals, Iowa loses about seven associate degree holders to other places over and above the number of associate degree holders that move to Iowa. Iowa's net loss is just over 10 bachelor's degree holders per 1,000 residents, which outpaces every other state in the nation (Figure 10 and Figure 11).

Figure 10. Average Annual Net-Migration Rates, 22-64-Year-Olds, 2022-2024



Notes: * identifies values that are statistically significant. The Net-Migration Rate is defined as net-migrants (in-migrants less out-migrants) per 1,000 population. Data include in-migrants from U.S. states, U.S. territories/island areas, and foreign countries. Out-migrants to U.S. territories/island areas and foreign countries cannot be accounted for. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022, 2023, and 2024 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Samples.

Figure 11. Average Annual Net-Migration Rates of Population Age 22-64 with a Bachelor's Degree and Above, 2022-2024



Notes: The Net-Migration Rate is defined as net-migrants (in-migrants less out-migrants) per 1,000 population. Data include in-migrants from U.S. states, U.S. territories/island areas, and foreign countries. Out-migrants to U.S. territories/island areas and foreign countries cannot be accounted for. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022, 2023, and 2024 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Samples.

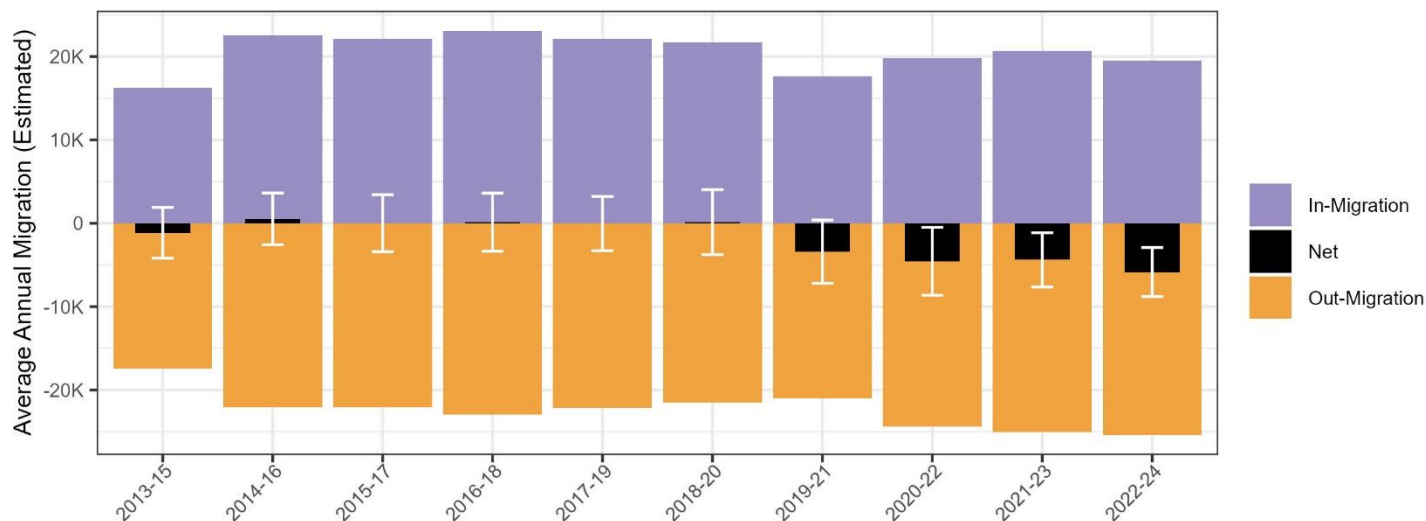
Some of this out-migration may be an expected result of educating so many college students from out-of-state; many of those students likely intend to return to their home state after graduating.

However, we observed this out-migration pattern among college-educated individuals across multiple age groups, not just those that include traditional-aged new college graduates in their early 20s. While the negative net migration is concentrated in younger age groups, there is net out-migration from Iowa among those with college degrees aged 18-24, 25-34, and in the larger age ranges of 22-39 and 22-64. In all cases, Iowa's net migration rate is among the most negative of the states.

Furthermore, Iowa's net migration among educated adults has become more negative over time (Figure 12). Prior to 2020, Iowa's estimated in-migration and out-migration of adults with bachelor's or graduate degrees were similar enough to each other that Iowa wasn't conclusively a net importer or exporter; net migration was within our data source's margins of error. In more recent years, out-migration has increased while in-migration has not, and Iowa is now definitively a net exporter of college-educated individuals.

Overall, the picture is not bright when it comes to migration, as Iowa is the most significant net exporter of talent educated at the baccalaureate level of any state in the nation. This is a strong indication that, at the state level, Iowa does not have a talent gap at the baccalaureate level, and this absence of a gap incentivizes both residents and recent college graduates to relocate elsewhere.

Figure 12. Average Annual Migration of Iowa Population Age 22-64 with at Least a Bachelor's Degree, 2015-2024



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 through 2024 American Community Survey One-Year Public Use Microdata Samples. Notes: White lines represent 90% margins of error for net migration numbers. Figures are rolling three-year averages, 2013-15 through 2022-24. Data for 2020 is not available due to the Covid Pandemic. Data include in-migrants from U.S. states, U.S. territories/island areas, and foreign countries. Out-migrants to U.S. territories/island areas and foreign countries cannot be accounted for. No conclusion can be drawn about a given estimate when the margin of error exceeds the absolute size of the estimate itself.

As explained above, the negative net migration may be partially explained by out-of-state college students leaving Iowa after graduating. A related question is whether Iowa residents who leave the state for college later return to Iowa. Available data cannot measure the extent to which this happens; the best multi-state data source for tracking graduate flows across state lines is the

U.S. Census Bureau’s PSEO, but it does not contain data on all states, does not currently disaggregate graduates by residency, and provides post-graduation employment data by Census region, rather than specific state. Iowa’s SLDS does have the capability to track graduates of Iowa public high schools over time to identify their postsecondary education and graduation, as well as whether they are subsequently employed in Iowa at different time intervals. The necessary data to provide details about the movement of Iowans in and out of the state for college and into the workforce were not available for this project. But the Iowa Department of Education, in partnership with the Iowa Workforce Development, may want to complete this type of analysis in the future.

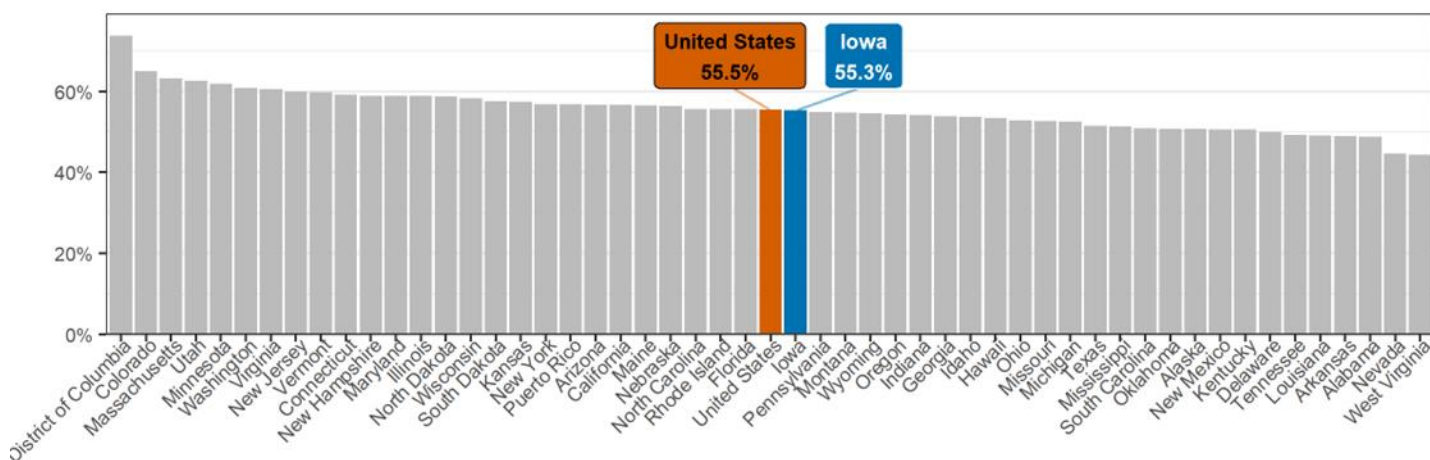
The top destinations for Iowa residents enrolling in colleges out of state are South Dakota State, the University of South Dakota, Northwest Missouri State University, Southern New Hampshire University, the University of Nebraska-Omaha, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (Figure 52). Four of these six institutions are very close to the Iowa border, and one is a primarily online institution; we would expect that many of these students return to Iowa after graduating, and may even commute to college from Iowa. However, these top six institutions account for only 20% of the total outgoing student population; Iowans attend many institutions all around the country.

We specifically analyze the post-graduation employment and residency of graduates from Iowa’s public institutions in this report’s [Post-Graduation Employment and Residency](#) section.

Educational Attainment

The proportion of Iowa residents with at least a postsecondary certificate or higher is about equal to that of the nation as a whole (Figure 13). Its share trails those of nearly all its surrounding states, with the exception of Missouri.

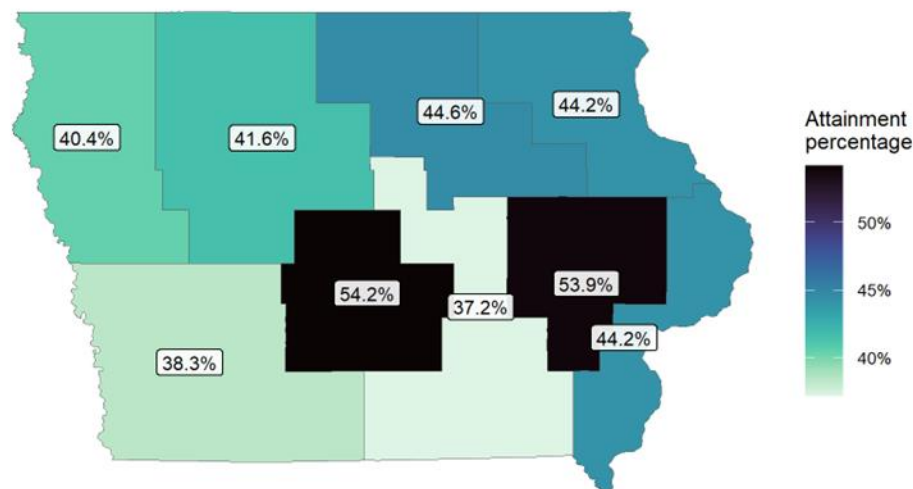
Figure 13. Percent of Residents Aged 25–64 with a Certificate/Certification or Higher, by State, 2023



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 American Community Survey One-Year Estimates; Table B15001; Data on 2023 certificates and certifications from Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce.

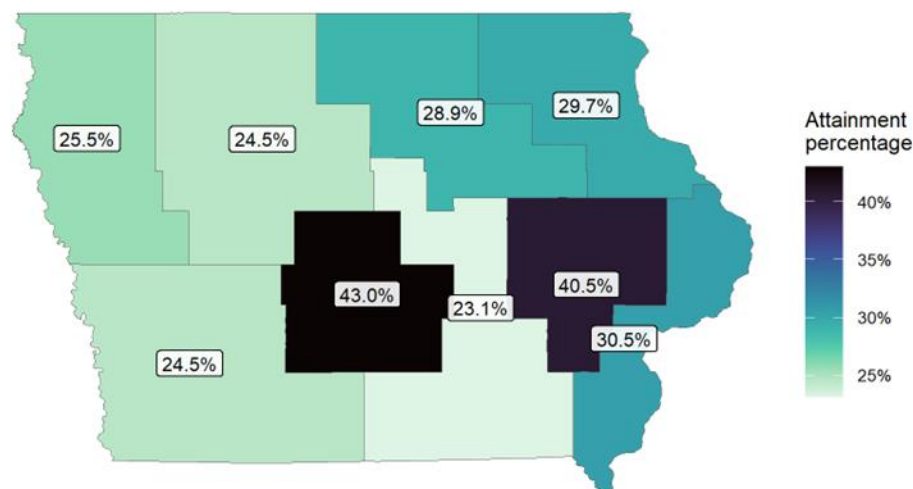
Higher levels of educational attainment are concentrated in the Central and East Central analysis regions, which correspond to urban and suburban parts of the state, including Des Moines, Iowa City, Ames, Cedar Rapids, and the counties surrounding those cities (Figure 14. and Figure 15.).

Figure 14. Percent of Residents Aged 25-64 with an Associate Degree or Higher, by Region, 2020-2024



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates; Table B15001. Note: Represents the estimated percentage of the population age 25-64 with an Associate's Degree or higher.

Figure 15. Percent of Residents Aged 25-64 with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher, by Region, 2020-2024



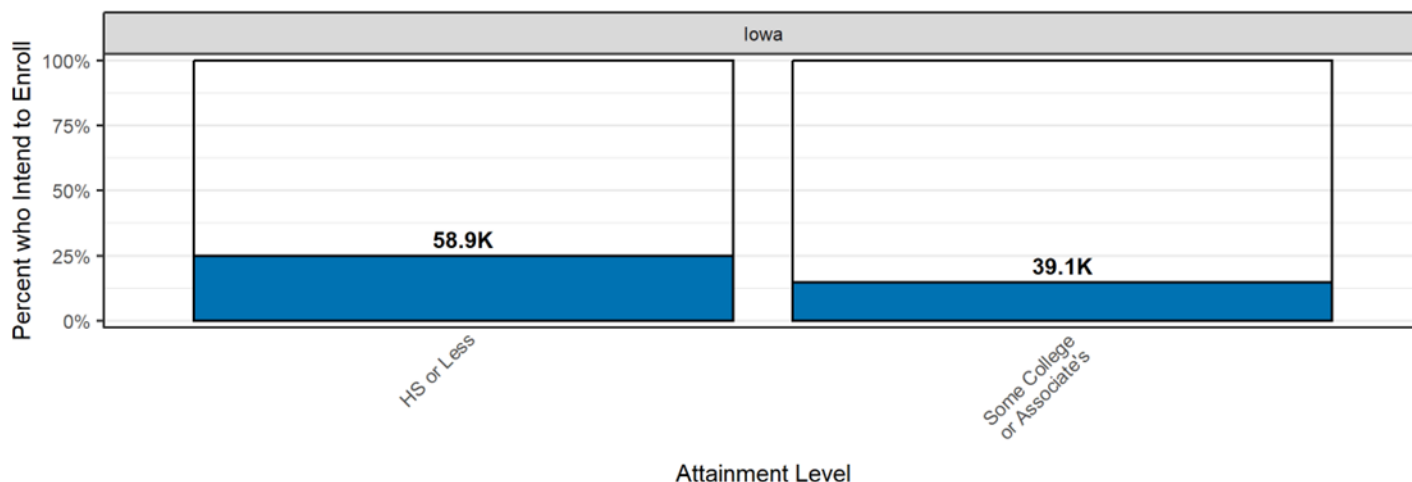
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates; Table B15001. Note: Represents the estimated percentage of the population age 25-64 with an Bachelor's Degree or higher.

Demand Among Adults Without a College Degree

There are approximately 518,000 Iowans age 25-44 who do not have a bachelor's degree. These individuals represent an opportunity for Iowa to increase the educational attainment of its workforce.

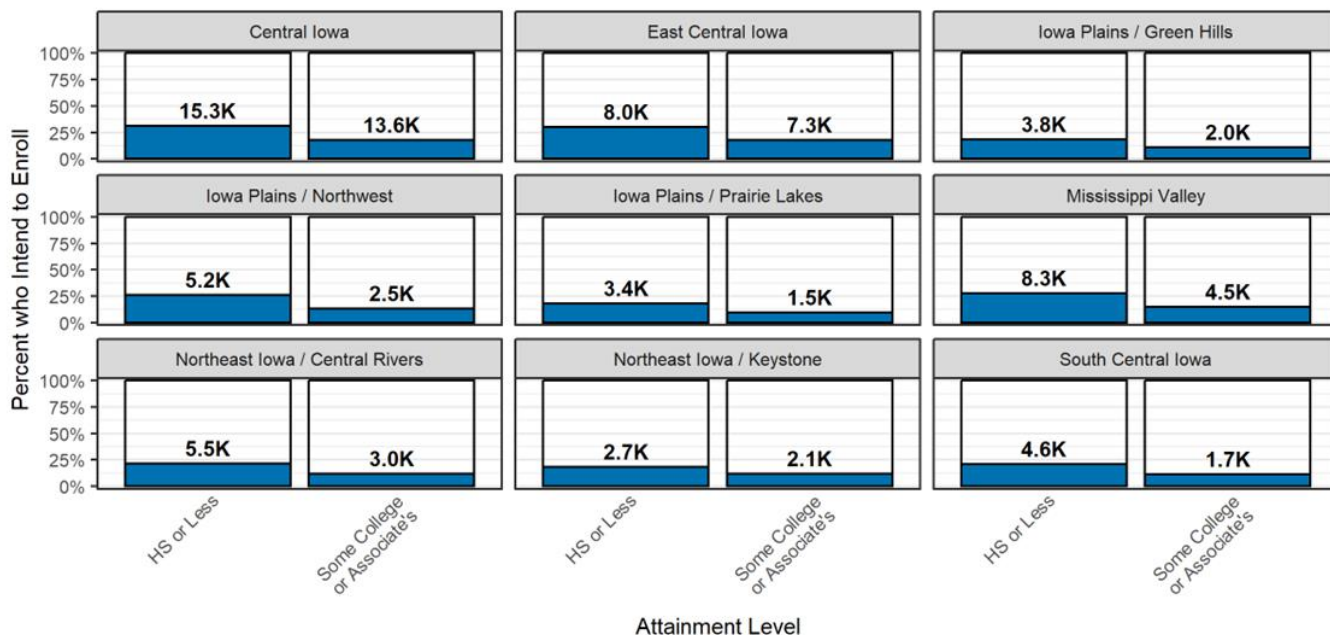
We used data from CollegeAPP, a proprietary data provider, to identify how many of these individuals might be interested in pursuing additional education. CollegeAPP models potential college students using voter, consumer, and survey data. According to their modeling, there may be 58,900 residents in Iowa in the prime working age range of 25-44 with a high school diploma or less who exhibit a high degree of interest in enrolling in additional education or training; this represents about 25% of those who have not attended college. Additionally, there may be another 39,100 residents in this age range with some college or an associate degree who are interested in additional education (Figure 16). These individuals are spread across the state (Figure 17); interest levels appear fairly similar across all of Iowa's regions.

Figure 16. Number and Percent of Iowa Residents Ages 25-44 Who Intend to Enroll in Higher Education, By Educational Attainment



Source: CollegeAPP. Numbers were modeled in January 2026 using voter, consumer, and survey data; they are estimates. Those who intend to enroll are individuals who match over 60% of the characteristics of survey respondents who said they intend to enroll in any kind of education/training within the next two years.

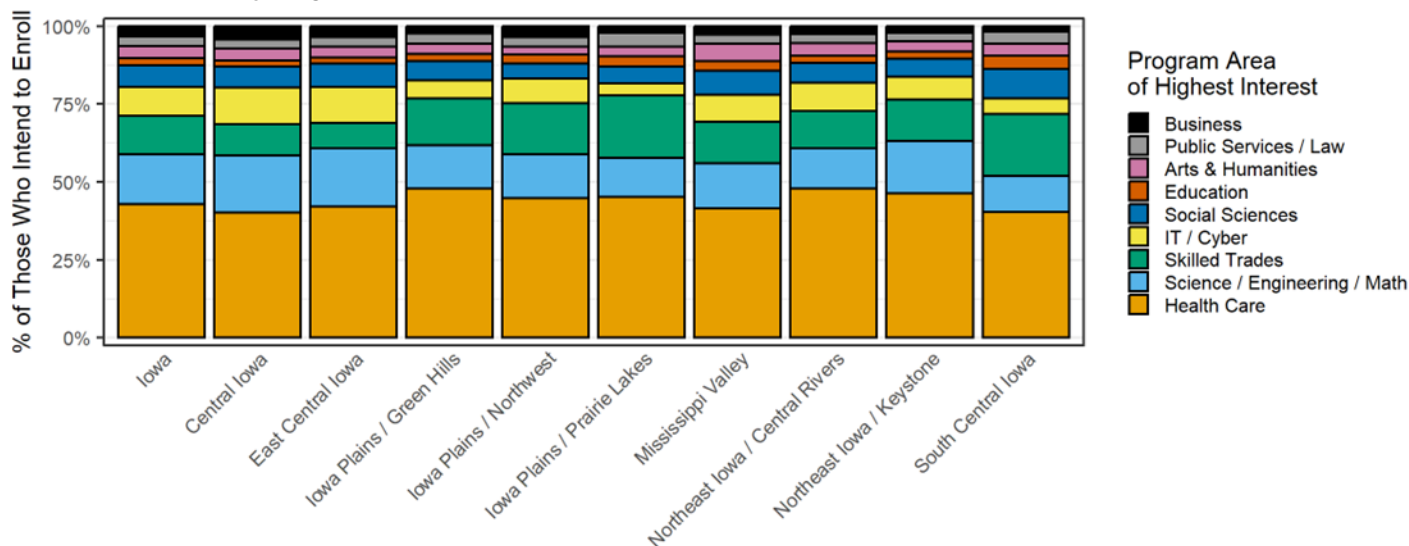
Figure 17. Number and Percent of Residents Ages 25-44 Who Intend to Enroll in Higher Education, By Educational Attainment and Region



Source: CollegeAPP. Numbers were modeled in January 2026 using voter, consumer, and survey data; they are estimates. Those who intend to enroll are individuals who match over 60% of the characteristics of survey respondents who said they intend to enroll in any kind of education/training within the next two years.

Among these adults who are interested in further education or training, the largest number are interested in health care. In some regions, particularly Central and East Central Iowa, science/engineering/math is the program area of second-highest interest; in other areas, particularly the western and southern regions of the state, programs in the Skilled Trades are of second-highest interest.

Figure 18. Program Areas of Interest of Residents Ages 25-44 Who Intend to Enroll in Higher Education, By Region



Source: CollegeAPP. Numbers were modeled in January 2026 using voter, consumer, and survey data; they are estimates. Only includes individuals likely to have a Bachelor's degree or less. Those who intend to enroll are individuals who match over 60% of the characteristics of survey respondents who said they intend to enroll in any kind of education/training within the next two years.

Labor Market Demand

This section analyzes data designed to answer the questions: What does the labor market look like in Iowa? How does it differ by region, and what future changes are expected? What does this all mean for postsecondary demand? Understanding Iowa's current and future labor market is necessary for understanding where there may be gaps in the postsecondary educational ecosystem.

Jobs by Education Level

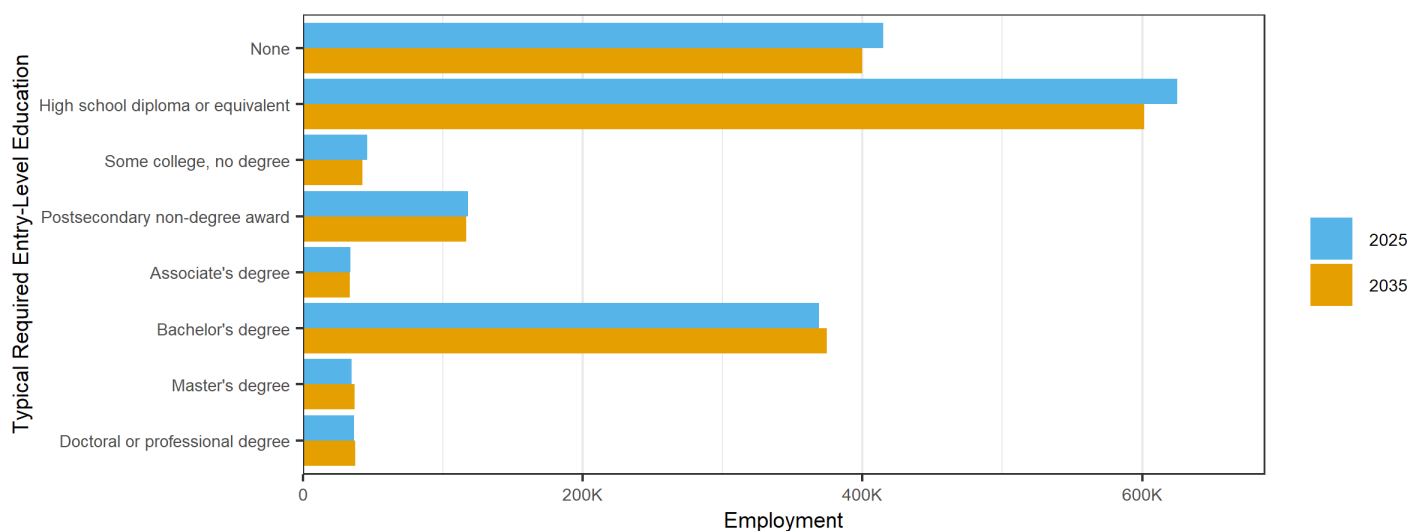
Most of the jobs that Iowa will add to its economy over the next several years will require a postsecondary education. Georgetown University's Center for Education and the Workforce projects that by 2031, 71% of net new jobs will require some postsecondary education or a degree, with 47% of those typically requiring a bachelor's degree. Additionally, of all jobs in the state, CEW projects that 32% will require a bachelor's degree or better, and a further 15% will require at least an associate degree.³

³ Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce (2025). *After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements Through 2031. State Report* (Washington, D.C.: Author). https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/Projections_2031-State-Report.pdf

For more detailed information about specific occupations, education levels, and sub-state regions, we turned to projections produced by Jobs EQ, which are more detailed than those published by either Georgetown or Iowa Workforce Development. Though their methodologies differ, each of those entities begins its projections from the same original data produced by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. In Iowa, projections indicate that the state will see an increase in the educational requirements of the occupations that will be available in 2035. Over the next 10 years, Iowa is expected to see a decline in the number of jobs available that do not require any postsecondary education. The number of jobs that typically require associate degrees is expected to remain essentially stable, and the number of jobs requiring bachelor's or graduate degrees will grow modestly (Figure 19).

These statewide projections are driven by changes in the number of jobs in the Central Iowa region, where more jobs for individuals at nearly all educational levels will exist, but especially at the baccalaureate level and above. In East Central Iowa, projections suggest an increase in jobs requiring graduate degrees. Consistently throughout the rest of the state, fewer jobs at all educational levels, apart from master's degrees, are projected. The demand for master's degrees is projected to be essentially flat. (See the [Regional Data Appendix](#).)

Figure 19. Iowa Jobs by Typical Entry-Level Education, 2025 and 2035

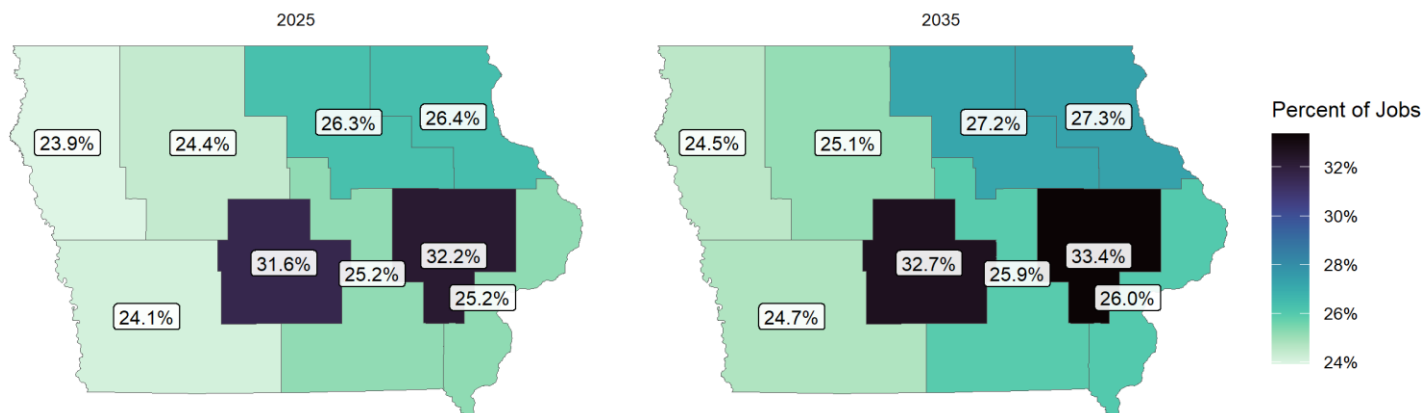


Source: JobsEQ. Note: 2035 jobs are projections.

JobsEQ projects that 29% of jobs in 2035 are projected to require an associate degree or higher, though this percentage varies by region (Figure 20). In every region of the state, this percentage is lower than current levels of educational attainment (Figure 14.), suggesting that the residents of Iowa are overall educated enough to meet the state's workforce needs. It is still possible, however, that there are gaps between employers' needs and Iowans' education. These data do not tell us whether the levels and disciplines of Iowans' degrees are well-aligned with the specific jobs available and their skill requirements. These JobsEQ projections are also significantly lower than the CEW numbers cited above. This discrepancy arises because the JobsEQ forecasts are simply based on past trends in occupational demand in combination with population projections; they make no adjustments for changing educational requirements *within* occupations and the creation of new occupations that don't currently exist. This means they don't account for how the

nature of jobs and their underlying educational requirements are changing due to factors such as the increasing reliance on automation and the rise of artificial intelligence. It is therefore possible that these projections will systematically underestimate future educational requirements.

Figure 20. Percent of Jobs Requiring an Associate Degree or Higher, 2025 and 2035

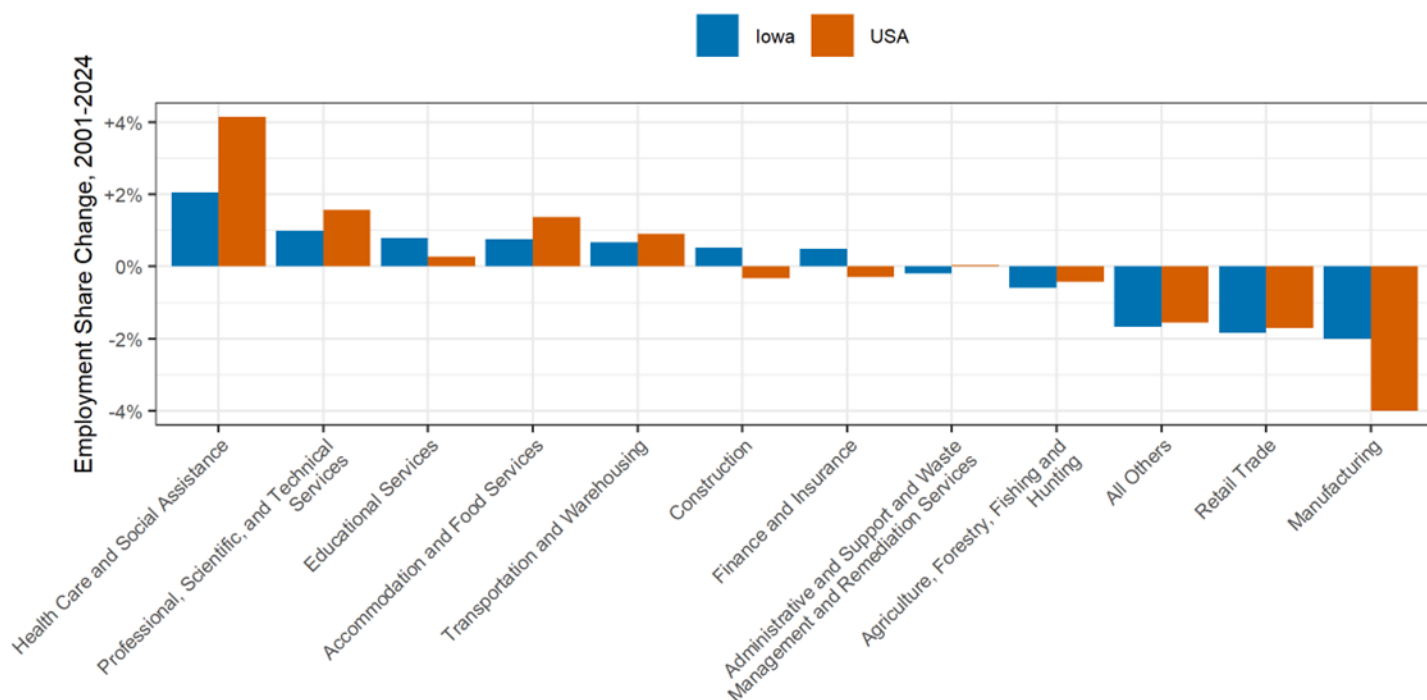


Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q2.

Industries

As measured by shares of employment, the industry mix in Iowa has shifted over the past quarter-century in important respects. In particular, Iowa has seen an increase in the share of jobs in the health care/social assistance and professional/scientific/technical services industries (Figure 21). However, both grew by smaller shares of jobs in Iowa than across the U.S. as a whole. A smaller percentage of Iowa's 2024 jobs were in Retail Trade and Manufacturing compared to 2001. Again, the change in Iowa was less pronounced than the U.S. overall. Details on regional changes over time are available in the [Regional Data Appendix](#).

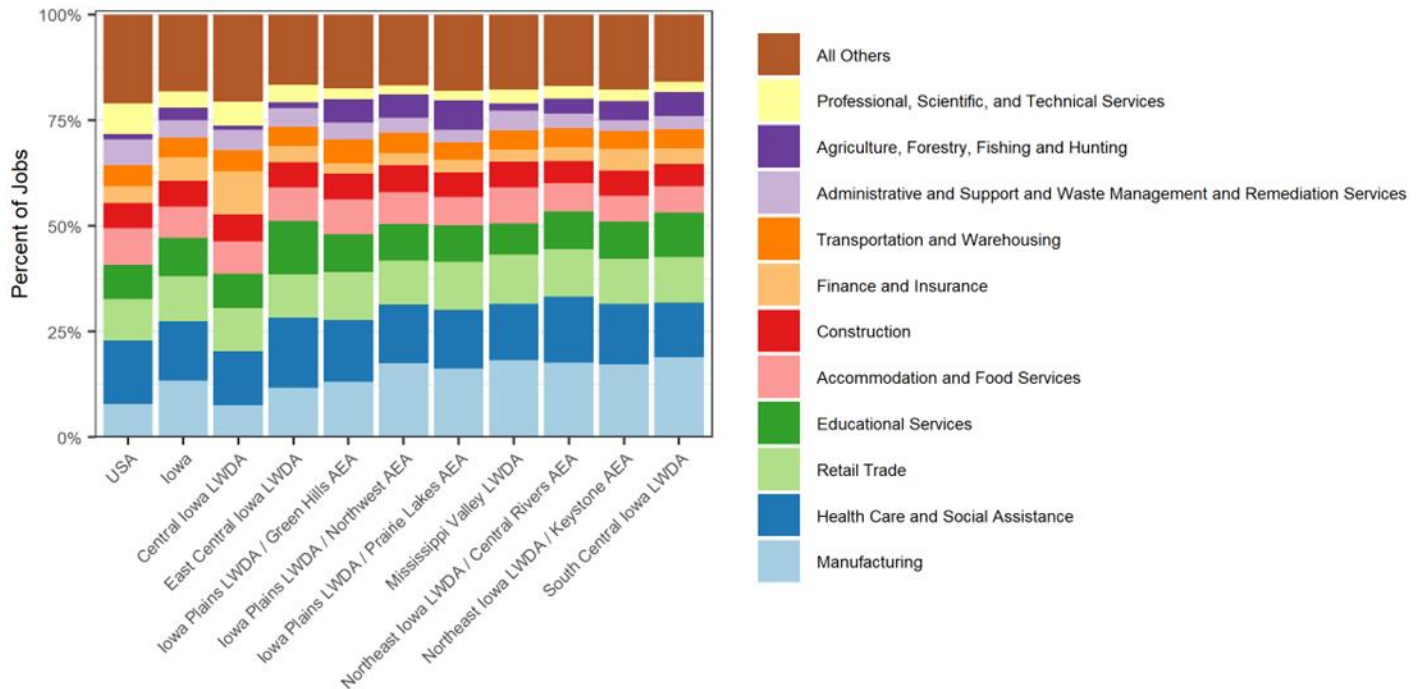
Figure 21. 2001-2024 Change in Share of Employment by Industry, Iowa and USA



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q2.

Compared to the U.S. as a whole, Iowa's workforce is substantially more engaged in the manufacturing industry, and slightly more likely to be employed in finance and insurance, agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting. Iowans are less likely to work in professional, technical, and scientific roles. Regional differences in employment distribution are dramatic. For example, Iowa Plains and South Central Iowa are most heavily committed to agriculture. All regions other than Central and East Central Iowa have large employment bases in manufacturing, while Central Iowa outpaces the rest of the state in finance and insurance and East Central leads in educational services (Figure 22).

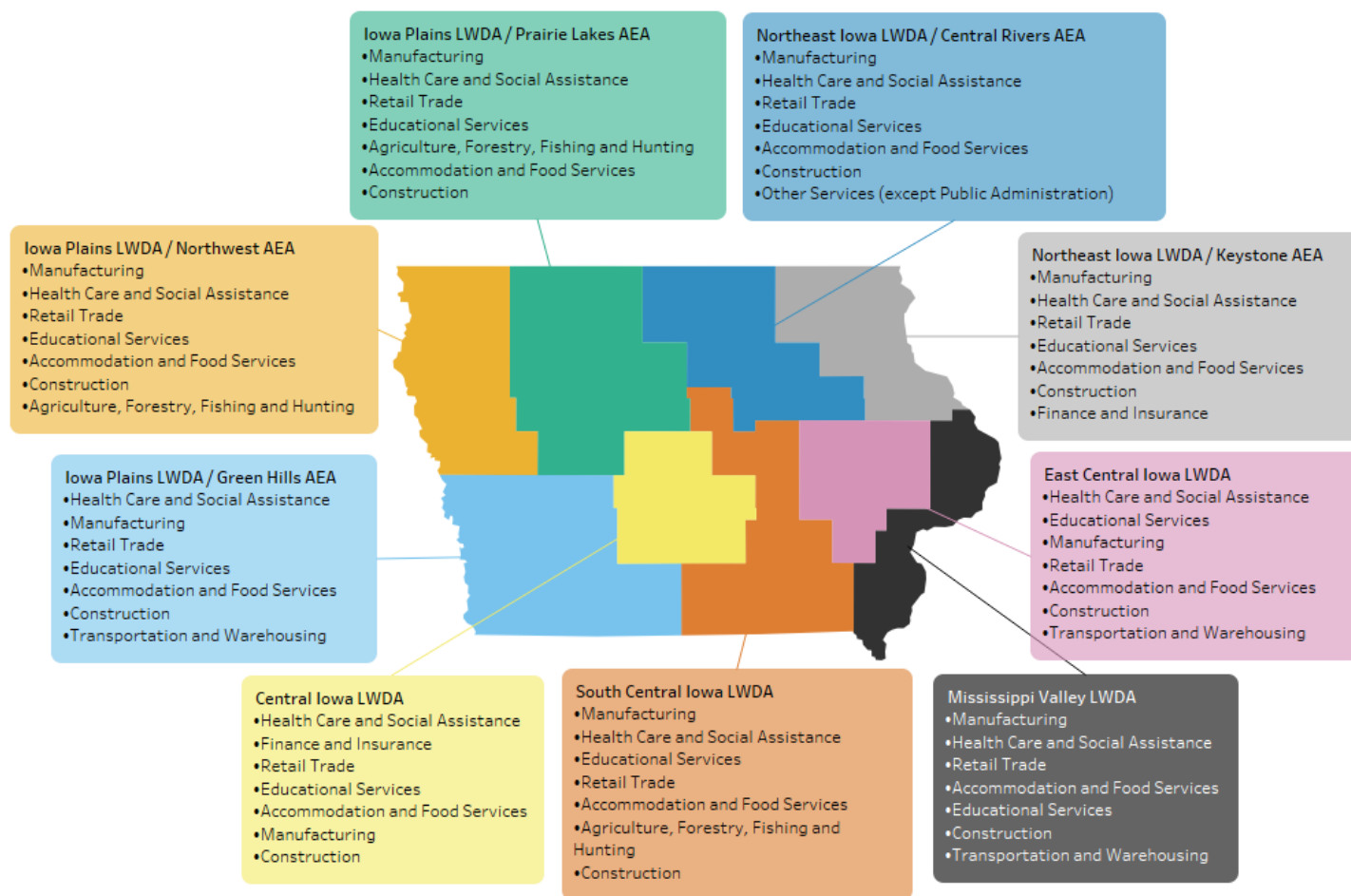
Figure 22. Employment Distribution by Industry and Region, 2024



Source: Jobs EQ.

Despite the importance of agriculture in Iowa, in none of its regions is agriculture projected to rank among the very highest industries based on projected employment in 2035. Instead, those are expected to be manufacturing, health care and social assistance, and retail trade (Figure 23).

Figure 23. Top Iowa Industries by Projected 2035 Employment

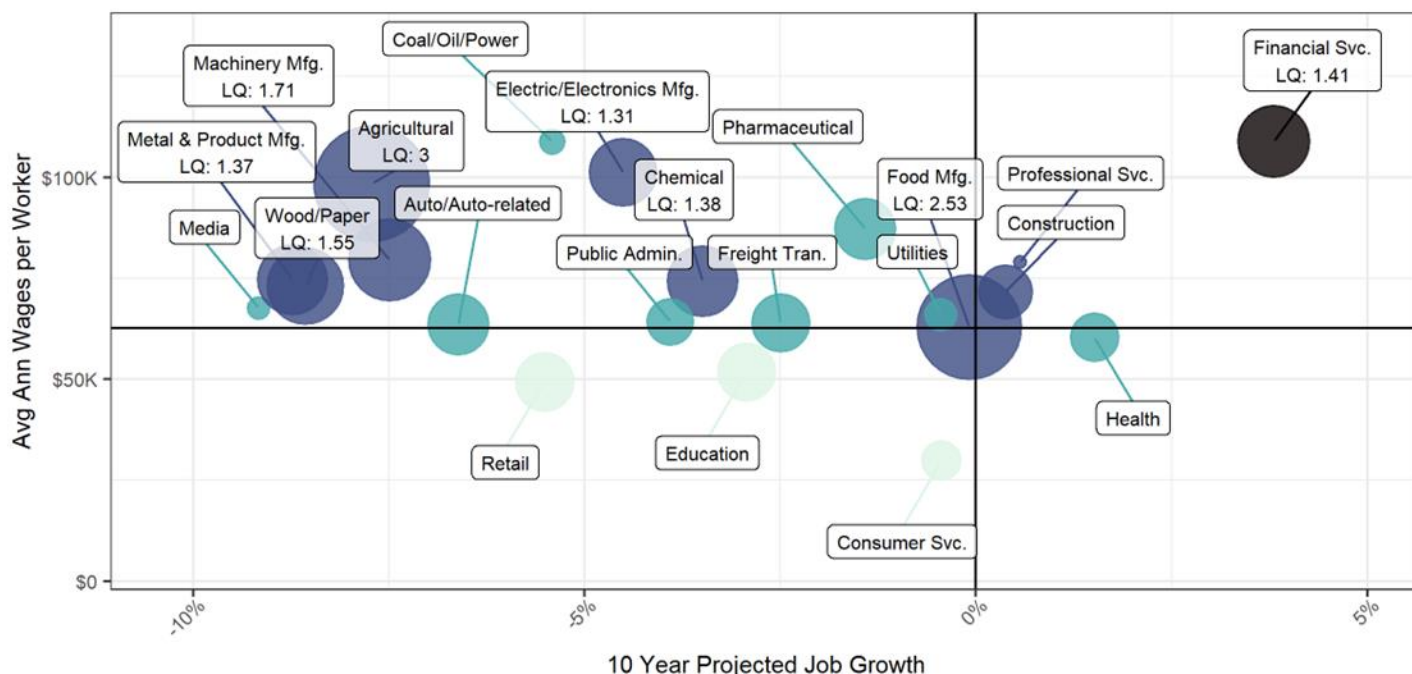


Source: Jobs EQ.

As a state, Iowa has comparative advantages in agriculture, wood and paper production, and manufacturing of food, machinery, chemicals, metal and metal products, and electronics, as well as in financial services. Of these, only financial services is projected to experience employment growth (Figure 24). Comparative advantages exist for a geography in industries that are relatively strong compared to the U.S. as a whole, measured according to concentrations of employment, and indicate opportunities for new investment either for growth or as a necessity for maintaining existing strength.⁴

⁴ https://www.incontext.indiana.edu/2006/march/pdfs/1_LQ.pdf

Figure 24. Iowa Comparative Advantage by Industry Cluster



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q3. Bubble size reflects the 4-quarter average Location Quotient (LQ). Only industry clusters with an LQ higher than .5 are displayed. Darker colors indicate more advantages: Above-average wages, projected job growth, and/or local competitive advantage (as measured by Location Quotient).

Iowa's regional economies have distinct comparative advantages. For example, Central Iowa is unusual in that most of its industries are projected to see employment growth, and its diverse industry mix also means that only financial services stands out as being a clear comparative advantage. East Central Iowa boasts a comparative advantage in pharmaceuticals, which is both growing and high-paying, while also seeing comparative advantages in agriculture, chemical, electronics, and education, which are all projected to see employment decreases. (See the [Regional Data Appendix](#).)

Occupations

Demand over the next decade is expected to be greatest among workers with at least a bachelor's degree in management, nursing, accounting, and education (Figure 25). With few exceptions, these are the same broad occupational categories that are expected to be in greatest relative demand in all the regions across Iowa (Figure 27; also see the [Regional Data Appendix](#) for detailed tables by region). However, it is notable that in the most rural regions, growth in most of these occupations is projected to be essentially flat, and in some cases, negative. In such cases, the need for talent comes entirely from turnover among current workers.

Figure 25. Top 15 Iowa Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring At Least a Bachelor's Degree, 2025-2035

Iowa

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	26,336	0.0%	34,488	\$105,400
29-1141	Registered Nurses	15,820	-0.1%	33,364	\$80,500
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	10,461	0.1%	14,136	\$82,900
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	9,635	-0.4%	15,679	\$57,700
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	8,484	0.1%	9,819	\$82,000
11-3031	Financial Managers	7,647	1.3%	9,160	\$147,800
11-9199	Managers, All Other	7,331	0.0%	9,845	\$133,200
25-3031	Substitute Teachers, Short-Term	7,266	0.0%	6,237	\$40,300
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	7,098	0.3%	8,190	\$77,900
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	6,876	-0.4%	11,868	\$60,600
15-1252	Software Developers	6,696	1.1%	10,715	\$119,800
13-1071	Human Resources Specialists	6,352	0.2%	7,886	\$73,800
11-9111	Medical and Health Services Managers	6,021	1.6%	6,578	\$117,900
13-1111	Management Analysts	5,532	0.6%	6,359	\$91,800
13-1082	Project Management Specialists	4,857	0.1%	7,143	\$103,200

Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

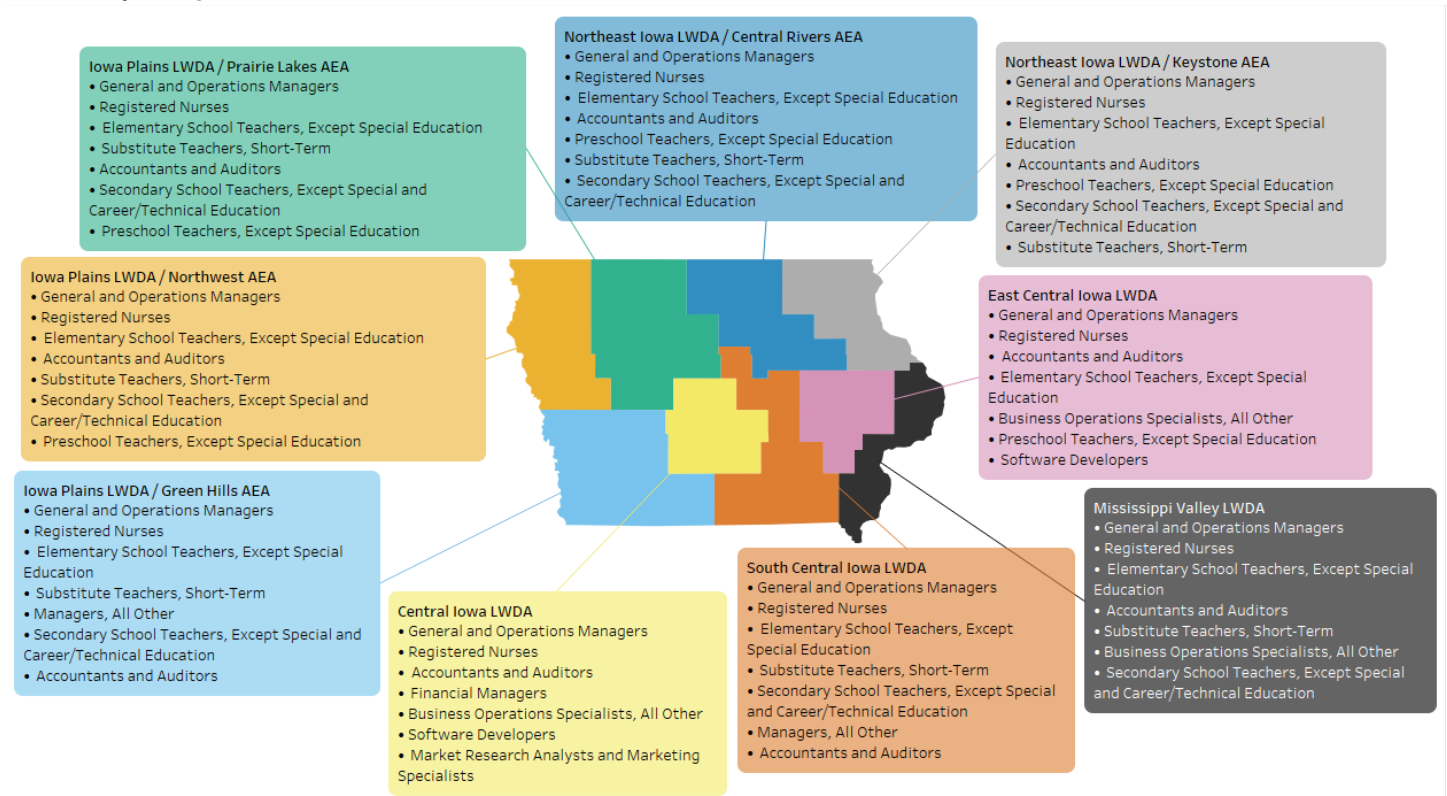
For jobs that traditionally require an associate degree, Iowa's occupational demand is projected to be greatest among preschool teachers, legal aides, health-related positions, and agricultural and technical positions (Figure 26). There is greater diversity in anticipated job needs across regions at this educational attainment level. Although many of the same jobs are on the list for being in demand, their order differs substantially, with occupations closely linked to the agriculture industry (agricultural technicians, food science technicians, and veterinary techs) rising in relative prominence. These projections also reveal demand driven, in many cases, by turnover rather than growth in the occupation. (Figure 27; also see the [Regional Data Appendix](#) for detailed tables by region.)

Figure 26. Top 15 Iowa Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring a Postsecondary Certificate or Associate Degree, 2025-2035

Iowa					
SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
25-2011	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	7,248	0.1%	6,458	\$35,800
23-2011	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	2,432	-0.2%	2,417	\$58,000
31-2021	Physical Therapist Assistants	1,849	1.5%	1,116	\$64,000
29-2056	Veterinary Technologists and Technicians	1,190	0.3%	1,204	\$44,300
29-1292	Dental Hygienists	1,187	0.2%	1,948	\$87,600
29-2034	Radiologic Technologists and Technicians	1,150	-0.2%	2,400	\$69,300
19-4012	Agricultural Technicians	1,037	-0.1%	704	\$44,200
15-1231	Computer Network Support Specialists	987	-0.3%	1,711	\$68,500
43-4161	Human Resources Assistants, Except Payroll and Timekeeping	879	-1.1%	983	\$49,000
19-4099	Life, Physical, and Social Science Technicians, All Other	828	0.0%	689	\$53,500
17-3022	Civil Engineering Technologists and Technicians	709	-0.2%	894	\$68,700
17-3011	Architectural and Civil Drafters	694	0.0%	830	\$67,200
17-3023	Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technologists and Technicians	684	-0.7%	878	\$74,100
23-2099	Legal Support Workers, All Other	654	-0.3%	727	\$54,500
31-2011	Occupational Therapy Assistants	643	1.2%	475	\$66,500

Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

Figure 27. Top Iowa Occupations that Require At Least an Associate Degree by Average Annual Openings, 2025-2035



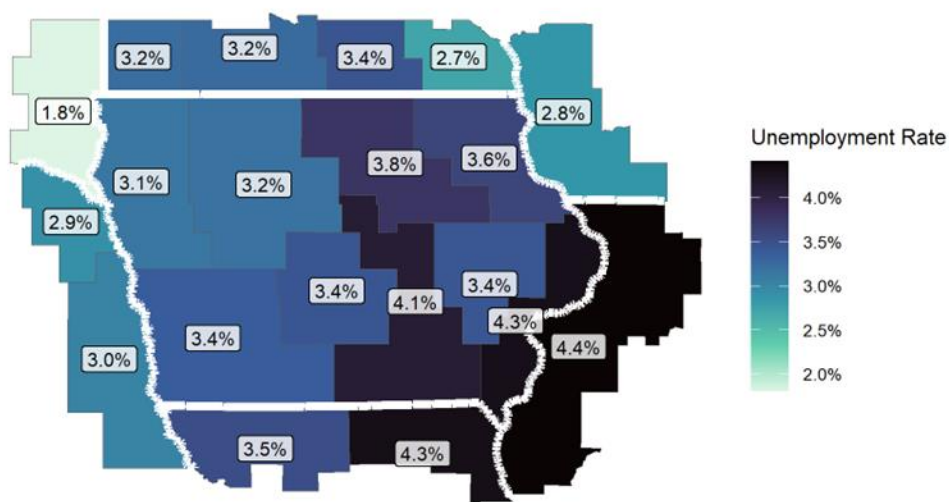
Source: Jobs EQ.

Unemployment

Unemployment in many areas of Iowa is low. The national unemployment rate, as of 2025 Q3, was 4.2%. In Iowa, it was 3.6%. Regions in the western half of the state had even lower rates (Figure 28). In areas of low unemployment, workers may find it easier to secure a job, while employers may find it more difficult to hire, compared to areas with higher unemployment rates.

Unemployment in many nearby counties of surrounding states is also low. The southeast corner of South Dakota, in particular, stands out for its very low unemployment rate; it is the location of Sioux Falls, the fastest-growing metro area in the Midwest. Because of the area's growth and demand for labor, Iowa residents living near South Dakota may be motivated to seek work out of state.

Figure 28. Unemployment Rate by Region, 2024Q4-2025Q3

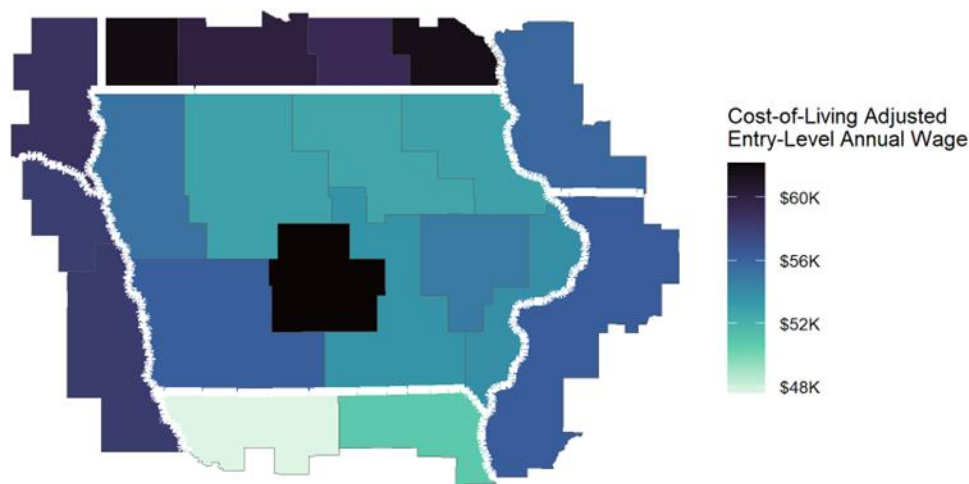


Source: Jobs EQ. Notes: Includes counties that are at least partially within 30 miles of the Iowa border. Unemployment rate imputed from Bureau of Labor Statistics data. It represent the average for the four quarters ending 2025Q3.

Wages

The wages for entry-level workers vary by region. For jobs that typically require a bachelor's degree, entry-level wages are highest in Central Iowa, which may motivate new graduates to move to the area from elsewhere in the state. Additionally, wages in the counties that surround Iowa in South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Nebraska are all higher than those in nearby regions in Iowa, even after adjusting for cost-of-living differences (Figure 29). Iowans living near these state borders have wage incentives to seek work out of state, which impacts labor availability in Iowa.

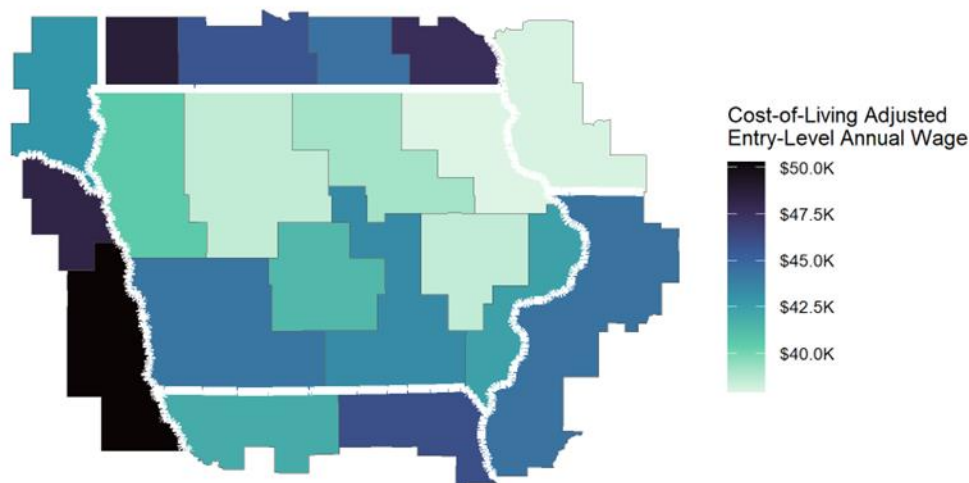
Figure 29. Bachelor's Degree Occupations' Average Entry-Level Wages by Region, Adjusted for Cost-of-Living



Source: Jobs EQ. Notes: Includes counties that are at least partially within 30 miles of the Iowa border. Entry-level wages are computed as the mean of the lower third of all wages as of 2025Q3. COL-adjusted wages are adjusted to the USA base, utilizing the Cost of Living data from C2ER, data as of 2025Q3. Occupations are assigned an entry level of education by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

At the associate degree level, Iowa entry-level wages are highest in the southwest corner of the state, but wages across the border in Nebraska are even higher. For these occupations too, new associate degree graduates will find higher wages (again, adjusted for cost-of-living differences) out of state in nearby counties in South Dakota, Minnesota, Illinois, and Nebraska, and parts of Missouri (Figure 30).

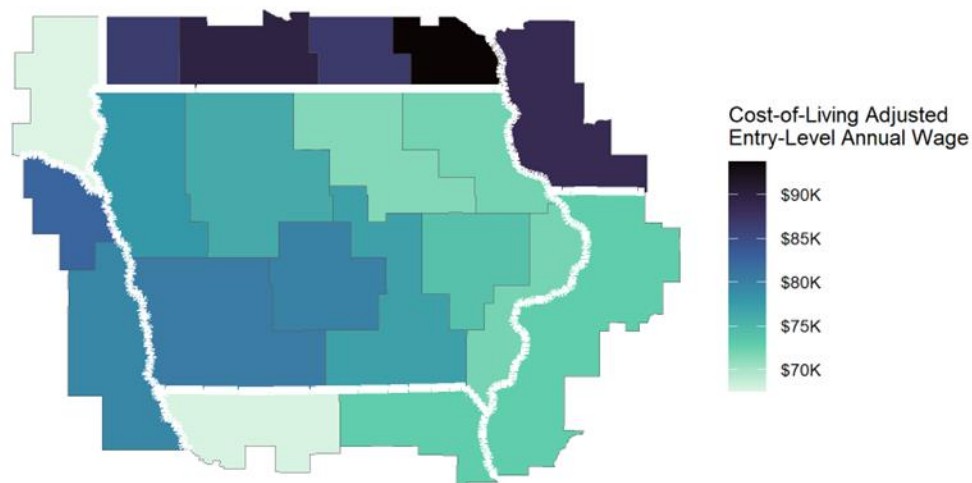
Figure 30. Associate Degree Occupations' Average Entry-Level Wages by Region, Adjusted for Cost-of-Living



Source: Jobs EQ. Notes: Includes counties that are at least partially within 30 miles of the Iowa border. Entry-level wages are computed as the mean of the lower third of all wages as of 2025Q3. COL-adjusted wages are adjusted to the USA base, utilizing the Cost of Living data from C2ER, data as of 2025Q3. Occupations are assigned an entry level of education by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Stakeholders we met with repeatedly mentioned difficulty in retaining employees with postsecondary education and training. For example, representatives of health care providers complained that Registered Nurses were leaving for jobs across the border due to low wages in Iowa, among other reasons. Data partially back up this specific observation, as entry-level wages for Registered Nurses are notably lower in Iowa than in nearby locations in Minnesota and Wisconsin (Figure 31). We also heard that nurses commonly left southwest Iowa counties for Omaha, Nebraska, for better working conditions and other reasons, even though data do not suggest a major wage gap.

Figure 31. Registered Nurses' Average Entry-Level Wages by Region, Adjusted for Cost-of-Living



Source: Jobs EQ. Notes: Includes counties that are at least partially within 30 miles of the Iowa border. Entry-level wages are computed as the mean of the lower third of all wages as of 2025Q3. COL-adjusted wages are adjusted to the USA base, utilizing the Cost of Living data from C2ER, data as of 2025Q3. Occupations are assigned an entry level of education by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

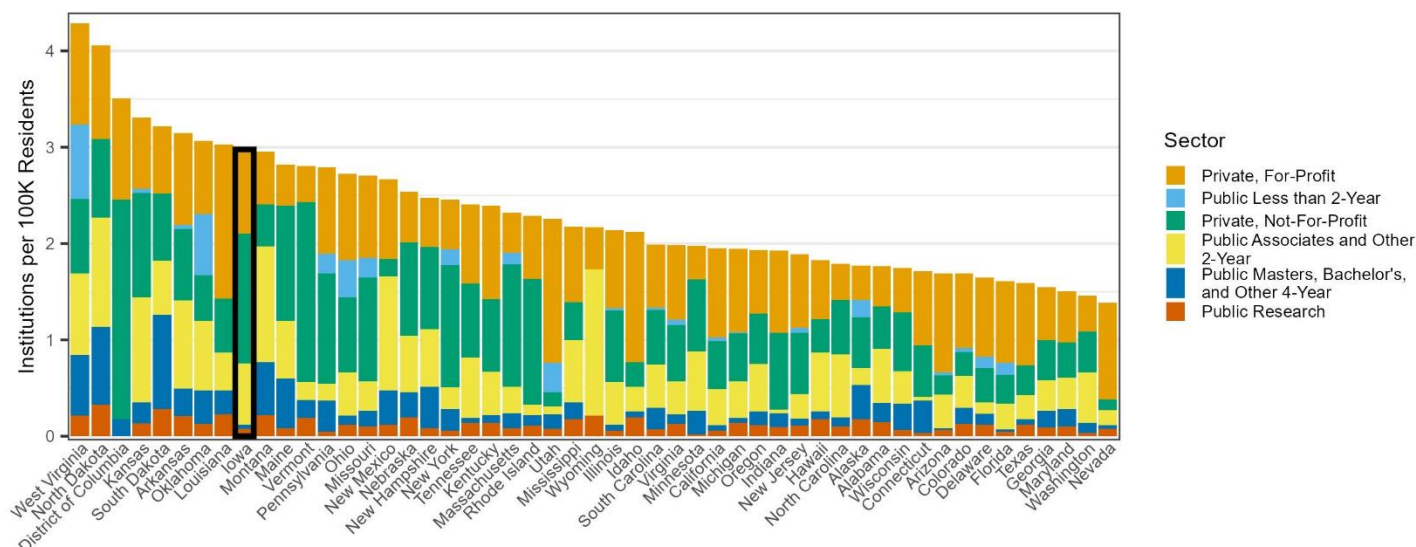
Postsecondary Access

This section analyzes data designed to answer the questions: Are the necessary postsecondary programs available to all students across the state? Where are the gaps in access? In assessing access, it is important to consider not only the locations of institutions, but also the availability of programs at different degree/certificate levels and different modalities, enrollment and participation rates by student characteristics to identify who is being left out, and affordability.

Postsecondary Education Assets

Iowa is home to a relative wealth of postsecondary education assets. Compared to other states, the concentration of colleges and universities in Iowa, relative to the size of the population, is quite high. Iowa ranks ninth among states for its number of institutions per 100,000 adult residents (Figure 32). In addition to their main campuses, many institutions in Iowa operate branch campuses or other locations where services are delivered.

Figure 32. Postsecondary Institutions per 100,000 Residents Age 18+, by State



Sources: Numerator from NCES IPEDS Directory Information, HD2024 file. Denominator is 2025 Resident Population Age 18 Years and Older from the U.S. Census Bureau's Population Estimates. Notes: Includes only Title IV granting institutions. Online institutions primarily serving out-of-state students have been subtracted from state values.

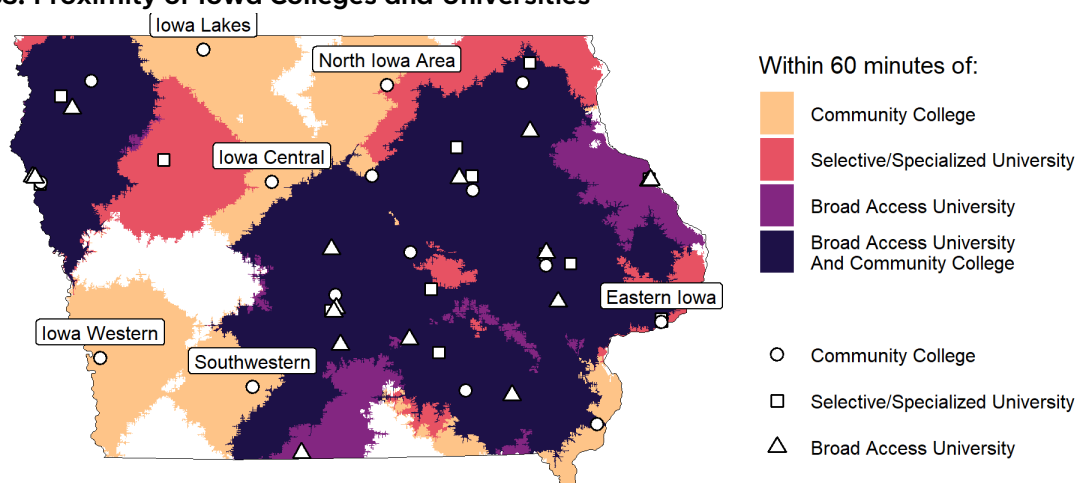
This relative abundance does not, in and of itself, assure accessibility to a postsecondary education on equal footing for all Iowa residents, however. That depends on where the institutions' main campuses, as well as branch campuses and other locations, are located across Iowa in relation to where the population resides. Additionally, it is important to account for other types of access, including access to institutions in Iowa's neighboring states, access to the particular programs and services needed in a given region, and access via distance education. As demographic conditions turn bleaker for traditional-age students as they are projected to do, the competition for students among postsecondary institutions is likely to intensify, potentially affecting who those institutions seek to recruit (by catering more effectively to adult learners, for example) or how they deliver programs separately or in collaboration with one another using online learning and other tools. As Iowa considers how to meet statewide and local needs for postsecondary education and workforce development, it has an opportunity to consider ways to leverage existing public and private assets to greater effect.

Regardless of whether and how Iowa might innovate on this front, geographic proximity to a postsecondary education institution will remain a critically important factor in determining how well distributed access to a postsecondary education is. The simplest way to consider postsecondary access is to look at where Iowa's institutions are located and whether there are portions of the state that are not within a reasonable distance of a community college or

university. These areas are sometimes referred to as “education deserts,”⁵ though there is no standard definition for determining which areas qualify. This is a particularly germane question for Iowa, as it is among only three states with no more than three public four-year institutions that receive direct state appropriations to offer reduced tuition prices for in-state students. In contrast, other states have broad-access public four-year institutions dispersed more widely across their geographies. For this report, we mapped areas within (and not within) 60 minutes of driving time from the main campuses of Iowa institutions. This corresponds to the statutory maximum busing time for students at Iowa’s public elementary schools.⁶

Based on this measure, most parts of the eastern half of the state are proximate to an Iowa Community College and an Iowa-based broad-access university, defined as an institution that admits at least 80% of its applicants. The western half of Iowa, however, is more sparsely populated by both community colleges and universities, with the one exception of the state’s northwest corner (Figure 33).

Figure 33. Proximity of Iowa Colleges and Universities



Represents areas within 60 minutes of driving time from institutions' main campuses, based on IPEDS coordinates (this includes both campuses of IVCC). Darker colors are overlaid on lighter colors. Includes public and private non-profit institutions in Iowa; broad access are those with open admissions or that admit $\geq 80\%$ of applicants. Excludes institutions with a special focus, as identified by Carnegie Classification, on Graduate Studies, Law, Theological Studies, or Medical Schools/Centers.

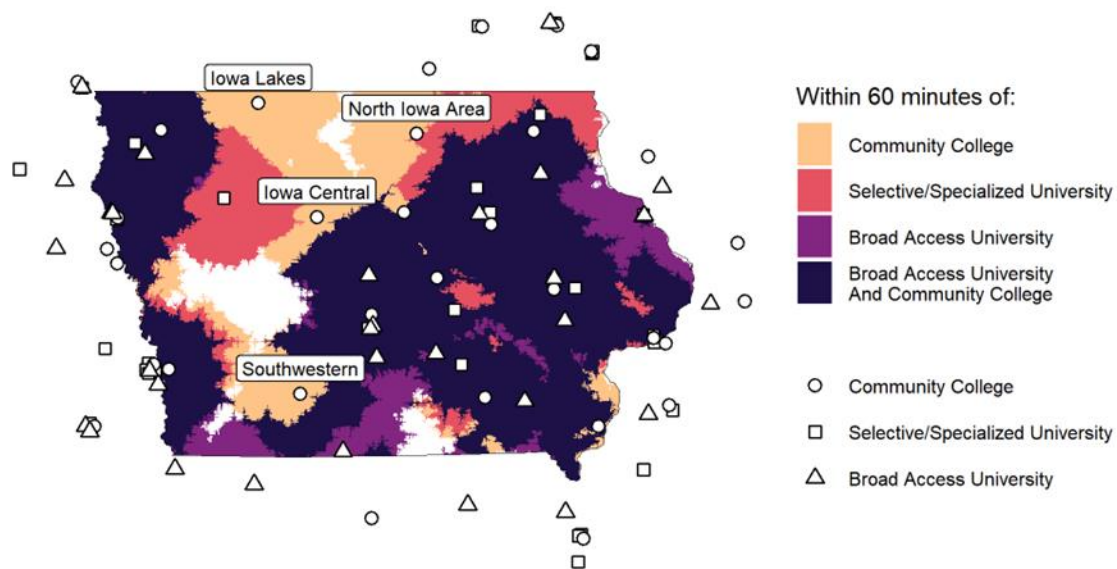
Much of the western edge of the state, however, is relatively near institutions located in South Dakota and Nebraska. If we include out-of-state institutions, as Figure 34 does, we see that additional Iowans have geographic access to a four-year institution. Enrollment at a public out-

⁵ Hillman, Nicholas, and Taylor Weichman. 2016. Education Deserts: The Continued Significance of “Place” in the Twenty-First Century. Viewpoints: Voices from the Field. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

⁶ [Iowa Administrative Code \(281—43.1\(3\)\)](#),

of-state institution can come at a significant additional cost to students who face non-resident tuition prices, rendering them unequal options for Iowa residents seeking a baccalaureate-granting institution in close proximity. However, many institutions in Iowa's neighboring states offer extremely competitive tuition rates to Iowa residents, including the universities in South Dakota, which charge Iowans the same rate they charge their own residents, and the University of Nebraska at Omaha, which reduces its non-resident tuition price by 45% for Iowa residents. In fact, the price Iowa residents pay to attend UNO is just 16% (or \$1,800) more than resident tuition at the University of Iowa, and Iowa residents actually pay 17% (\$1,935) less at the University of South Dakota.

Figure 34. Proximity of Colleges and Universities in Iowa or Border States



Represents areas within 60 minutes of driving time from institutions' main campuses, based on IPEDS coordinates (this includes both campuses of IVCC). Darker colors are overlaid on lighter colors. Includes public and private non-profit institutions in Iowa and surrounding states; broad access are those with open admissions or that admit $\geq 80\%$ of applicants. Excludes institutions with a special focus, as identified by Carnegie Classification, on Graduate Studies, Law, Theological Studies, or Medical Schools/Centers.

Figure 35 further displays all community college locations in Iowa, including branch campuses, outreach centers, and other types of locations. While the services and courses available at these locations will vary, they may serve as access points to the types of postsecondary education and training most needed in their local area.

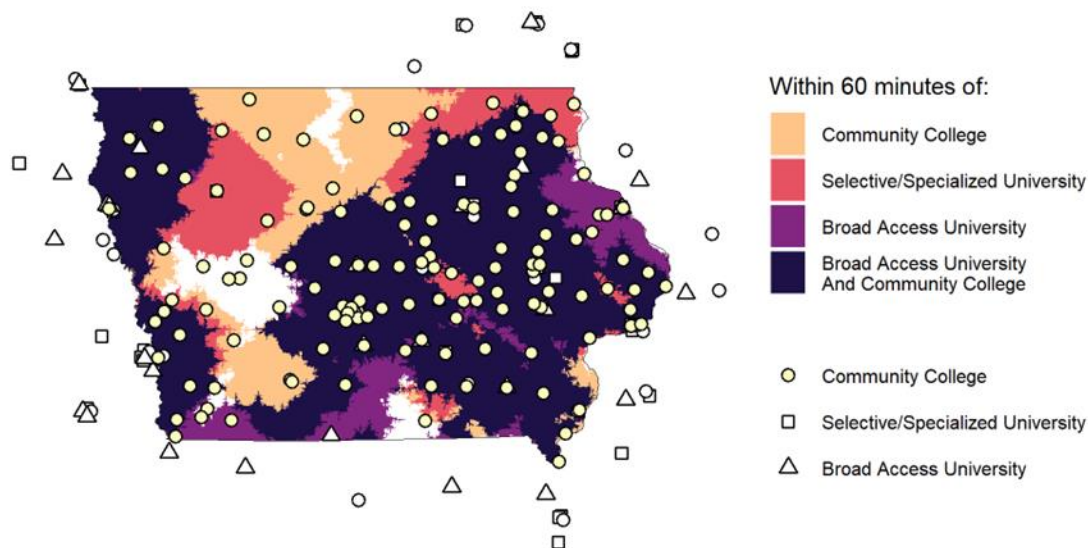
Similarly, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach has offices in all 99 Iowa counties. While Cooperative Extension's roots are in disseminating agricultural research, its role has grown to be more expansive.⁷ For example, ISU Extension and Outreach has an "Enterprise Development"

⁷ Blake Alan Naughton et al., "Empowering Rural Futures: Leveraging Extension for Community and Economic Development," NCHEMS, January 2025, https://nchems.org/wp-content/uploads/Rural-Extension-Framework-Report_FINAL.pdf.

function that provides services to new and expanding businesses. Additionally, the university views these offices as conduits for communicating “the needs of Iowans back to the university.”

When we consider access to out-of-state institutions, all community college locations, and Extension offices, there are few locations in Iowa without some kind of postsecondary access point nearby. It is beyond the scope of this study to assess whether the programming and services available at these widely dispersed access points are well aligned with local student and community needs. Assessing and improving that alignment is one way the state can help meet the educational and workforce demand in rural Iowa.

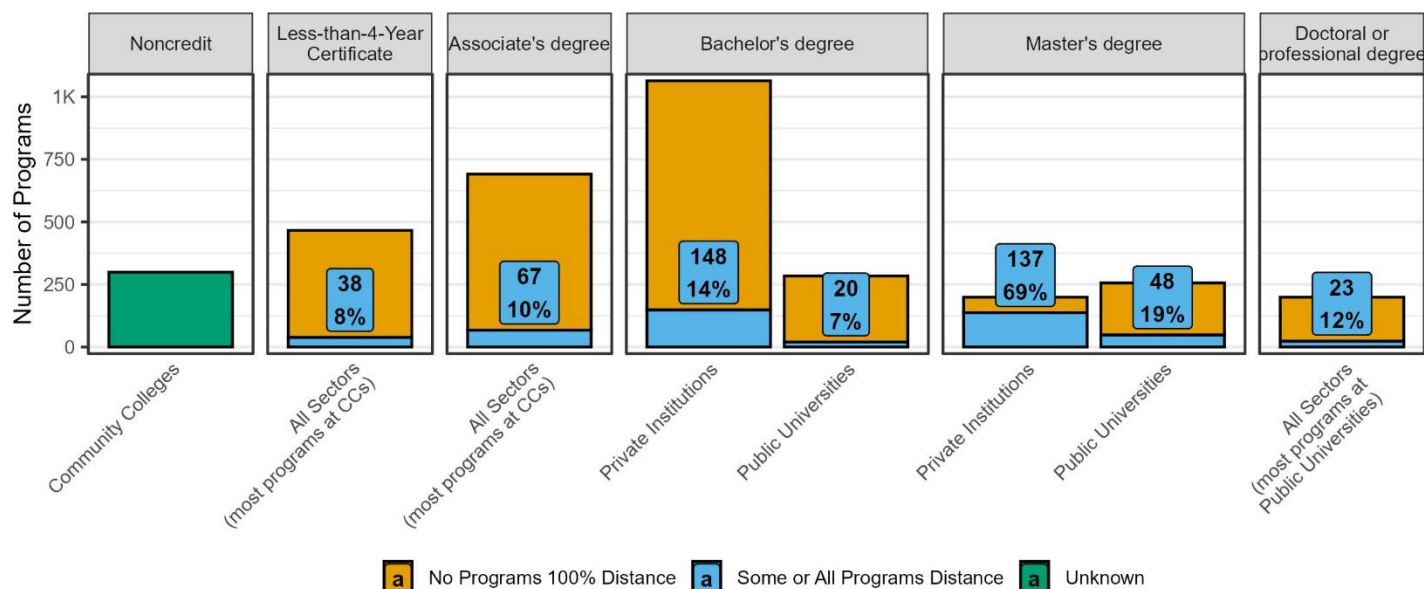
Figure 35. Proximity of Colleges and Universities in Iowa or Border States, with Additional Community College Locations



Represents areas within 60 minutes of driving time from institutions' main campuses, based on IPEDS coordinates (this includes both campuses of IVCC). Darker colors are overlaid on lighter colors. Includes public and private non-profit institutions in Iowa and surrounding states; broad access are those with open admissions or that admit $\geq 80\%$ of applicants. Excludes institutions with a special focus, as identified by Carnegie Classification, on Graduate Studies, Law, Theological Studies, or Medical Schools/Centers. Yellow dots represent community college branch campuses and additional locations.

Additionally, when evaluating geographic access, it is important to consider the availability of online or distance programs, which expand the geographic reach of institutions beyond their local area. About 10% of Iowa associate degrees, or 67 programs, can be completed entirely via distance. At the baccalaureate level, there are 168 programs, between the Regent Universities and private institutions, that can be completed entirely via distance (Figure 36).

Figure 36. Number of Iowa Programs by Level, Sector, and Distance Availability, 2024/25



Notes: Only includes active programs that had at least one graduate in the past three years. Distance programs are 100% distance; they do not include hybrid programs. Each program level and 6-digit CIP code at an institution is counted once, though it may include multiple programs. Noncredit programs were only available for community colleges. Sources: Private Institution programs based on NCES IPEDS Completions Survey, c2022_a and c2023_a final release files; c2024_a and c2024dep provisional release files. Board of Regents programs based on IPEDS c2024dep provisional release files, modified using the Board of Regents Program Change Log, updated January 2026, and combined with 2023, 2024, and 2025 awards data from the Iowa Board of Regents. Community college programs based on the Iowa Department of Education program inventories, updated Fall 2025, combined with 2023, 2024, and 2025 awards data from the Iowa Dept of Education.

The University of Northern Iowa (UNI) has specifically worked to expand geographic access across the state through its “UNI@IACC” program, which is designed to create access points to UNI programs at Iowa Community Colleges. Except in areas of highest demand, the instruction takes place online in programs selected for their statewide workforce relevance. Again, depending on demand, UNI staff members are sometimes available to provide in-person support to students on community college campuses; currently, a UNI employee is available on campus at least once a week at approximately five of the 15 community colleges. Additionally, UNI maintains a financial aid program for students in UNI@IACC programs that reduces UNI tuition to the same price as community college tuition for eligible students from low-income backgrounds.

UNI is also not the only institution that has made an intentional effort to reach students in far-away communities. Buena Vista University has a history of working with Iowa’s community colleges to deliver programming to communities far from its campus. Like UNI, Buena Vista has increasingly moved these programs online in recent years.

The Iowa Board of Regents, as a system, also partners with Iowa’s community colleges on the Western Iowa Regents Resource Centers (WIRRC). These five centers are housed at community colleges across the western part of the state, which is the region furthest from any BOR main campus. WIRCC employees are funded jointly by the Regents and community colleges and serve as liaisons between community college students and the universities. They also help bring various university programming to communities in the western portion of the state.

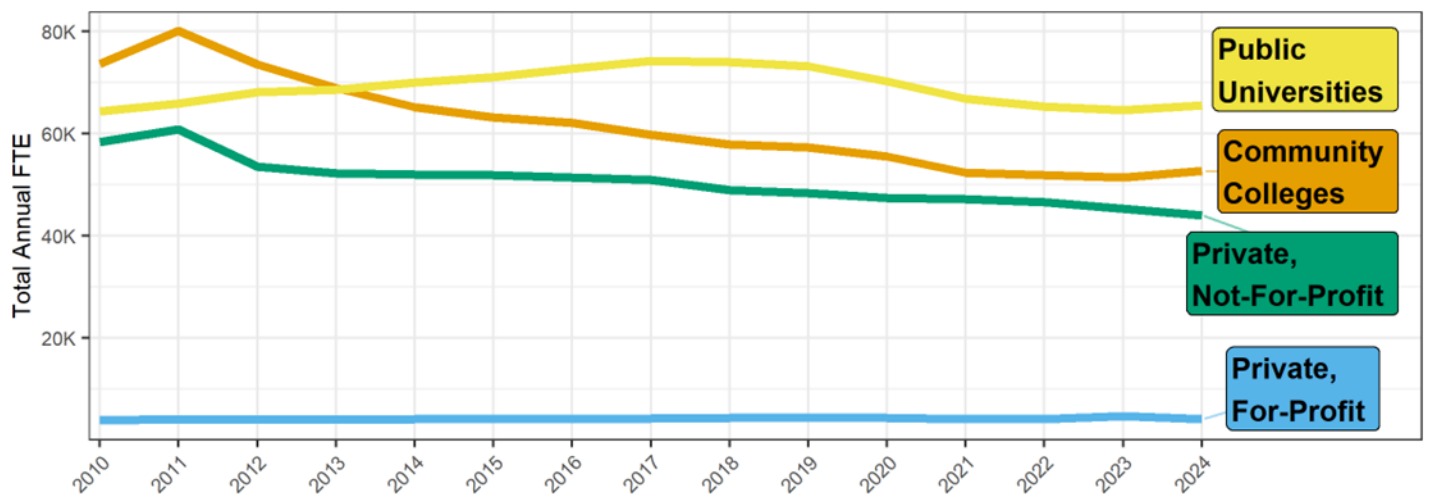
These types of means of distributing learning opportunities hold promise for increasing geographic access while leveraging the state’s existing institutions and programs. They may, in fact, be the only practical way to aggregate sufficient demand in some communities and program disciplines

to ensure that educational opportunities reach students in all parts of the state. However, they depend on high-quality online instruction, the availability of robust student support, and the funding necessary to keep tuition affordable for students. Stakeholders in Iowa's most rural regions consistently described online delivery as inferior to in-person instruction and argued that the students they tend to serve are dependent on face-to-face engagement and support in order to thrive. There is no easy solution for how to provide those courses and services in a cost-effective manner in sparsely populated areas. It may be that current efforts combining online instruction with face-to-face support are appropriate in concept but falling short in execution. Success in these programs requires universities to pay attention to student and workforce needs in regions sometimes far beyond their main campus. There is a risk that such programs become afterthoughts that are not considered mission-critical to the universities, while they are vital lifelines to smaller communities around the state.

Enrollment and Student Demographics

Measured by full-time equivalent students, enrollment in Iowa's community colleges and private, nonprofit four-year institutions have experienced a long-term decline in enrollment. From a high point in 2011, enrollment in both sectors fell steadily year-over-year through 2023 for the community colleges and through 2024 (the most recent year for which we have data) for the independent sector. Meanwhile, the Regent universities collectively saw steady growth through 2017 before they too weathered an enrollment decline through 2023 (Figure 37).

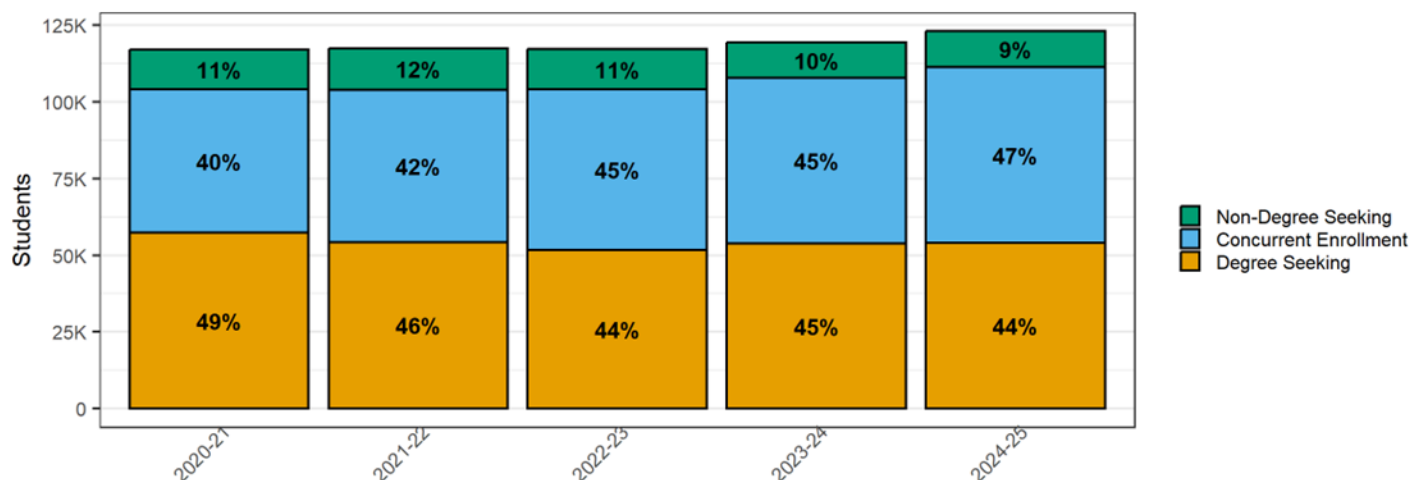
Figure 37. Iowa Postsecondary Enrollment by Sector of Institution



Source: NCES IPEDS 12-Month Enrollment Survey, files efiaYYYY, 2010-2023 final release files; 2024 provisional release.

Offsetting a portion of the decline in enrollment at Iowa's community colleges has been an increase in concurrent/joint enrollment among high school students, which climbed by about 10,000 students between 2020 and 2024 and increased by seven percentage points as a share of their enrollment (Figure 38).

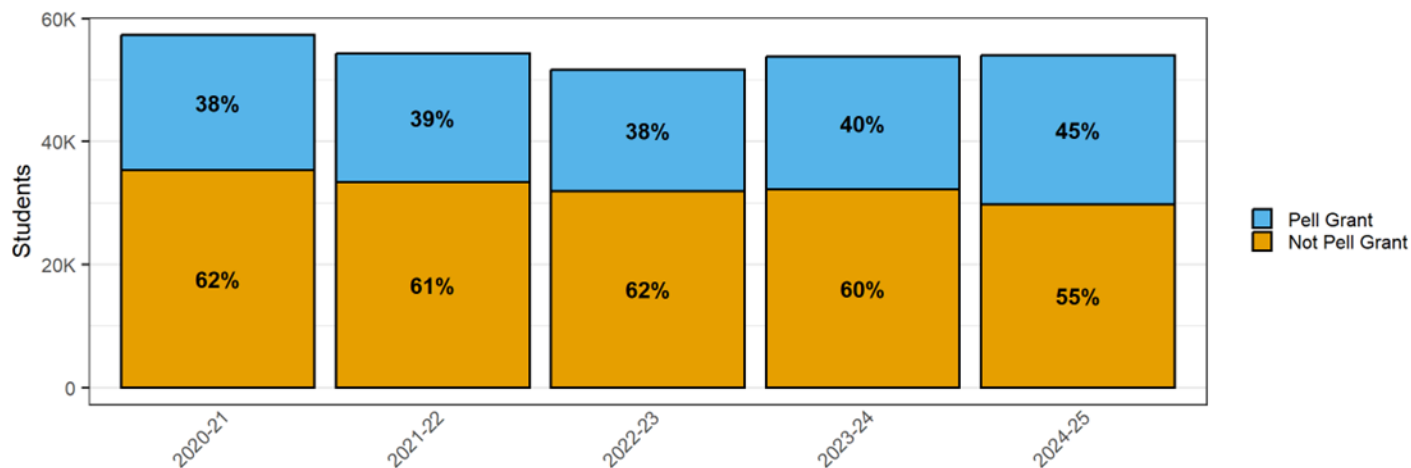
Figure 38. Community College Total Enrollment by Student Status



Source: Iowa Department of Education. Represents annual headcount.

Since 2020-21, the proportion of degree-seeking students at community colleges who received a Pell Grant—a binary proxy for income level—increased substantially (Figure 39).

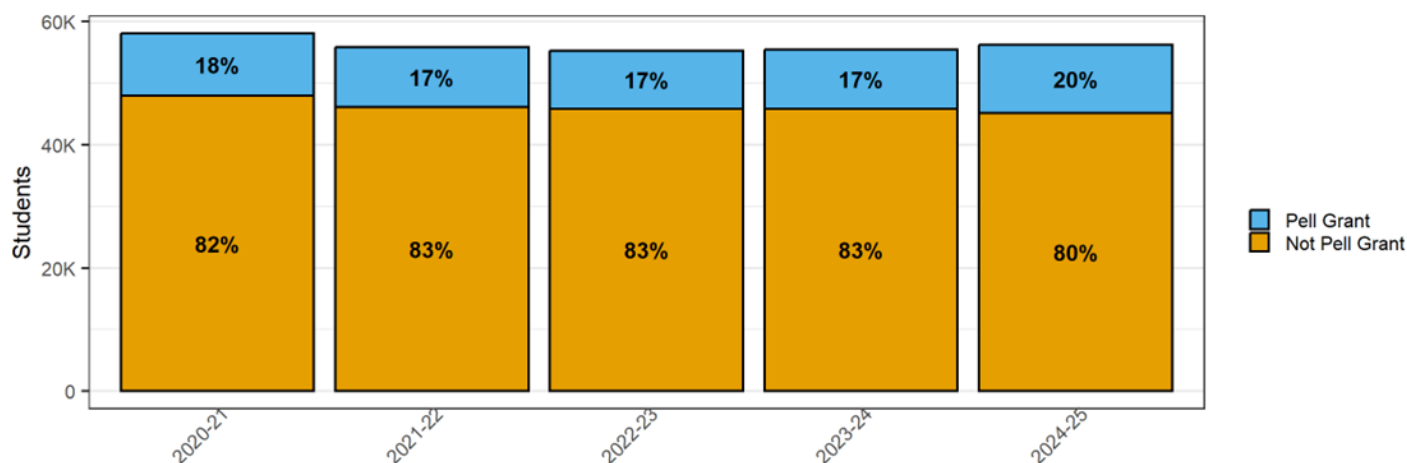
Figure 39. Community College Degree-Seeking Enrollment by Pell Status



Source: Iowa Department of Education. Note: Excludes joint enrollment high school students and other non degree/certificate-seeking students.

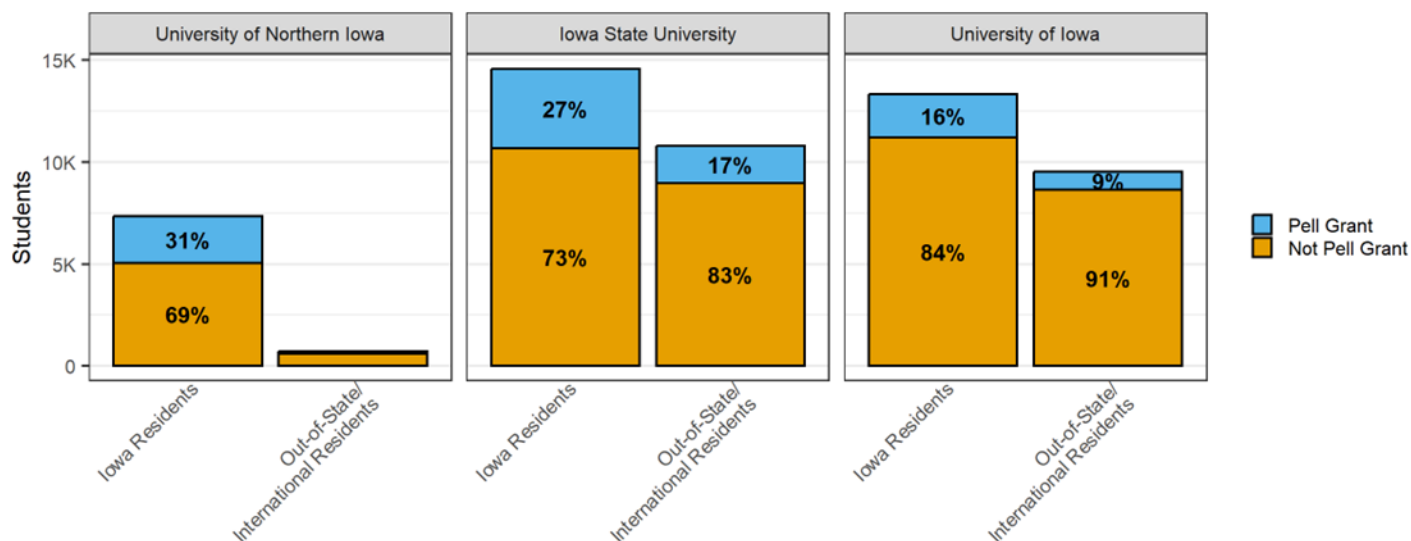
Concurrently, the share of undergraduates receiving Pell Grants at Iowa’s public universities stayed mostly stable, except for a small increase in 2024-25 (Figure 40). The Pell percentage at Iowa’s Regent institutions is significantly below the national average for public four-year institutions, which was 31% in 2023-24. The University of Northern Iowa’s percentage is similar to the national average, but the University of Iowa and Iowa State—which are larger institutions—serve much smaller percentages of Pell students (Figure 41). In ISU’s case, this difference is mostly due to the institution’s out-of-state students, who are less likely to receive Pell grants. At the University of Iowa, both Iowa residents and out-of-state students receive Pell grants at lower rates than both public four-year institutions nationwide and the other Regent institutions.

Figure 40. Public University Degree-Seeking Undergraduate Enrollment by Pell Status



Source: Iowa Board of Regents. Note: Represents annual headcount. Annual numbers were not available for ISU. Fall ISU enrollment has been mathematically adjusted to approximate annual numbers using ratios with IPEDS annual headcount.

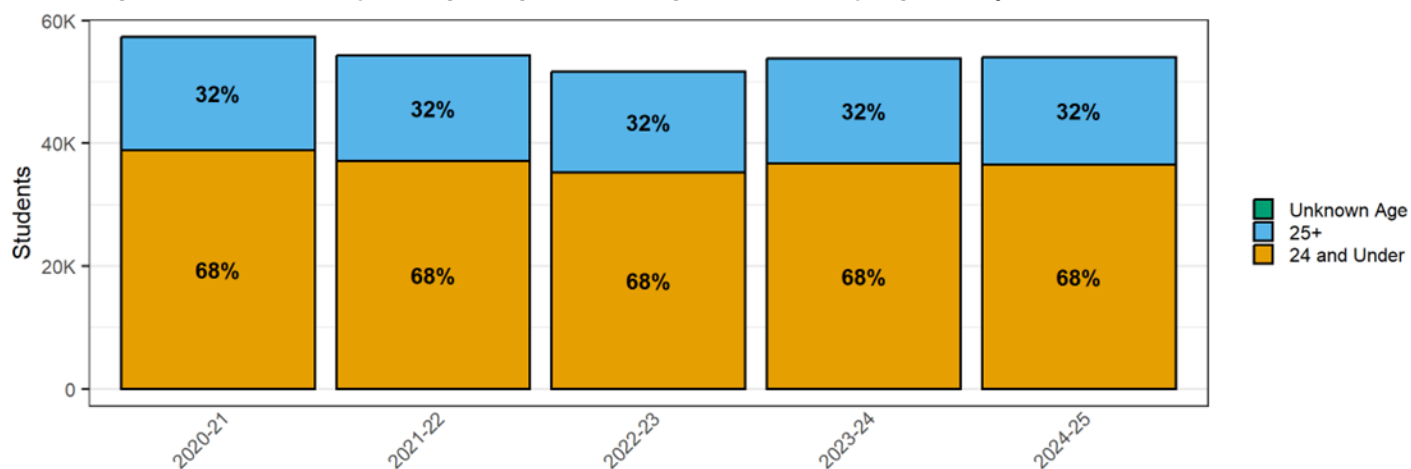
Figure 41. Public University Degree-Seeking Undergraduate Enrollment by Pell Status, by Institution and Residency, 2024-25



Source: Iowa Board of Regents. Note: Represents annual headcount. Annual numbers were not available for ISU. Fall ISU enrollment has been mathematically adjusted to approximate annual numbers using ratios with IPEDS annual headcount. 18% of UNI out-of-state/international students were Pell recipients.

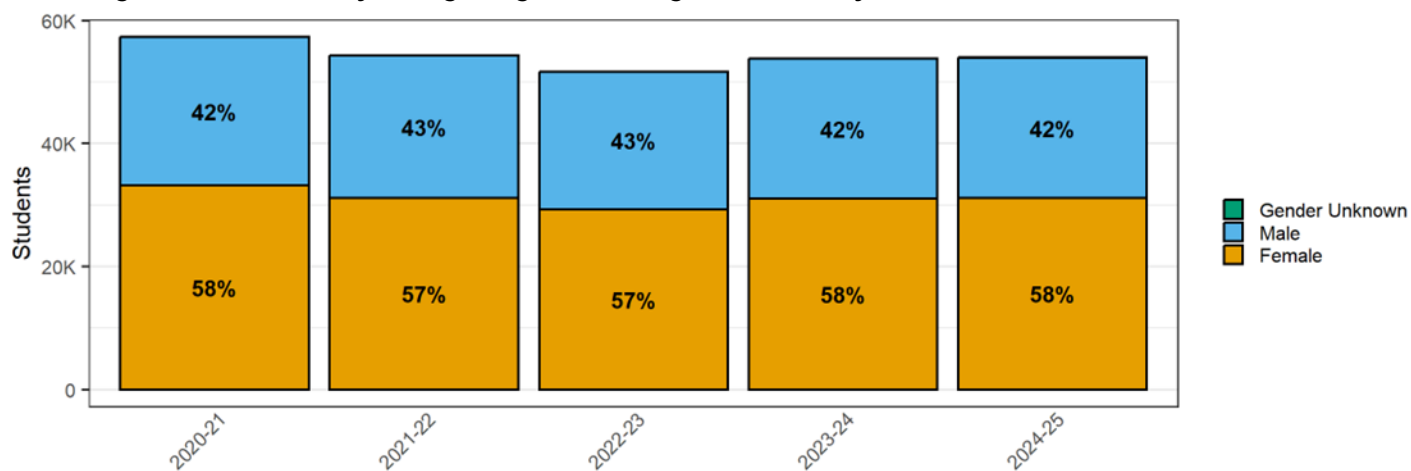
About a third of community colleges' degree-seeking students are adult learners over 25 years of age, and 58% are women. At the universities, more than 90% of students are traditional-aged (24 years and younger), while the gender mix is more balanced, with 51% being female (Figure 42 through Figure 45).

Figure 42. Community College Degree-Seeking Enrollment by Age Group



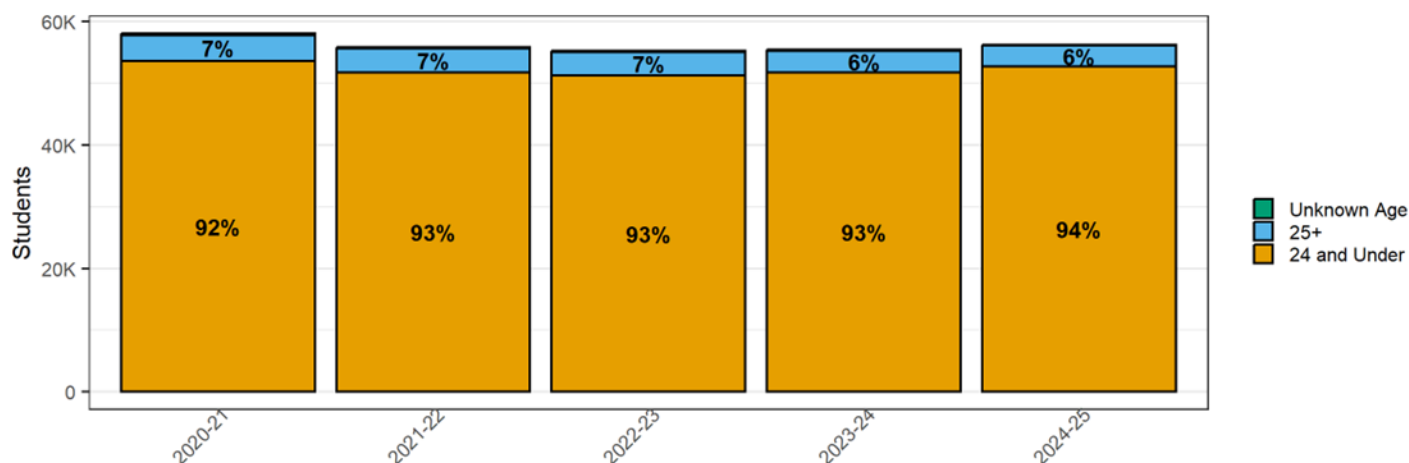
Source: Iowa Department of Education. Note: Excludes joint enrollment high school students and other non degree/certificate-seeking students.

Figure 43. Community College Degree-Seeking Enrollment by Gender



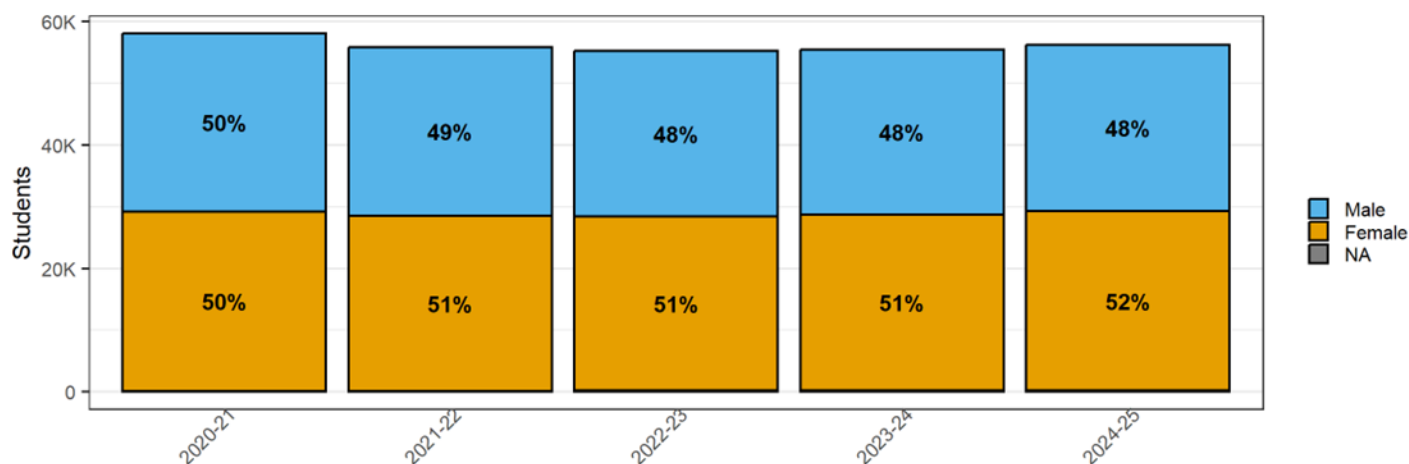
Source: Iowa Department of Education. Note: Excludes joint enrollment high school students and other non degree/certificate-seeking students.

Figure 44. Public University Degree-Seeking Undergraduate Enrollment by Age Group



Source: Iowa Board of Regents. Note: Represents annual headcount. Annual numbers were not available for ISU. Fall ISU enrollment has been mathematically adjusted to approximate annual numbers using ratios with IPEDS annual headcount.

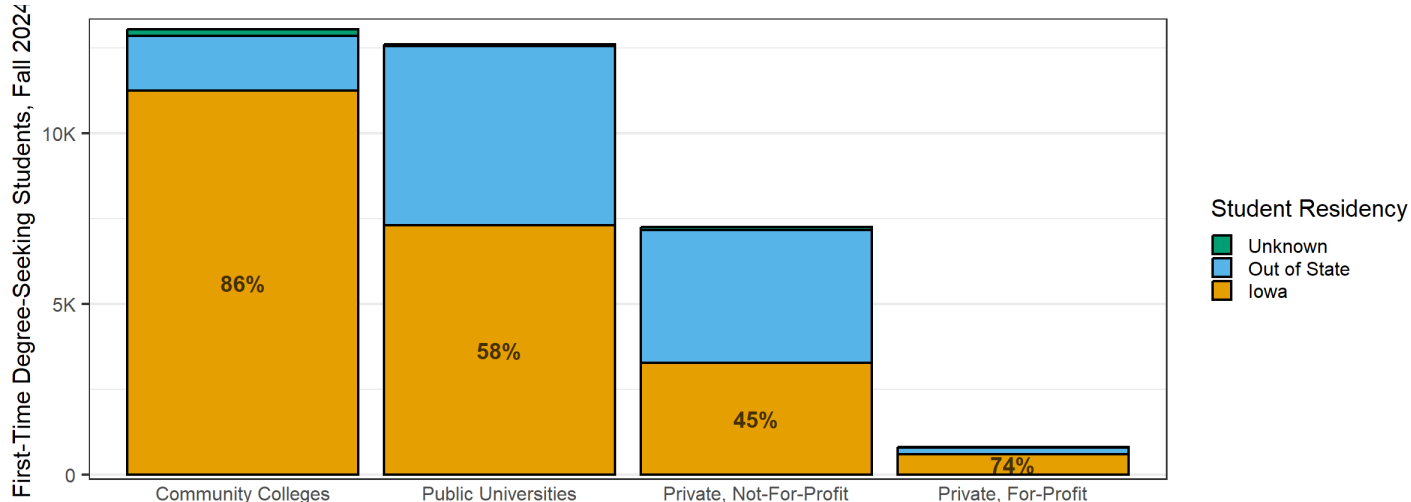
Figure 45. Public University Degree-Seeking Undergraduate Enrollment by Gender



Source: Iowa Board of Regents. Note: Represents annual headcount. Annual numbers were not available for ISU. Fall ISU enrollment has been mathematically adjusted to approximate annual numbers using ratios with IPEDS annual headcount.

In fall 2024, Iowa residents accounted for 86% of first-time students at Iowa's community colleges, 58% at Iowa's universities, and 45% at Iowa's private, nonprofit colleges (Figure 46). Both the share and the number of non-residents has been rising at Iowa's public universities since 2020-21 (Figure 47).

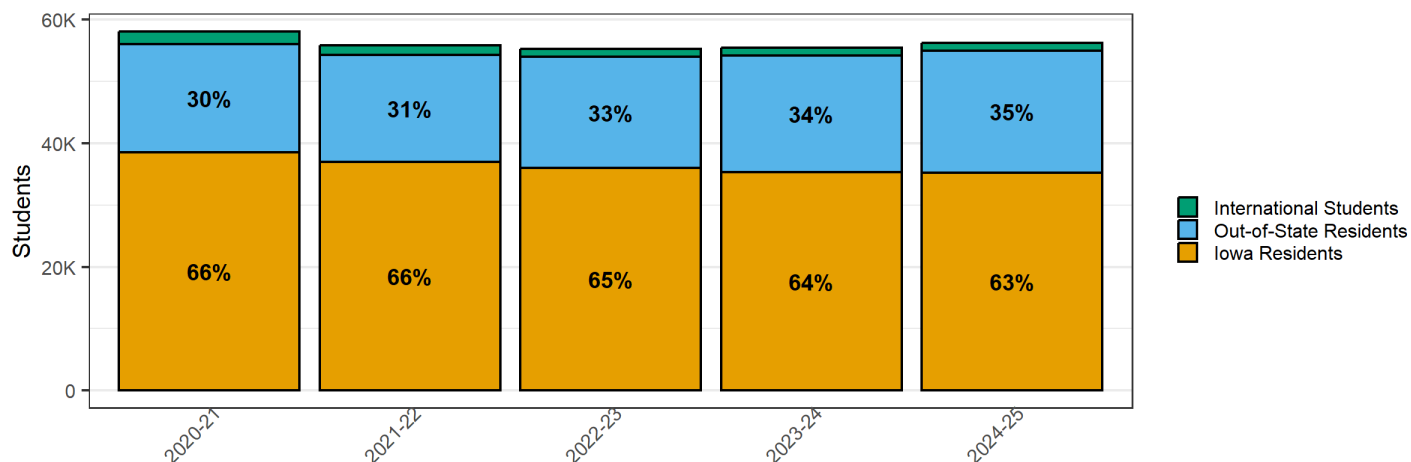
Figure 46. First-Time Degree-Seeking Students at Iowa Institutions, by Residency and Sector, Fall 2024



Source: NCES IPEDS Fall Enrollment Survey, ef2024c provisional release file.

Note percentages in Figure 46 do not match those in Figure 47. Figure 47 includes all degree-seeking undergraduates, not just first-time students.

Figure 47. Public University Degree-Seeking Undergraduate Enrollment by Residency



Source: Iowa Board of Regents. Note: Represents annual headcount. Annual numbers were not available for ISU. Fall ISU enrollment has been mathematically adjusted to approximate annual numbers using ratios with IPEDS annual headcount.

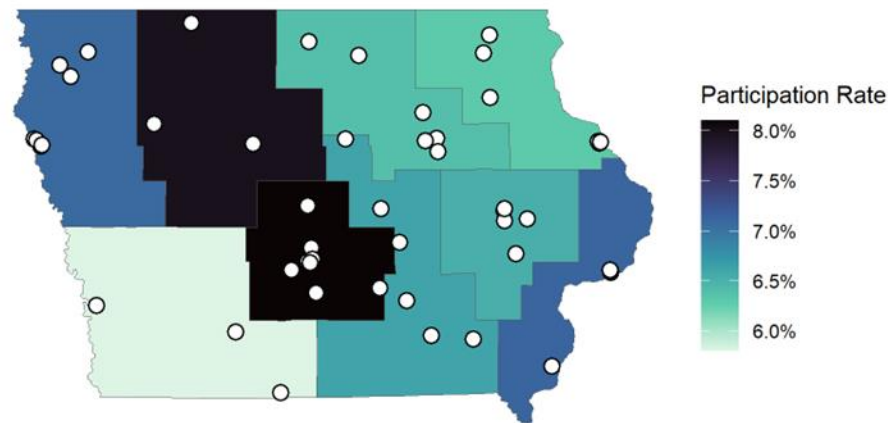
Participation Rates

Rates of postsecondary participation in Iowa's institutions are typically strongest in counties that host institutions, their contiguous counties, and in urban centers. They are weakest along the state's southern and southwestern borders (Figure 48). These patterns are even more obvious when looking just at the Regent universities' participation rates (Figure 49). This is not surprising given the distance between the public university campuses and these counties. Community colleges (Figure 50) and independent institutions (Figure 51) help address some of the gaps in

participation throughout the state. Still, access to Iowa's institutions remains more challenging in the Iowa Plains/Green Hills region, which is the southwest portion of the state. Students in this region may have easier access to out-of-state institutions; Northwest Missouri State University, the University of Nebraska-Omaha, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln are among the most popular out-of-state destinations for Iowa students; all are relatively close to southwest Iowa (Figure 54).

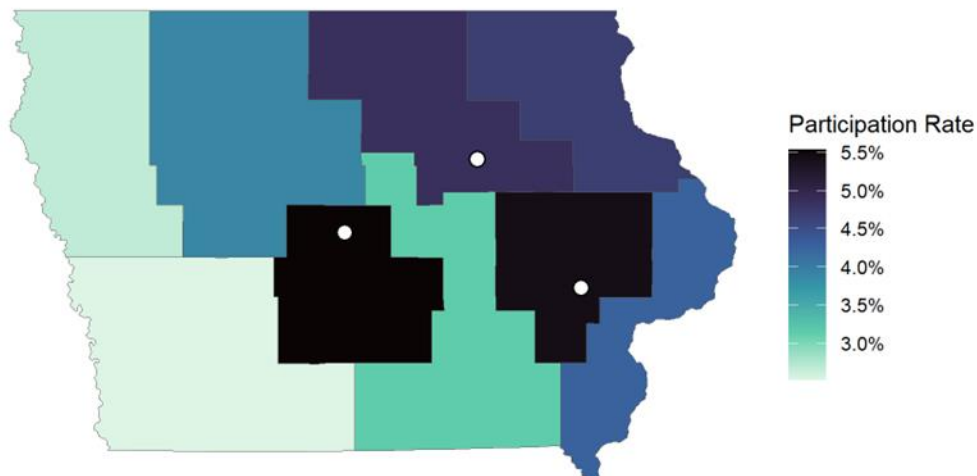
Similarly, Iowa data likely underestimate participation among residents of Iowa's northwestern counties, who may opt to enroll in South Dakota's public institutions just across the border. South Dakota State and the University of South Dakota have the highest enrollment of Iowa students among all out-of-state institutions and typically do not differentiate prices for non-resident students from Iowa.

Figure 48. Total Participation: All Sectors Undergraduate Degree-Seeking Enrollment as a Percent of Residents Age 18-44 Without a Bachelor's Degree



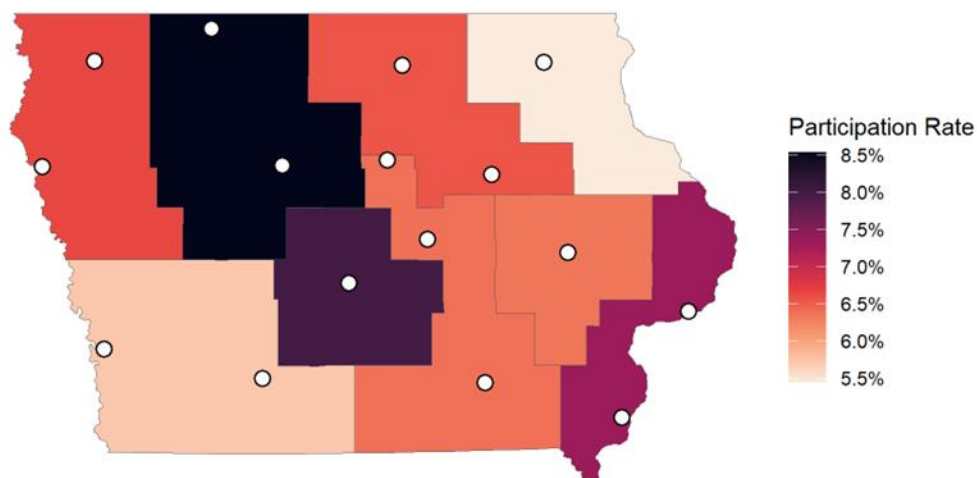
Sources: Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Board of Regents, Iowa SLDS, and U.S. Census Bureau 2024 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates; Table B15001. Numerator is 2021-2025 average undergraduate enrollment of Iowa residents in public universities, community colleges, and private institutions. Public institutions' enrollment includes degree-seeking students only. Private institution enrollment only includes students who graduated from a Iowa public high school from 2018 to 2024 and enrolled in an institution that submitted data to the National Student Clearinghouse. Denominator is 2020-2024 average Iowa residents age 18 to 44 without a Bachelor's degree. Dots represent locations of institutions.

Figure 49. Public University Participation: Undergraduate Enrollment as a Percent of Residents Age 18-44 Without a Bachelor's Degree



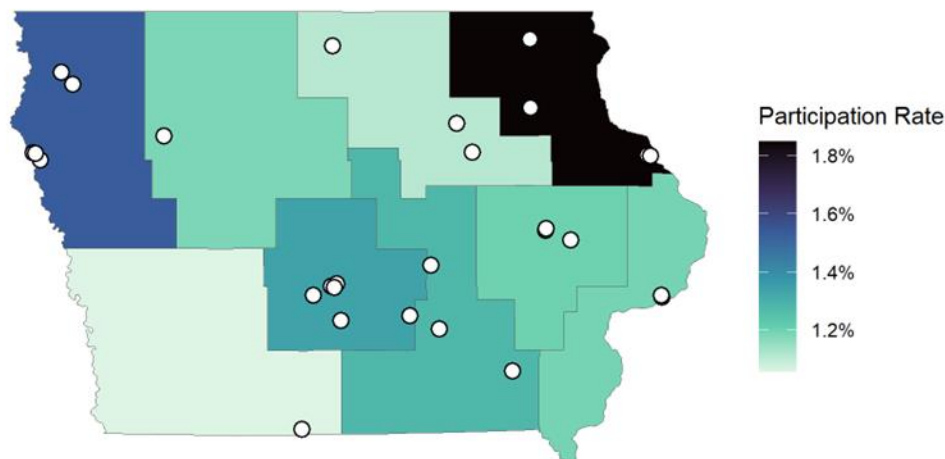
Sources: Iowa Board of Regents and U.S. Census Bureau 2024 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates; Table B15001. Numerator is 2021-2025 average enrollment of undergraduate, degree-seeking Iowa residents with a known county of origin. Denominator is 2020-2024 average Iowa residents age 18 to 44 without a Bachelor's degree. Dots represent locations of institutions.

Figure 50. Community College Participation: Degree-Seeking Enrollment as a Percent of Residents Age 18-44 With Less Than an Associate Degree



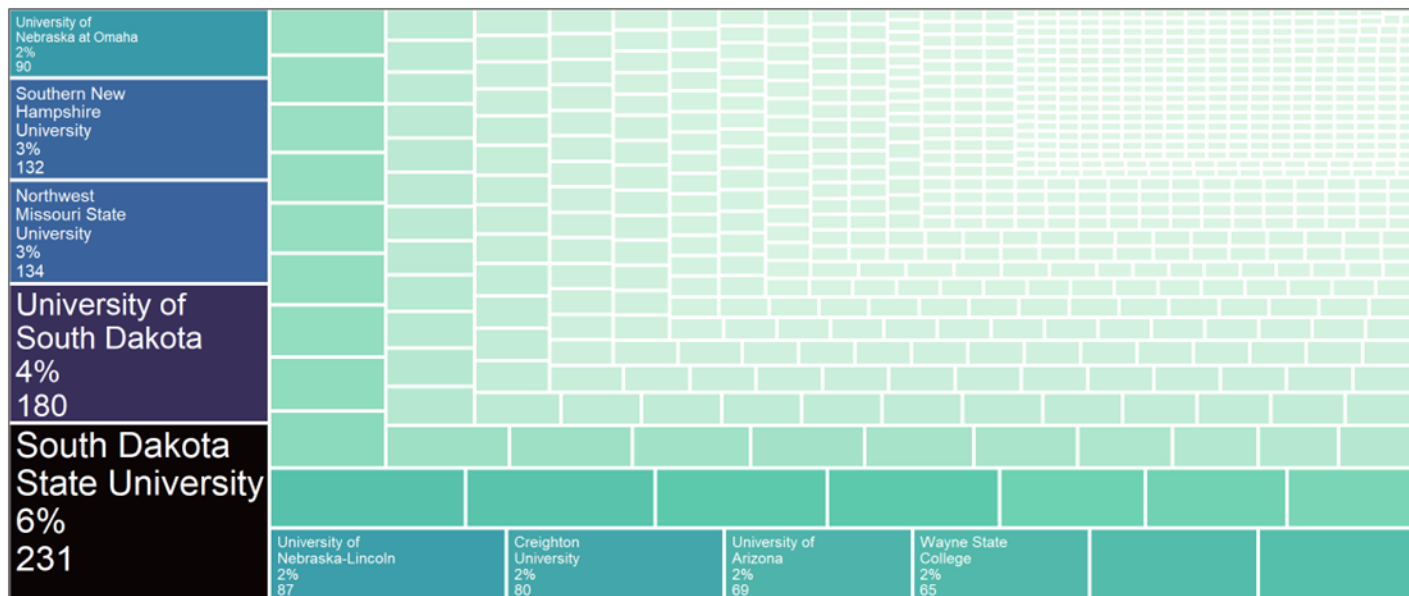
Sources: Iowa Department of Education and U.S. Census Bureau 2024 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates; Table B15001. Numerator is 2021-2025 average enrollment of degree-seeking Iowa residents with a known county of origin. Denominator is 2020-2024 average Iowa residents age 18 to 44 with less than an Associate degree. Dots represent locations of institutions.

Figure 51. Private Institution Participation: Undergraduate Enrollment as a Percent of Residents Age 18-44 Without a Bachelor's Degree



Sources: Iowa SLDS and U.S. Census Bureau 2024 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates; Table B15001. Numerator is 2021-2025 average enrollment of undergraduates who graduated from a Iowa public high school from 2018 to 2024 and enrolled in a private institution that submitted data to the National Student Clearinghouse. Denominator is 2020-2024 average Iowa residents age 18 to 44 without a Bachelor's degree. Dots represent locations of institutions.

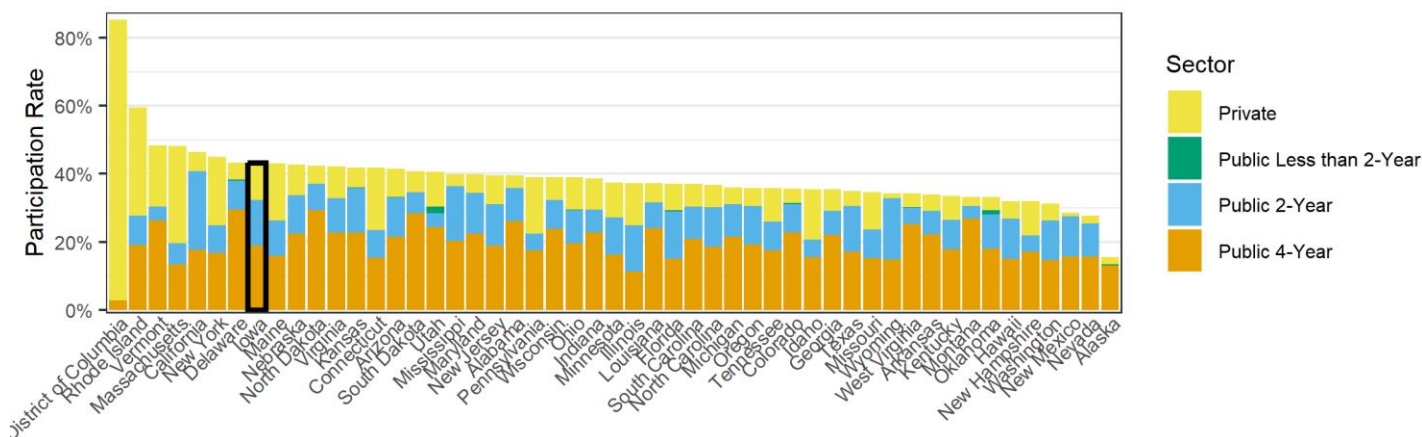
Figure 52. Destinations of Iowa Students Attending Out-of-State Institutions as First-Time Degree-Seeking Students, Fall 2024



Source: NCES IPEDS 2024 Fall Enrollment Survey, ef2024c provisional release file. Note: represents Iowa residents attending Title-IV eligible institutions outside Iowa as first-time degree-seeking students.

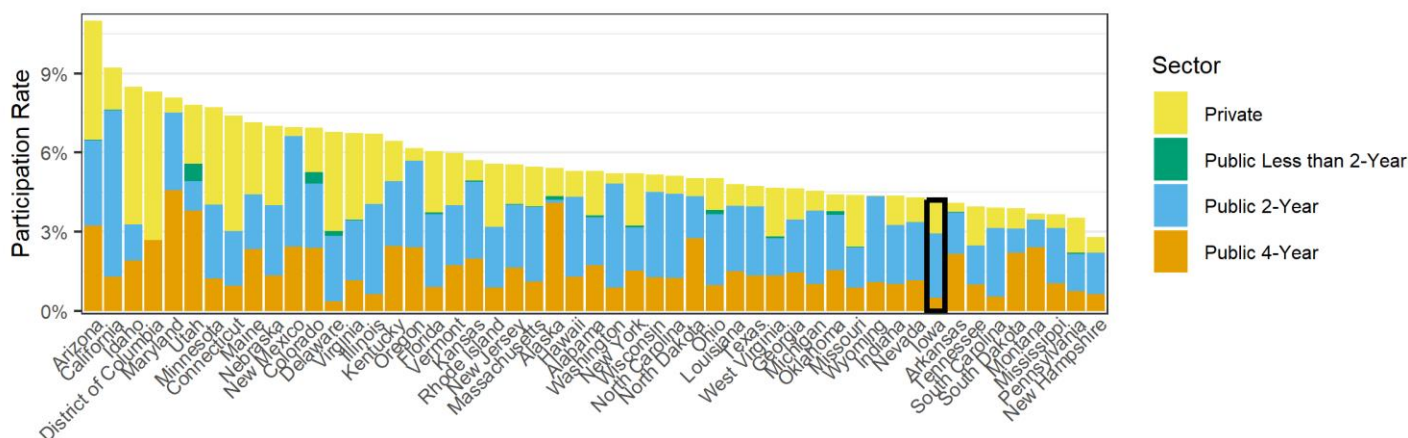
Iowa ranks highly among states in the participation rate of traditionally aged residents, but among the lowest-ranked in the participation rate of working-age adults (Figure 53 and Figure 54).

Figure 53. Participation by State, Age 18 to 24: Undergraduates as a Percent of Residents Without a Bachelor's Degree



Sources: Numerator from NCES IPEDS Fall Enrollment Survey, final release file ef2023b. Denominator is 2023 state population aged 18-24 without a Bachelor's degree. Notes: Includes only undergraduates at Title IV granting institutions. Online institutions primarily serving out-of-state students have been subtracted from state values. Rates do not account for student residency.

Figure 54. Participation by State, Age 25-49: Undergraduates as a Percent of Residents Without a Bachelor's Degree



Sources: Numerator from NCES IPEDS Fall Enrollment Survey, final release file ef2023b. Denominator is 2023 state population aged 24-44 without a Bachelor's degree. Notes: Includes only undergraduates at Title IV granting institutions. Online institutions primarily serving out-of-state students have been subtracted from state values. Rates do not account for student residency.

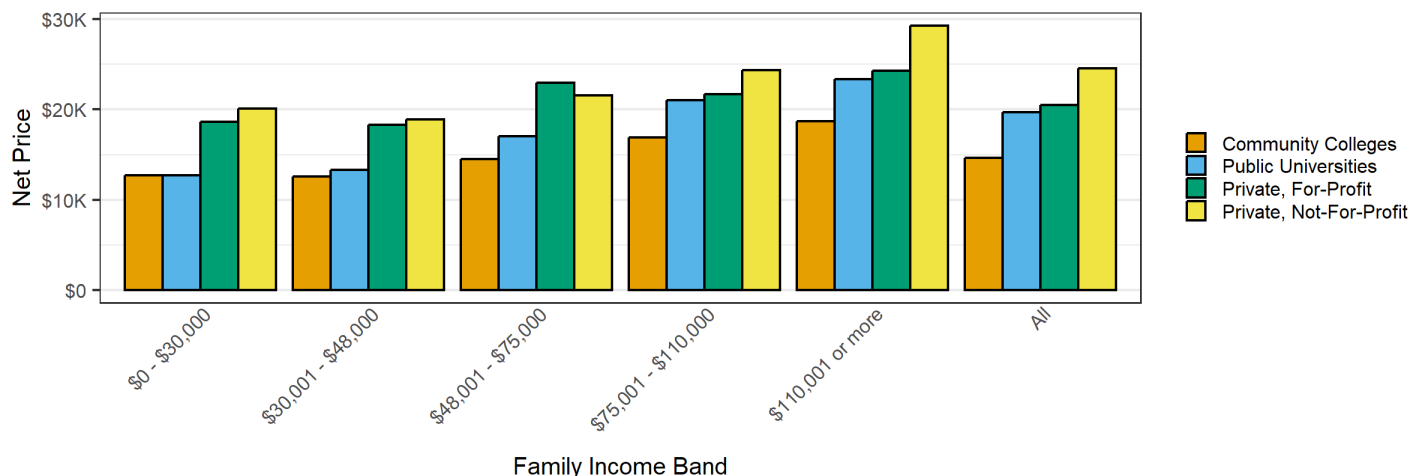
Affordability

As in most states, Iowa's community colleges are the state's most affordable postsecondary option based on net price. Net price represents the average full-time student's annual cost of attendance, including living expenses, after scholarships and grants. For those seeking baccalaureate or graduate education, the Regent institutions are more affordable, on average, than Iowa's private institutions (Figure 55).

Because of need-based aid options, the net price for students from lower-income backgrounds is generally lower, across all sectors, than the net price for more wealthy students. For students in

the lowest income bracket (less than \$30,000 per year), the net price at public community colleges and universities is about \$12,700, on average. At Iowa's private, not-for-profit institutions, the net price for these students is around \$20,000. A price difference of over \$7,000 per year is likely to be quite significant to these students and their families.

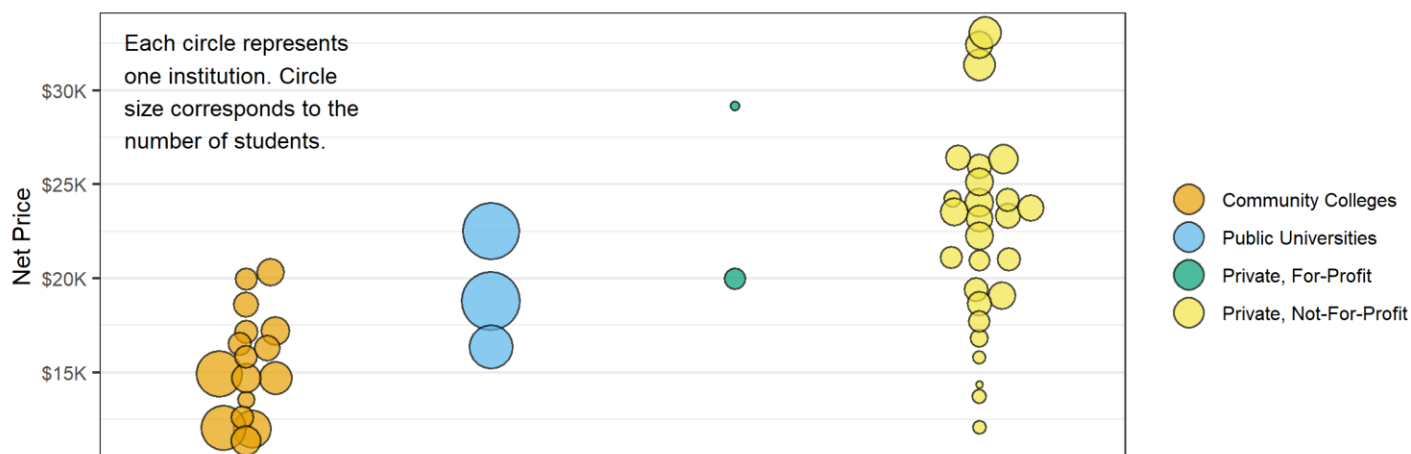
Figure 55. Net Price by Sector and Student/Family Income Band, 2023-24



Source: NCES IPEDS Student Financial Aid and Net Price Survey and Cost Survey, *sfa2324*, *cost1_2024* and *cost2_2024* provisional release files. Net price is calculated for the cohort of first-time-in-college, full-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates who were awarded title IV federal student aid. For public institutions the cohort is further restricted to those paying the in-state or in-district tuition rate. Net price is the total cost of attendance (including tuition, fees, food, housing, books, supplies, and other expenses) minus the average amount of grant and scholarship aid from federal, state or local governments, or institutional sources, awarded to students in the cohort. Costs of attendance are sector averages weighted by enrollment of students in the cohort at each institution. Costs of attendance are based on on-campus living expenses for Public Universities and Private Not-For-Profit Institutions. They are based on off-campus, not with family living expenses for Community Colleges and Private For-Profit Institutions.

Beyond the averages in Figure 55, there are significant differences in net price between institutions, especially in the private sector. Some private institutions in Iowa have net prices similar to—or lower than—those of community colleges and Regent universities (Figure 56).

Figure 56. 2023-24 Iowa Institutions' Net Price Distribution



Source: NCES IPEDS Student Financial Aid and Net Price Survey and Cost Survey, *sfa2324*, *cost1_2024* and *cost2_2024* provisional release files. Net price is calculated for the cohort of first-time-in-college, full-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates who were awarded title IV federal student aid. For public institutions the cohort is further restricted to those paying the in-state or in-district tuition rate. Net price is the total cost of attendance (including tuition, fees, food, housing, books, supplies, and other expenses) minus the average amount of grant and scholarship aid from federal, state or local governments, or institutional sources, awarded to students in the cohort. Costs of attendance are based on on-campus living expenses for Public Universities and Private Not-For-Profit Institutions. They are based on off-campus, not with family living expenses for Community Colleges and Private For-Profit Institutions.

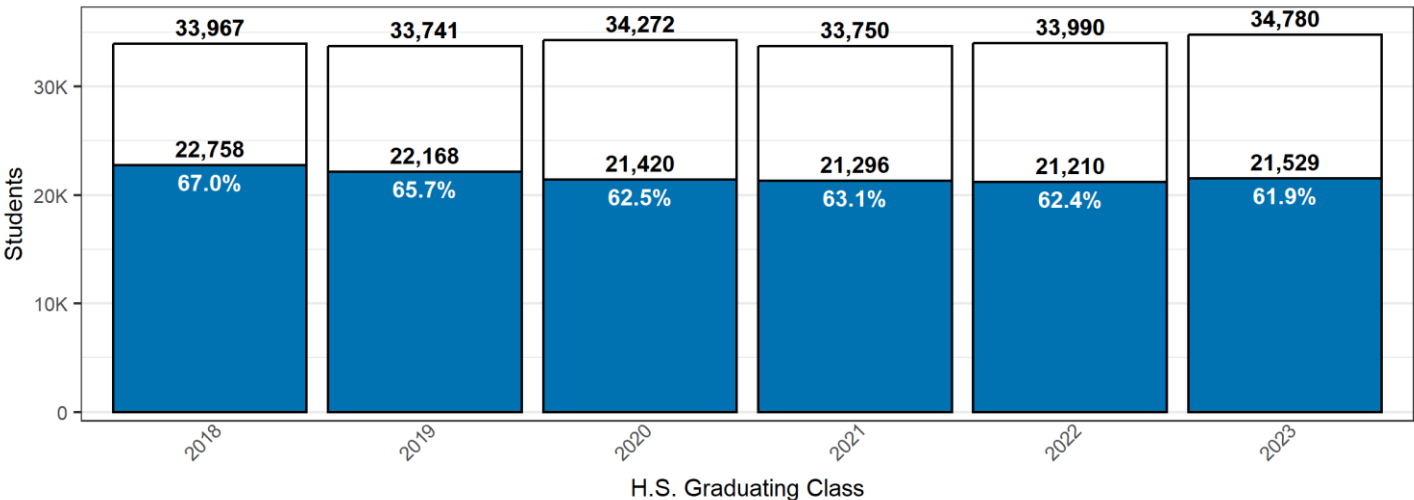
Student Success and the Education-to-Work Pipeline

This section analyzes data designed to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the education-to-work pipeline. This includes answering questions such as: What percentage of high school graduates continue to college? Do Iowa college students have access to meaningful work-based learning opportunities while in school? How many students are graduating from Iowa institutions in what fields? What percent of community college graduates successfully transfer to four-year institutions and complete bachelor's degrees? What percentage of Iowa college graduates stay in Iowa to work after graduating?

College-Going Rates

Across the nation, the rates at which high school graduates enroll directly in college have been declining.⁸ While Iowa’s college-going rate has consistently been higher than the nation’s,⁹ its rates too have declined (Figure 57). In 2018, 67% of Iowa public high school graduates enrolled in college within one year. By 2023, this rate had dropped to 62%. Lower college-going rates compound workforce challenges created by population decreases and demographic change.

Figure 57. Direct from High School College-Going Rates



Source: Iowa Department of Education's Iowa High School Readiness Reports. Note: Represents public high school graduates who enrolled in postsecondary education or training within one year of high school graduation.

Work-Based Learning

Iowa has emphasized work-based learning in recent years. There are numerous programs statewide to encourage work-based learning among both high school and college students; these range from opportunities that educate students about local employers to internships, clinical experiences, apprenticeships, and more. Stakeholders shared with us numerous examples of work-based learning taking place across the state. There was a general consensus across our

⁸ Louisa Hunkerstorm, “College-Going Rates Provide Deeper Insight Into Postsecondary Enrollment Over Time,” *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 57, no. 6 (2025): 63–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2025.2568358>.

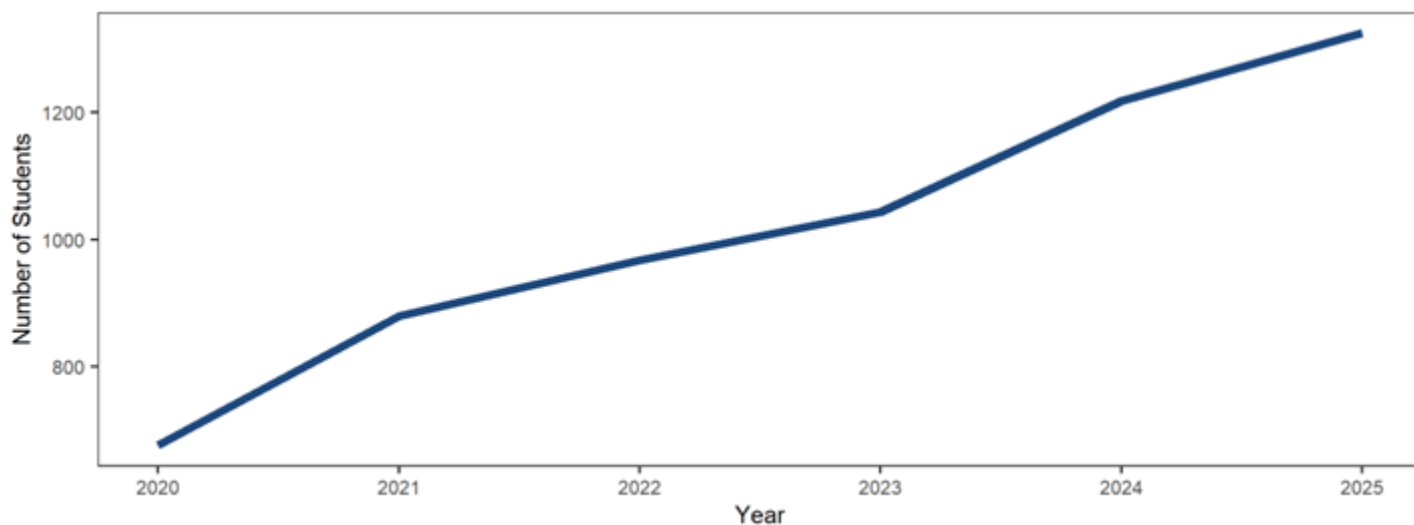
⁹ “Direct From High School College-Going Rates,” *NCHEMS*, <https://nchems.org/college-rates-by-state-year/>. Note: Rates differ from Iowa DOE’s due to different data sources and methodology.

focus groups that meaningful work-based learning experiences are important for students to be ready to enter the workforce when they graduate.

There are no comprehensive data on all these different types of experiences, but there are data on two types of work-based learning activities taking place at community colleges: registered apprenticeships and professional licensures.

The number of registered apprenticeships offered through Iowa Community Colleges has nearly doubled since 2020 (Figure 58). The vast majority of those attached to a college (77%) have been offered at Hawkeye Community College.

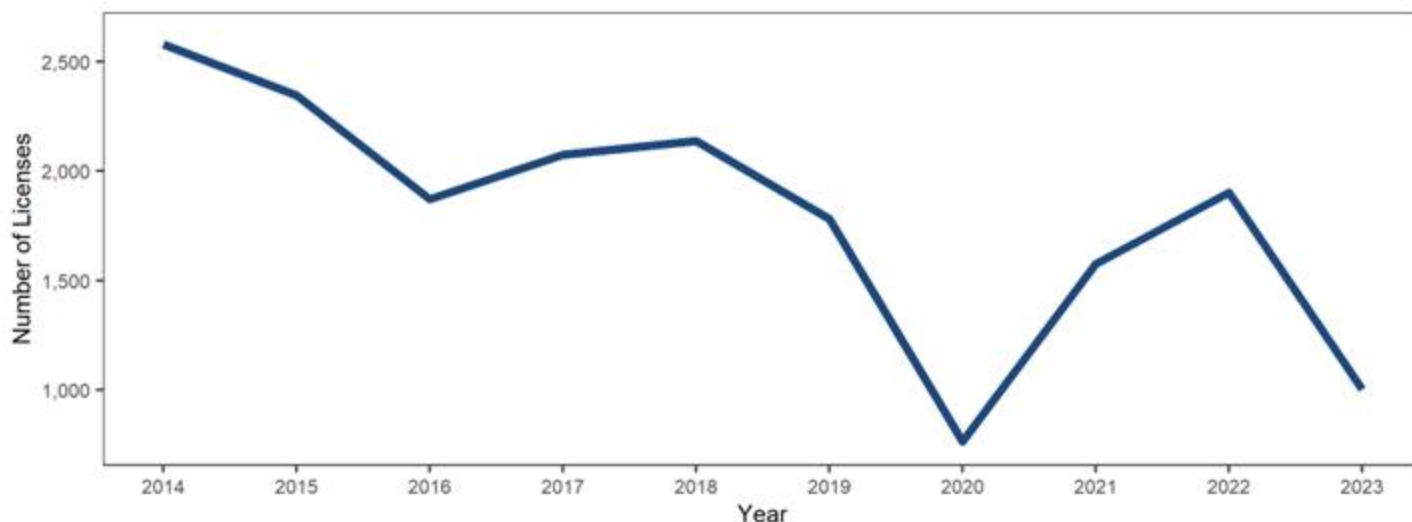
Figure 58. Total Enrolled in Registered Apprenticeships



Source: Iowa Department of Education.

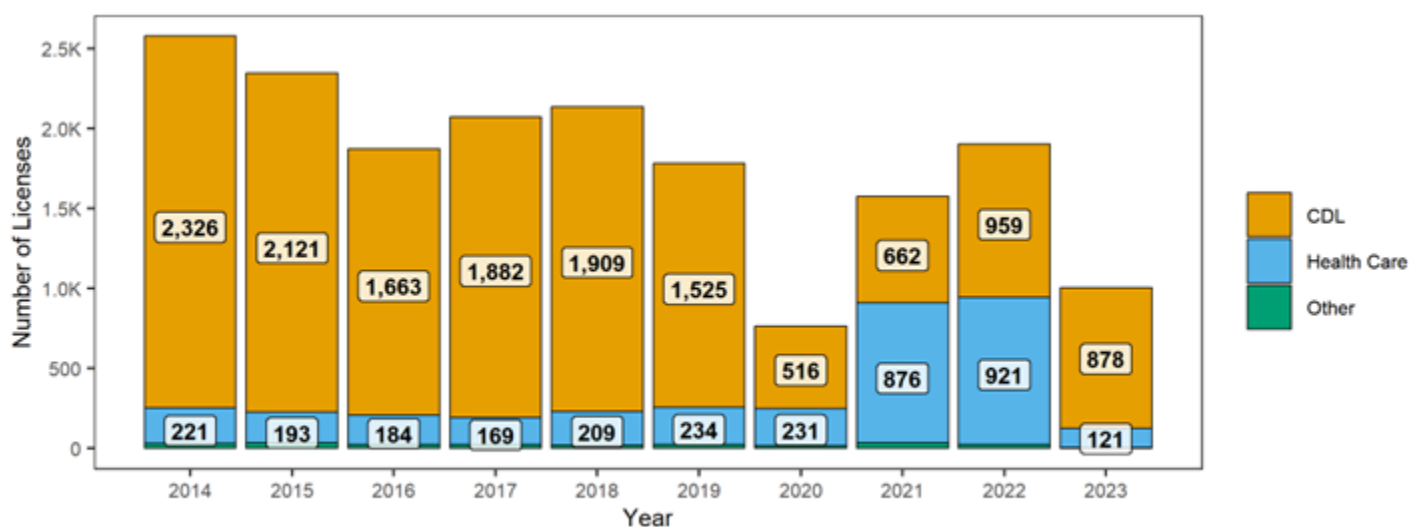
The number of professional licenses awarded annually has fallen since 2014. The vast majority of professional licenses tracked by the Iowa Department of Education are Commercial Drivers Licenses (CDLs). The pandemic coincided with a major multi-year trough in total licenses awarded, with a dramatic drop in CDLs partially offset by a sharp but temporary increase in health care licenses. Post-pandemic, the number of awards barely recovered in 2022 before dropping substantially again in 2023 (Figure 59 and Figure 60).

Figure 59. Professional Licenses for All Occupational Areas Awarded by Community Colleges



Source: Iowa Department of Education.

Figure 60. Professional Licenses Awarded by Occupational Area

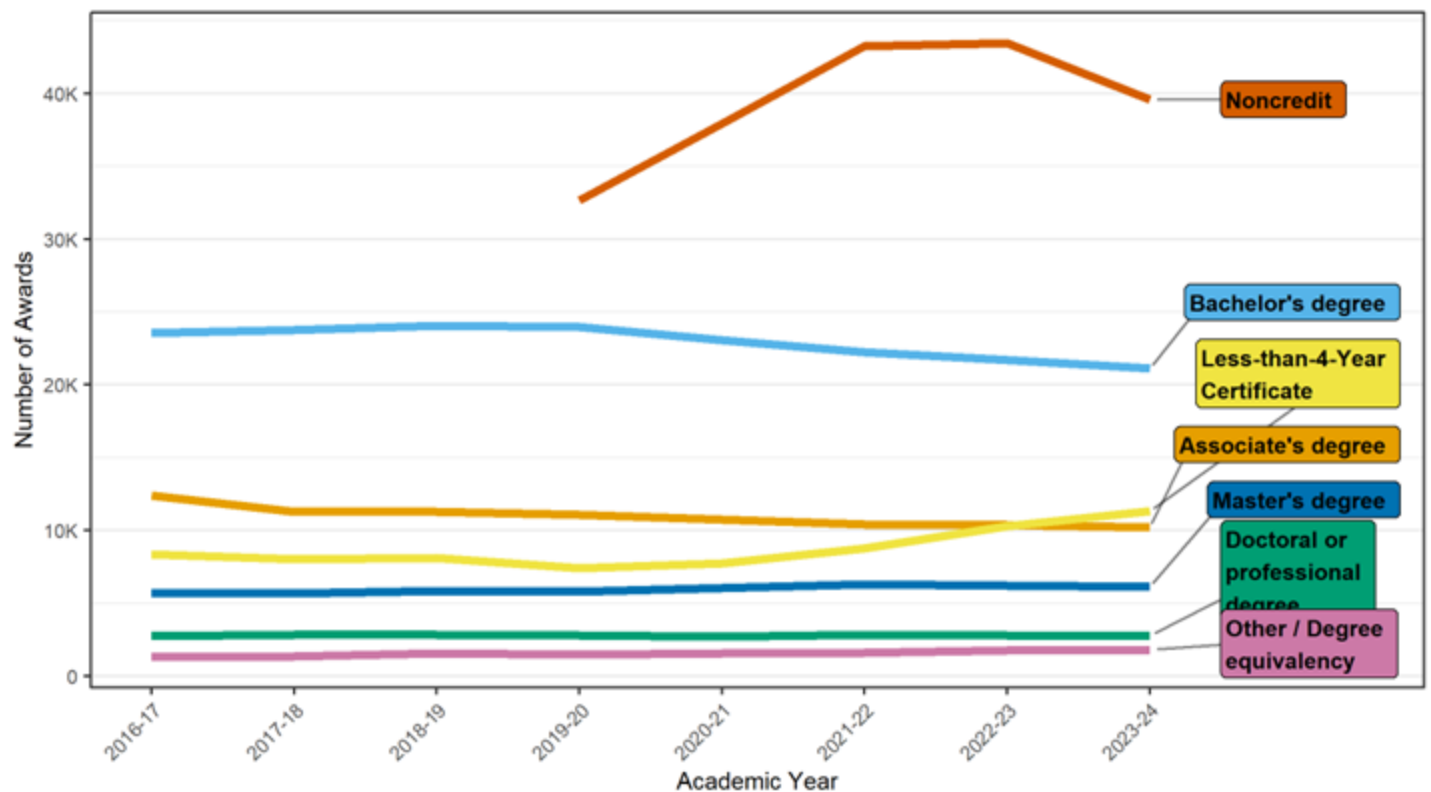


Source: Iowa Department of Education.

Completion of Degrees and Certificates

Iowa has only recently begun tracking noncredit credentials, joining other states in an effort to quantify a growing segment of postsecondary education. Since 2020, noncredit credentials have represented the largest number of awards granted each year, and their prevalence has grown significantly through 2025. Apart from noncredit credentials, bachelor's degrees remain the most commonly awarded postsecondary credential by a wide margin, followed by associate degrees. Over the past decade, however, the number of credit awards at all levels except certificates has been steady or dropping since prior to the pandemic (Figure 61).

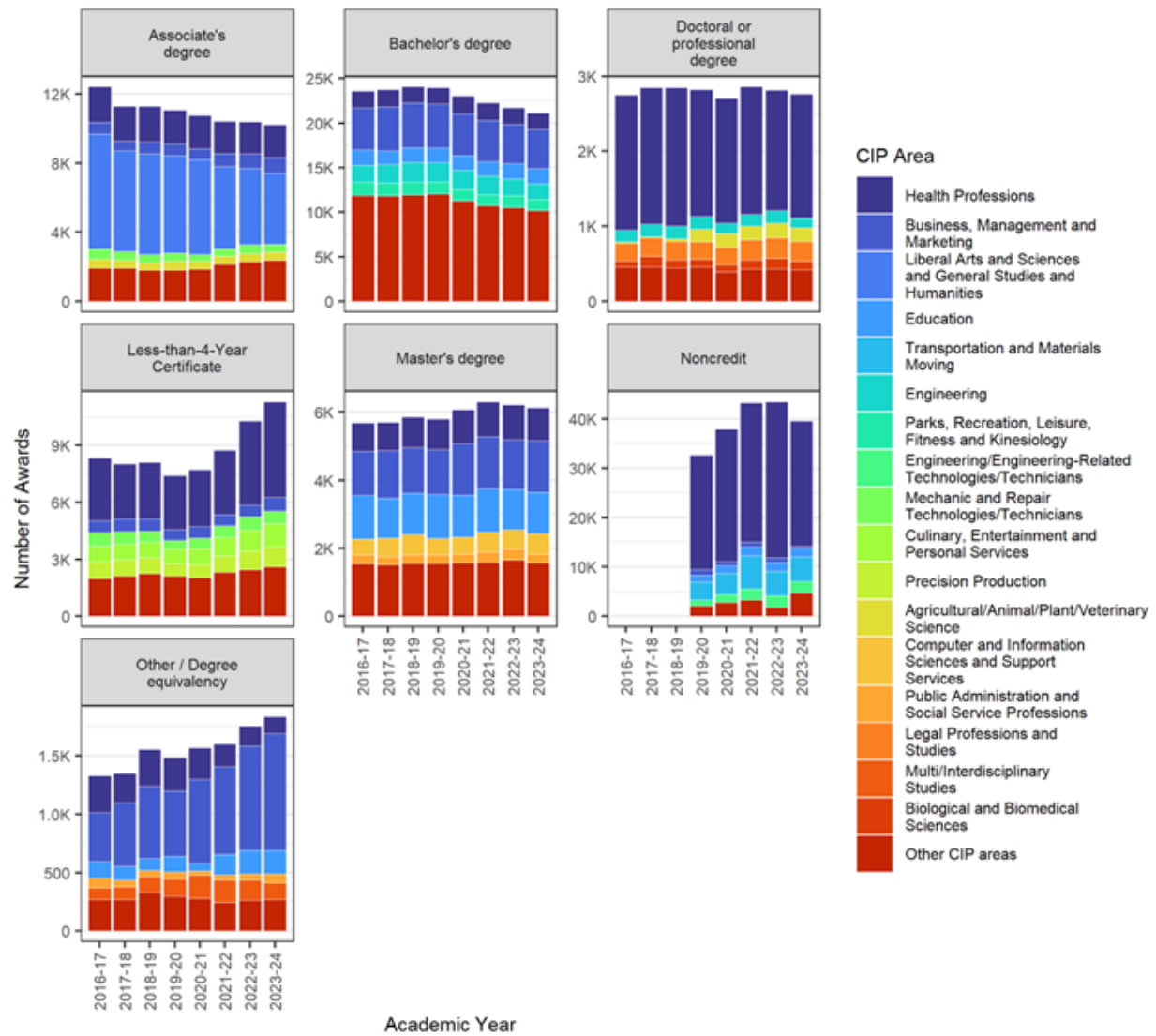
Figure 61. Awards by Level, All Iowa Institutions



Source: Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Board of Regents, and NCES IPEDS Completions Survey, files cYYYY_a, 2016–2023 final release files, 2024 provisional release.

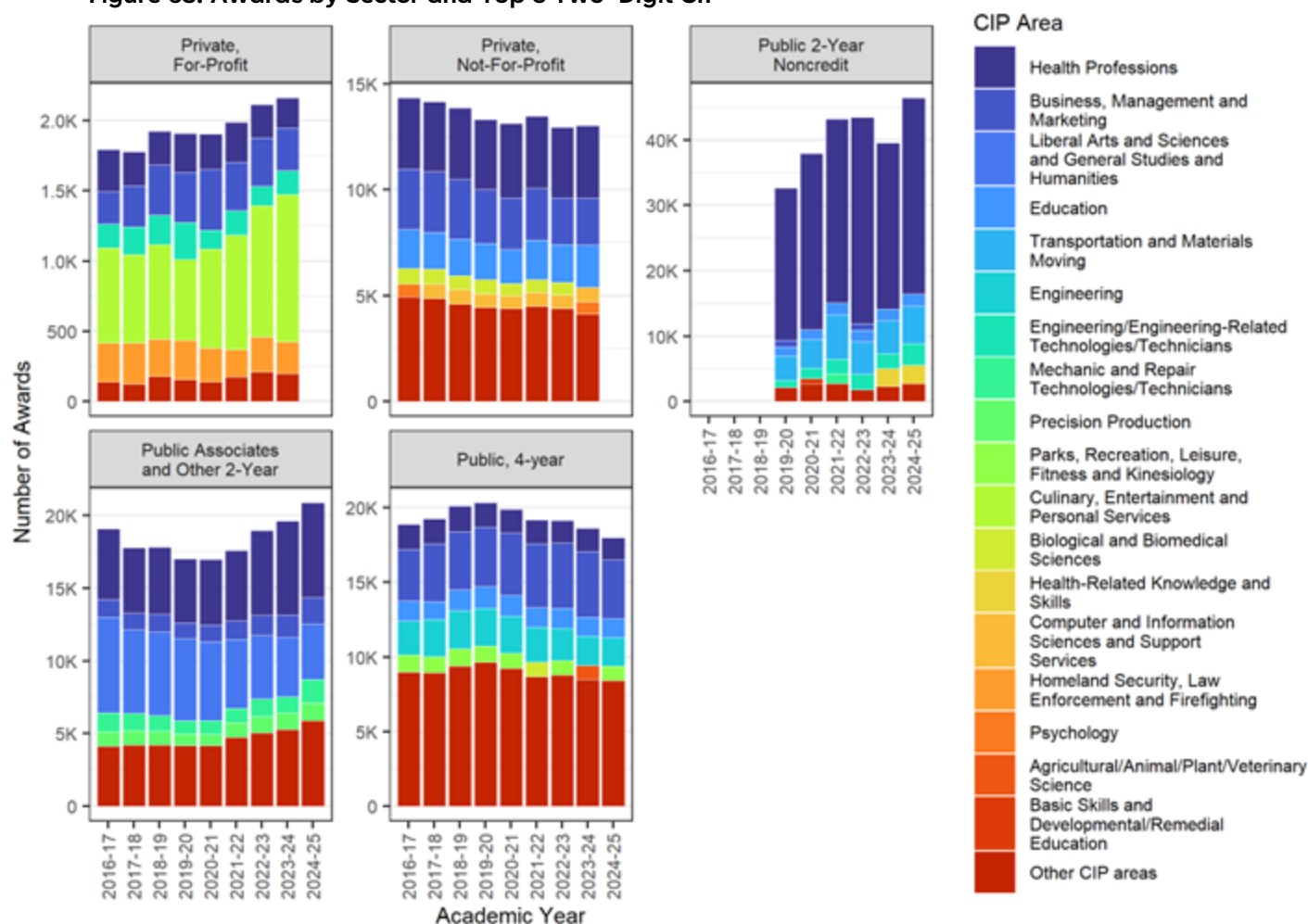
Awards in the health professions, already the most numerous across Iowa, grew most over the past decade. Awards in business, management and marketing, and in education also ticked upward, while the number of awards conferred in engineering fell slightly, and awards in the liberal arts and sciences declined substantially. This is evidence that students are self-selecting into programs more closely linked to immediate job opportunities and signals of occupational demand (Figure 62 and Figure 63).

Figure 62. Awards by Level and Top 5 Two-Digit CIP Codes



Source: Source: Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Board of Regents, and NCES IPEDS Completions Survey, files cYYYY_a, 2016–2023 final release files, 2024 provisional release.

Figure 63. Awards by Sector and Top 5 Two-Digit CIP



Source: Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Board of Regents, and NCES IPEDS Completions Survey, files cYYYY_a, 2016–2023 final release files, 2024 provisional release.

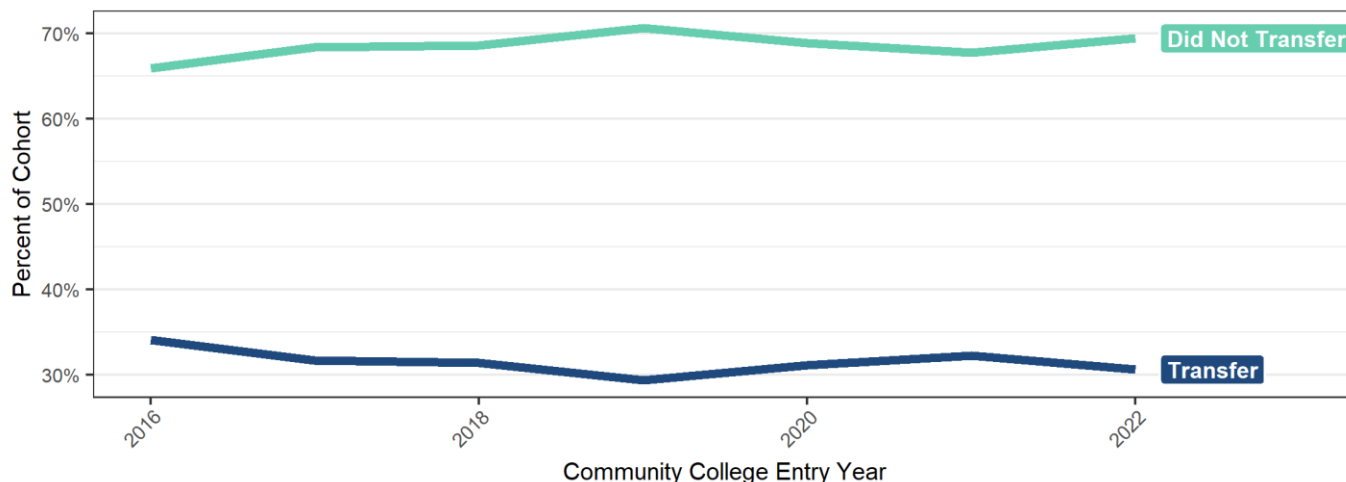
Transfer

Transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions is an important component of access and the education-to-work pipeline. One of the traditional missions of community colleges is to prepare students to transfer to a university where they can complete a bachelor's degree. Ideally, the community college transfer pathway allows students to save money and stay in their home communities for the first half of a bachelor's degree. This pathway is only a meaningful option, however, if students are able to successfully transfer and graduate. As these analyses will show, the transfer pipeline into Iowa's colleges is about as robust as it has been for the past several years, at least as a path to a proportion of all baccalaureate graduates.

Overall, the percentage of full-time, first-time-in-college Iowa community college entrants who transferred to a four-year institution within three years has declined slightly from 34% for the 2016-17 cohort to 31% for the 2022-23 cohort (Figure 64). Many community college students never intend to transfer, however. We therefore also looked at the specific population of students who completed a transfer-oriented associate degree program. Rates for this population were much

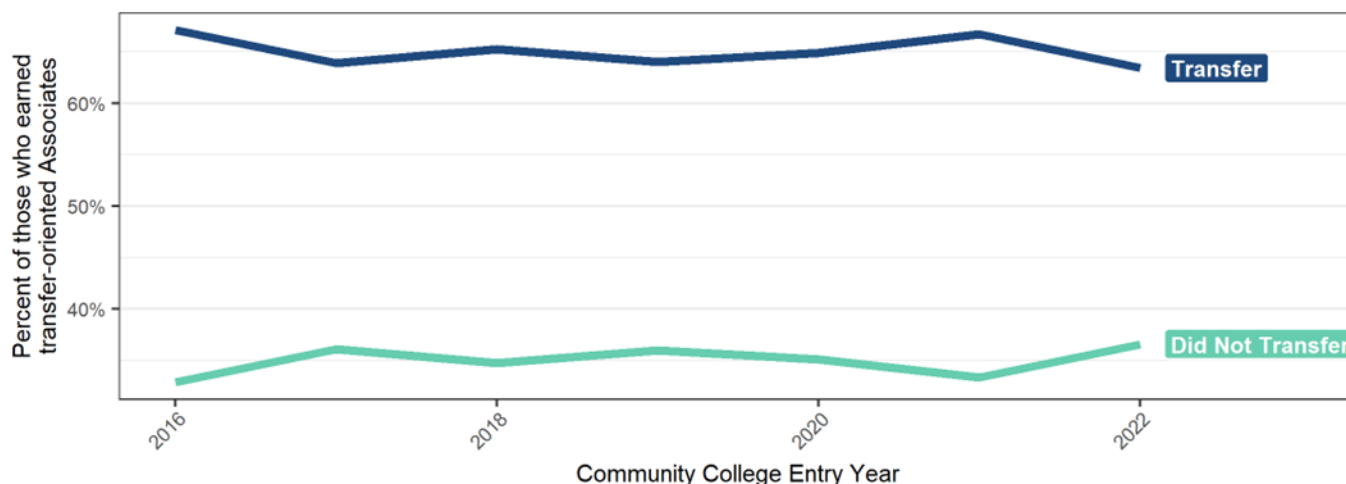
higher, but also fell somewhat across this seven-year timeframe; they were 67% for the 2016-17 cohort and 63% for the 2022-23 cohort (Figure 65). For both the total cohort and transfer-oriented associate-degree earners, rates rose and dipped during this timeframe; the declines were not consistent.

Figure 64. Percent of First-Time Iowa Community College Students Who Transferred Within 3 Years



Source: Iowa Department of Education. Notes: Starting cohort includes all first-time, full-time students as of Fall term of an Academic Year. Transferred = enrolled in a transfer institution within three years of the student's cohort term, and the earliest enrollment in the transfer institution is after the latest enrollment in the original institution.

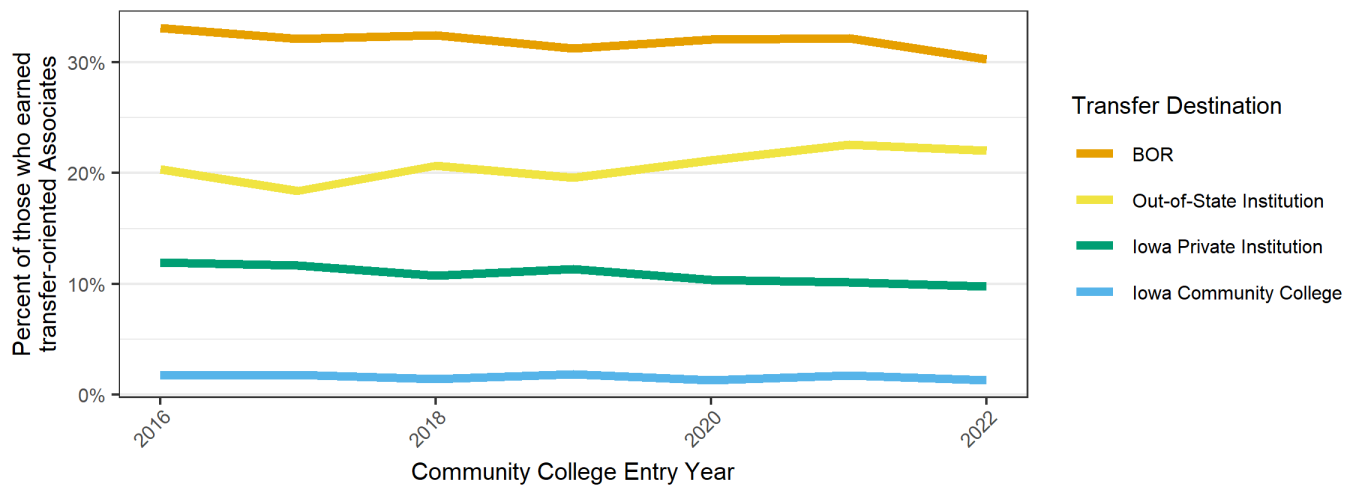
Figure 65. Percent of First-Time Iowa Community College Students Who Transferred Within 3 Years, of Those Who Earned a Transfer-Oriented Associate Degree



Source: Iowa Department of Education. Notes: Starting cohort includes all first-time, full-time students as of Fall term of an Academic Year. Transferred = enrolled in a transfer institution within three years of the student's cohort term, and the earliest enrollment in the transfer institution is after the latest enrollment in the original institution.

Among those who earned a transfer-oriented associate degree, the percentage of those who transferred into an Iowa-based four-year institution slipped, while the percentage who transferred into an out-of-state institution rose (Figure 66).

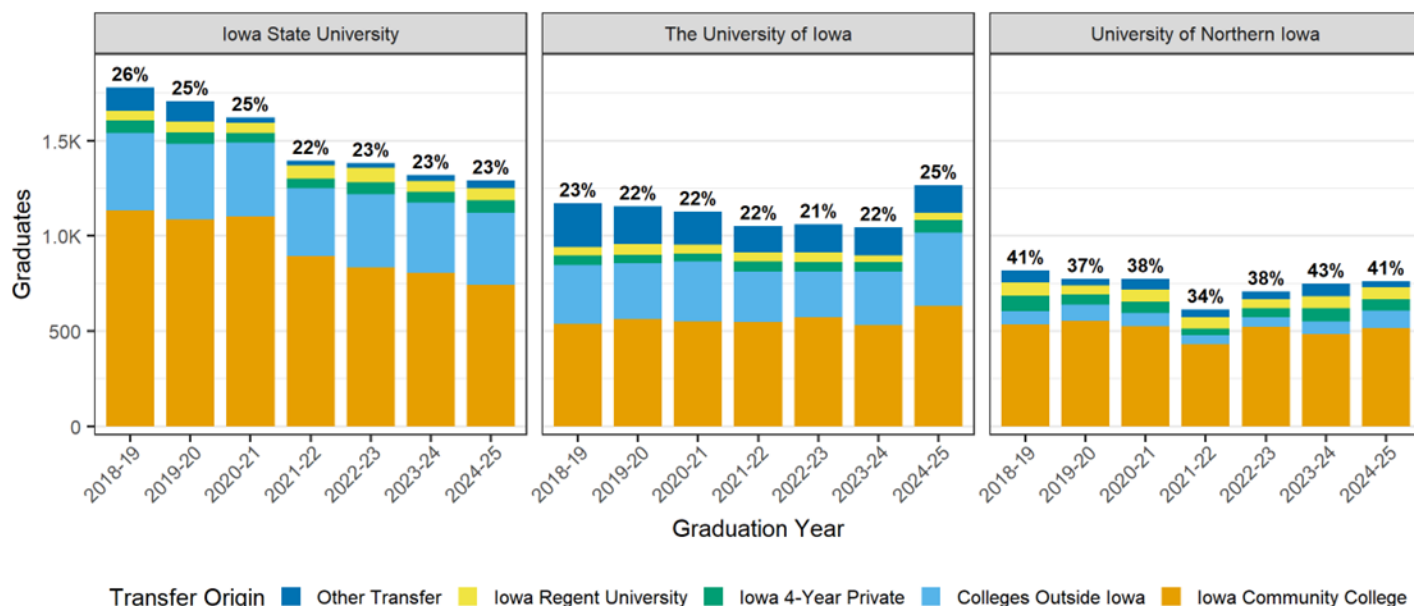
Figure 66. Percent of First-Time Iowa Community College Students Who Transferred Within Three Years, of Those Who Earned a Transfer-Oriented Associate Degree, by Transfer Destination



Source: Iowa Department of Education. Notes: Starting cohort includes all first-time, full-time students as of Fall term of an Academic Year. Transferred = enrolled in a transfer institution within three years of the student's cohort term, and the earliest enrollment in the transfer institution is after the latest enrollment in the original institution.

In addition to whether community college students transfer, we also looked at how many graduates from four-year institutions had transferred in from another institution. At Iowa State, the percentage of undergraduate degree earners who were transfer students declined from 26% in 2018-19 to 23% in 2024-25; most of those declines were among transfers from Iowa community colleges. The percentage of transfer graduates at the University of Iowa mostly held steady around 22% before increasing a few percentage points in 2024-25; that increase was due to higher numbers of graduates who had transferred from out-of-state institutions. Transfer students comprise a much higher percentage of UNI's graduates than they do at the other two Regent universities. However, UNI still graduates fewer transfer students than the other Regent institutions due to its smaller size. (See Figure 67.)

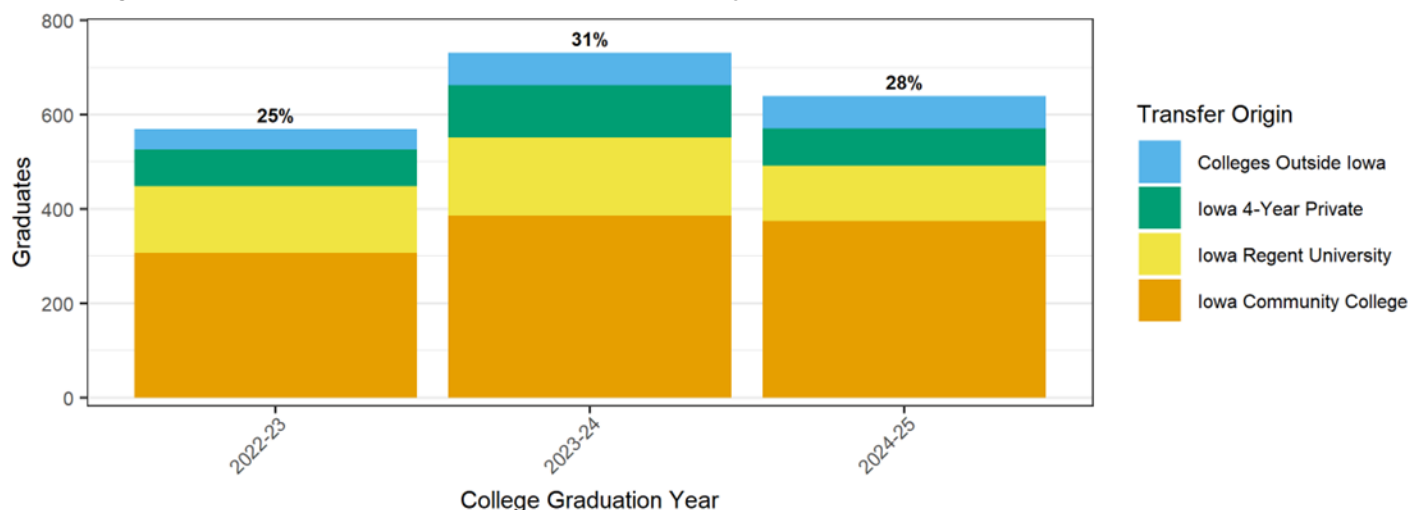
Figure 67. Regent University Graduates by Transfer Status



Source: Iowa Board of Regents. Only includes those who earned undergraduate degrees. Percentages represent the percent of total graduates who had previously transferred.

Due to data limitations, we were only able to analyze the transfer status of private college graduates for those who had first graduated from an Iowa public high school in 2018 or later. For this specific sub-population, between 25% and 31% of private college graduates had previously transferred (Figure 68). Interestingly, while the majority of transfer students came from Iowa community colleges, a sizeable number also transferred from Regent universities or other private institutions in Iowa.

Figure 68. Private Institution In-State Graduates by Transfer Status



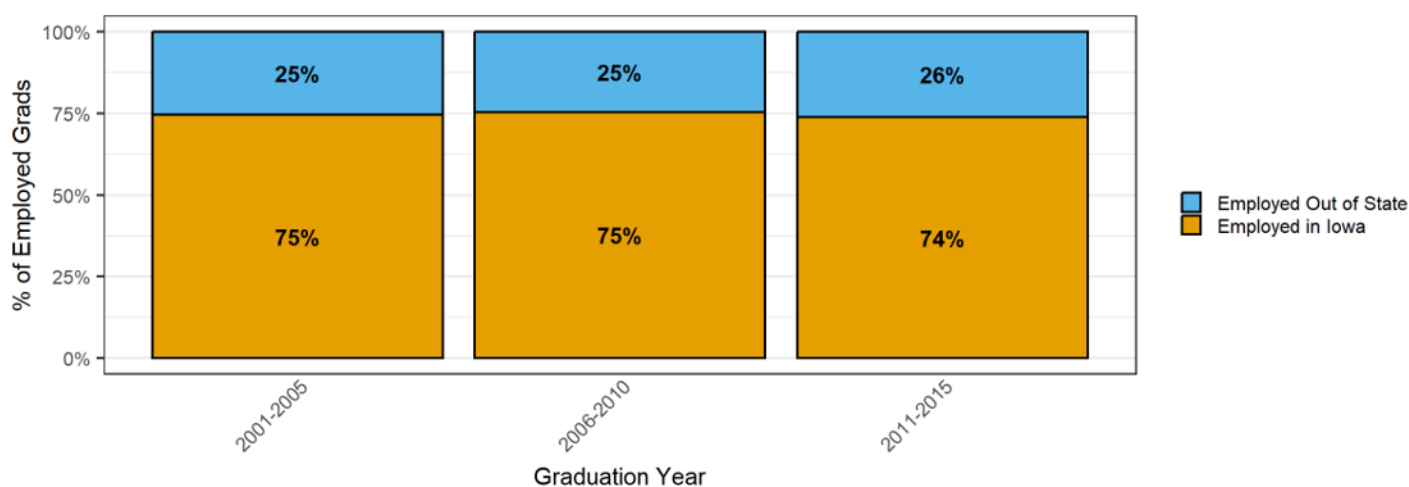
Source: Iowa SLDS. Notes: Only includes those who earned Associate and Bachelor's from private institutions in Iowa who previously graduated from a Iowa public high school from 2018 to 2024. Percentages represent the percent of total graduates who had previously transferred to the institution.

In our meetings with stakeholders across Iowa, we heard that Iowa institutions—across all sectors—have been working hard to ensure smooth and successful transfer for students. These efforts have not, thus far, resulted in improvements that are evident in the data. Most transfer agreements in Iowa have historically been bilateral agreements between a single community college and a single four-year institution. Recently, a consortium of Iowa private colleges created a blanket transfer agreement with Iowa’s community colleges, called the “Iowa Private Transfer Guarantee,” designed to streamline the transfer process. This type of multilateral, statewide agreement holds promise for increasing meaningful access to bachelor’s degrees for those students who begin their postsecondary education at a community college.

Post-Graduation Employment and Residency

Graduates of Iowa’s community colleges tend to remain in Iowa—of those with employment records¹⁰, about three-quarters of those who complete associate degrees are consistently found to be employed in Iowa five years after graduating, while about a quarter work in another state (Figure 69). Numbers are similar for graduates of certificate programs at least one year in length.

Figure 69. Employment Location 5 Years Post-Graduation of Employed Associate Degree Graduates from Iowa Community Colleges



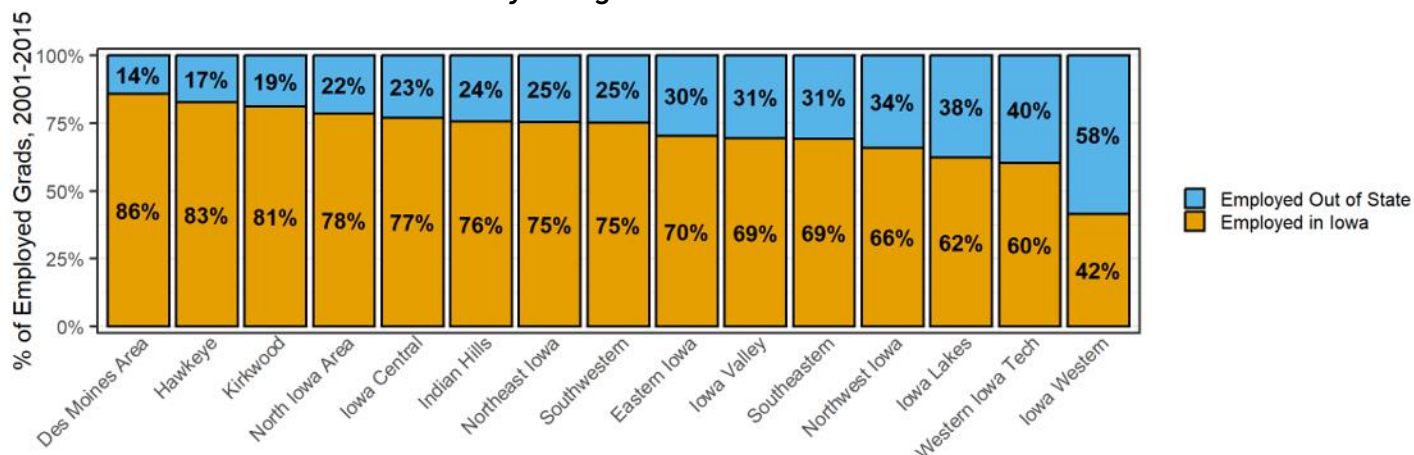
Source: U.S. Census Bureau's Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO). Excludes graduates without UI wage records, those who had 2 or more quarters of no earnings in the reference year, or who earned less than the annual equivalent of full-time work at the prevailing federal minimum wage.

The percentage working in Iowa varies by institution from 86% at Des Moines Area to 42% at Iowa Western (Figure 70). Generally speaking, graduates of institutions closer to Iowa’s borders work

¹⁰ “Those with employment records” excludes graduates who were employed in jobs not covered by Unemployment Insurance (less than 4% of jobs nationally), those who had two or more quarters without earnings in the reference year, and those who earned less than the annual equivalent of full-time work at the prevailing federal minimum wage. Approximately 20% of associate and bachelor’s degree graduates are excluded.

out of state more frequently; these institutions also graduate and enroll more out-of-state students.

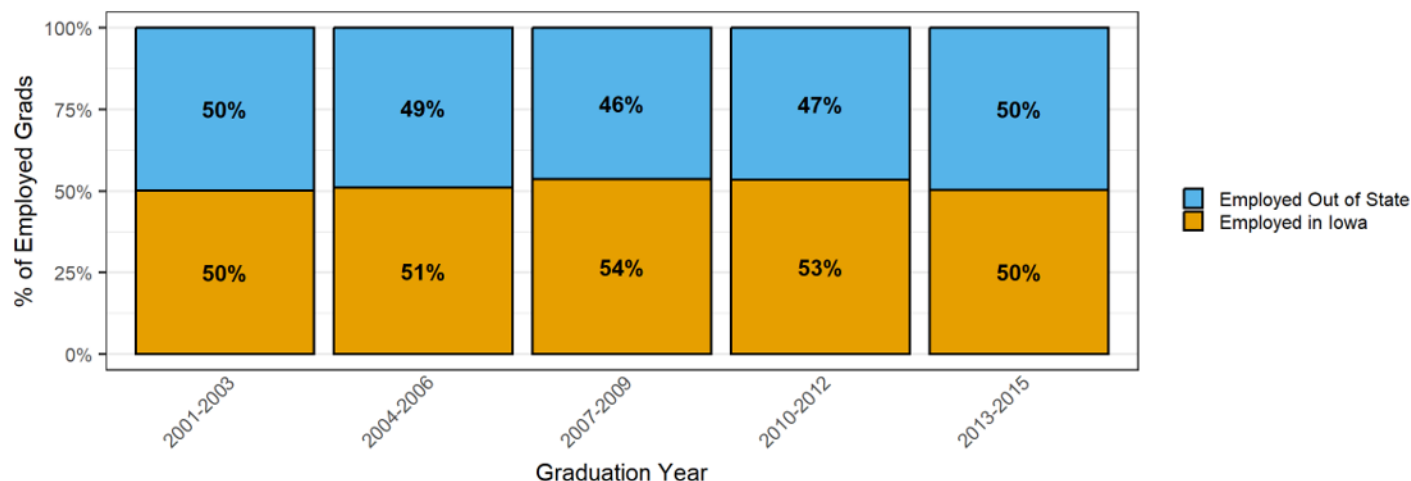
Figure 70. Employment Location Five Years Post-Graduation of Employed Associate Degree Graduates from Iowa Community Colleges



Source: U.S. Census Bureau's Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO). Excludes graduates without UI wage records, those who had 2 or more quarters of no earnings in the reference year, or who earned less than the annual equivalent of full-time work at the prevailing federal minimum wage.

Among graduates of Iowa's public universities, about half of employed bachelor's degree earners are working in Iowa five years after graduation, and the other half are employed out of state. These numbers have fluctuated only slightly since 2001 (Figure 71).

Figure 71. Employment Location 5 Years Post-Graduation of Employed Bachelor's Degree Graduates from Iowa Public Universities

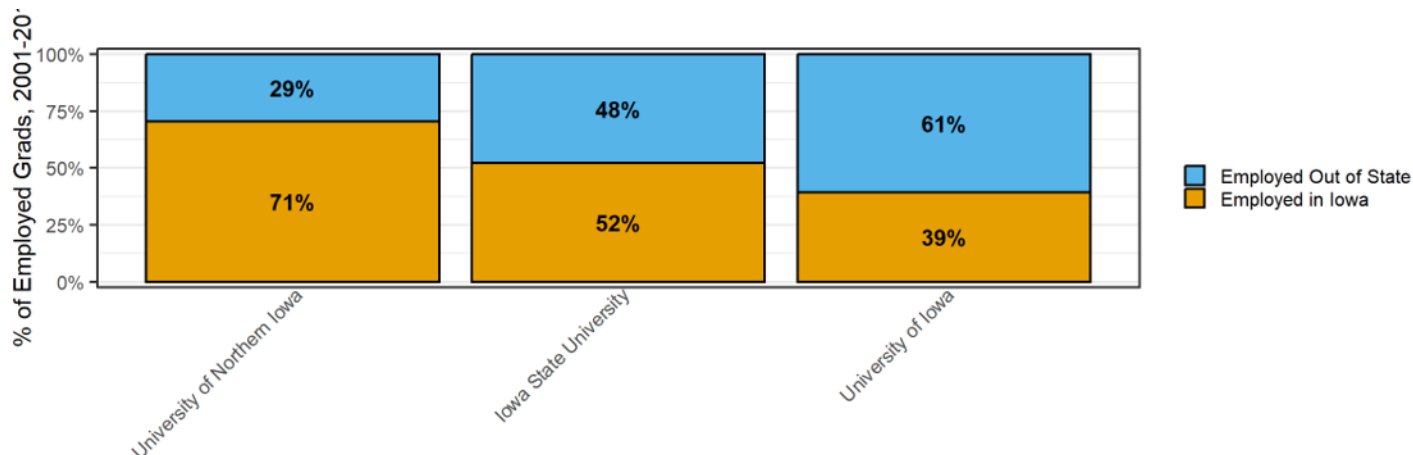


Source: U.S. Census Bureau's Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO). Excludes graduates without UI wage records, those who had 2 or more quarters of no earnings in the reference year, or who earned less than the annual equivalent of full-time work at the prevailing federal minimum wage.

There are significant differences among the three universities; among employed graduates, over 70% of University of Northern Iowa graduates were employed in Iowa five years after graduating,

while under 40% of University of Iowa graduates were. Iowa State is in the middle; 52% of its employed graduates were working in Iowa five years later (Figure 72).

Figure 72. Employment Location Five Years Post-Graduation of Employed Bachelor's Degree Graduates from Iowa Public Universities

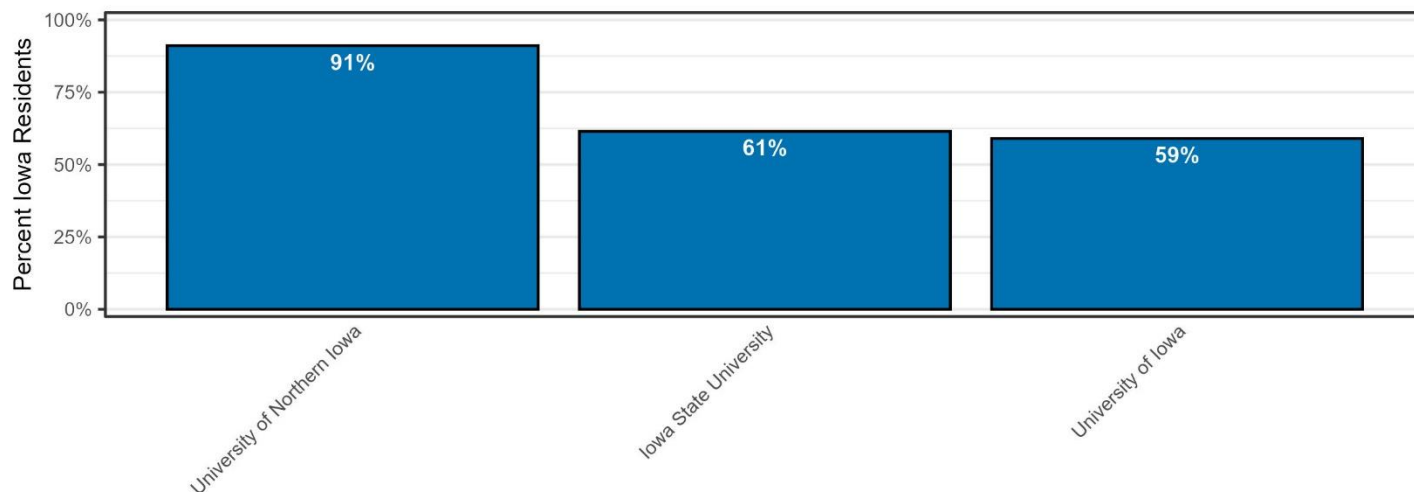


Source: U.S. Census Bureau's Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO). Excludes graduates without UI wage records, those who had 2 or more quarters of no earnings in the reference year, or who earned less than the annual equivalent of full-time work at the prevailing federal minimum wage.

To some extent, these figures correlate with the percentage of graduates who are Iowa residents to begin with (Figure 73). UNI graduates the largest proportion of Iowa residents of the three public universities, and the largest proportion of its graduates stay in Iowa. However, about the same percentage of ISU and SUI graduates are Iowa residents, and yet a much higher percentage of ISU grads stay and work in Iowa. The data cannot explain what causes these differences; we point them out simply to illustrate that the outflow of college-educated individuals from Iowa is not solely a function of the number of out-of-state students who come to Iowa for college. Many Iowa residents are also leaving after they graduate. A report published earlier this year by the Common Sense Institute, tellingly titled “Educate. Graduate. Leave.” reached the same conclusion.¹¹

¹¹ Andrzej Wieciorkowski and Ben Murrey, *Educate. Graduate. Leave.* Common Sense Institute, January 2026.

Figure 73. Iowa Residents as a Percent of 2021-2025 Bachelor's Degree Graduates, Regent Institutions

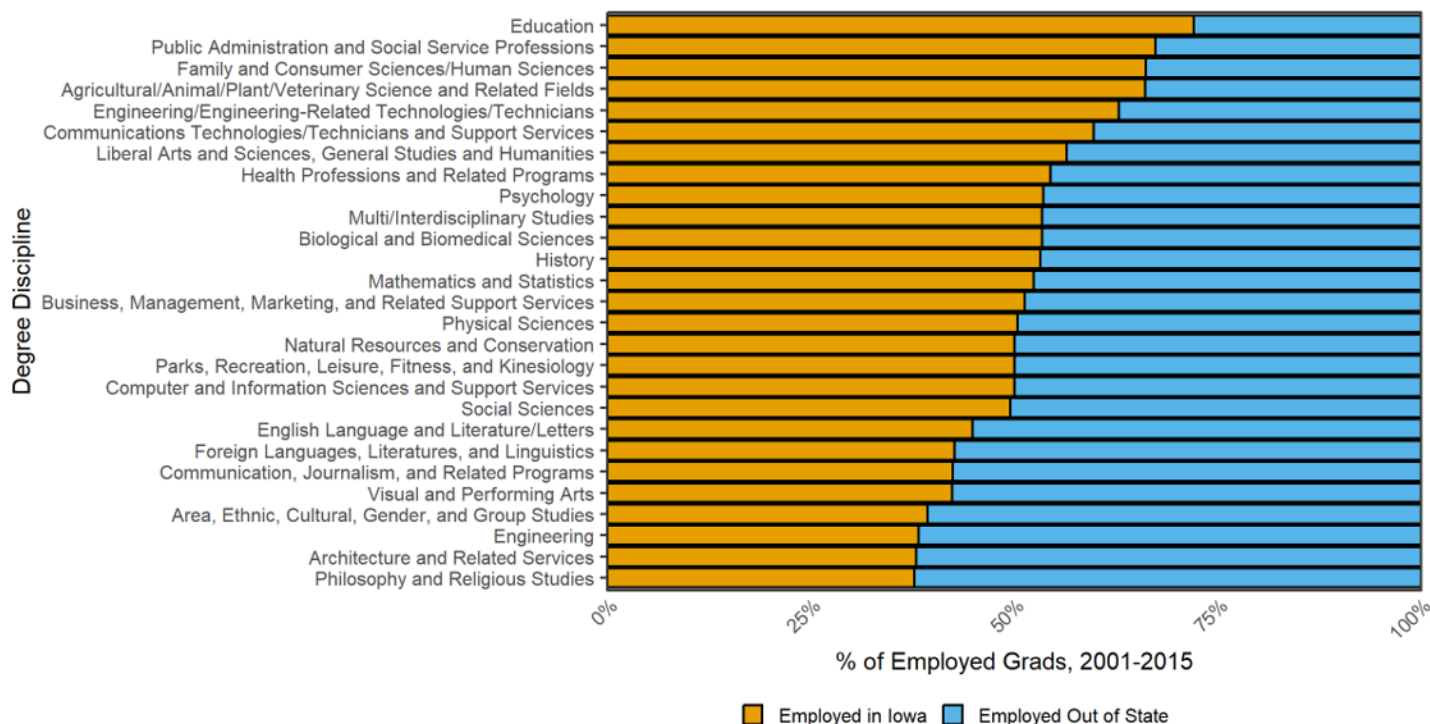


Source: Iowa Board of Regents. Residency is determined at student entry. Based on Bachelor's degree graduates in 2020-21 through 2024-25.

Graduates in some disciplines are more likely to stay and work in Iowa than others. Stakeholders expressed specific concern that graduates in teaching and nursing fields may be leaving the state; these professions are both socially important and have many annual job openings.

According to PSEO data, which only includes public institutions in Iowa, individuals who graduated with bachelor's degrees in Education and Health Professions were more likely to be working in Iowa five years after graduation than bachelor's degree graduates in most other fields (Figure 74). Education graduates are more likely to stay and work in Iowa than those in any other field. For the most recent cohorts available, 76% of employed Education graduates and 54% of employed Health Professions graduates were working in Iowa five years post-graduation; this number was 50% for bachelor's degree graduates across all fields.

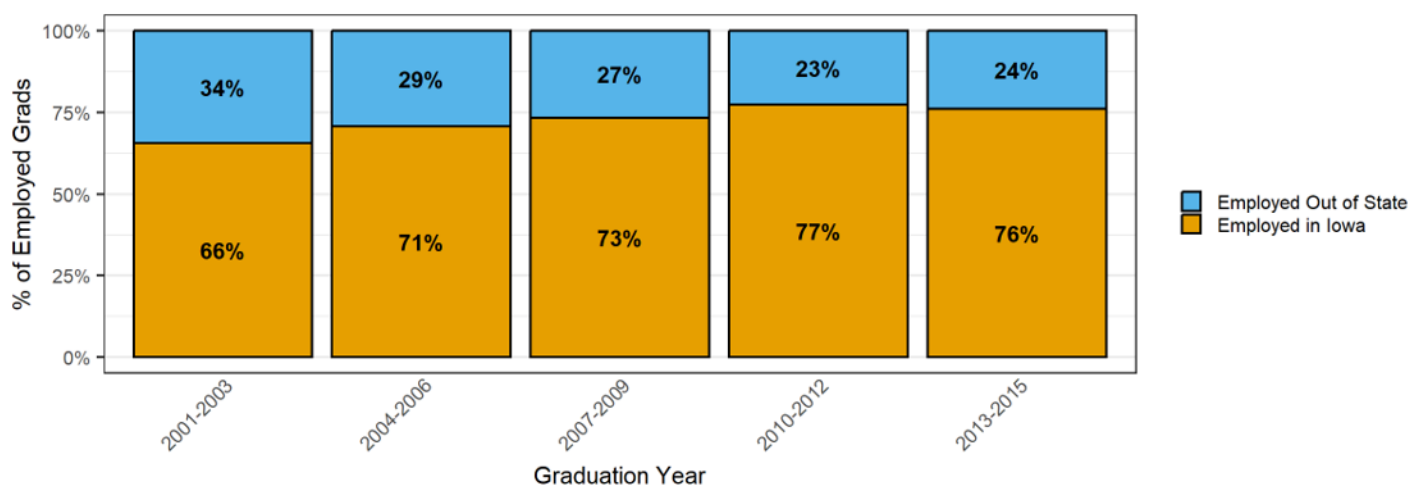
Figure 74. Employment Location Five Years Post-Graduation of Employed Bachelor's Degree Graduates from Iowa Public Universities, by Discipline



Source: U.S. Census Bureau's Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO). Excludes graduates without UI wage records, those who had 2 or more quarters of no earnings in the reference year, or who earned less than the annual equivalent of full-time work at the prevailing federal minimum wage.

In education disciplines specifically, the percentage of bachelor's degree working in Iowa five years after graduation has also increased over time (Figure 75).

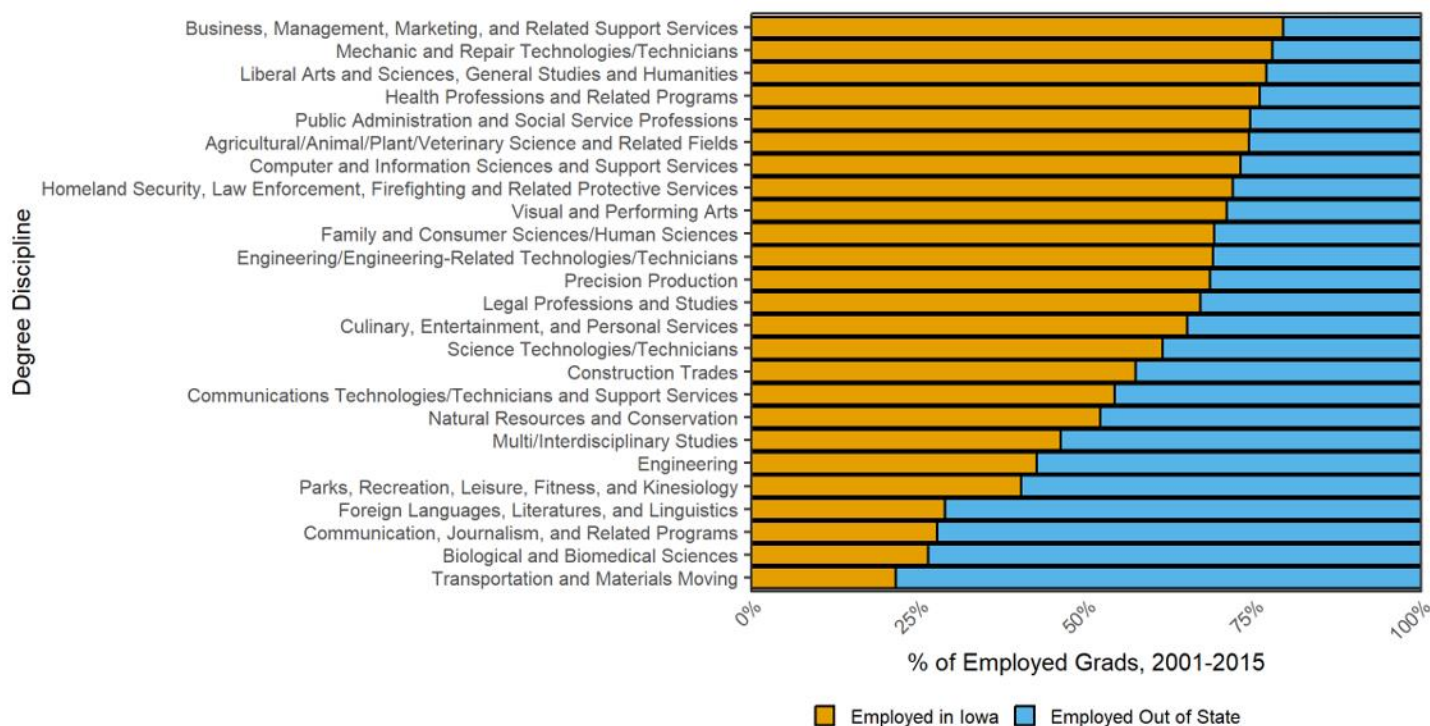
Figure 75. Employment Location Five Years Post-Graduation of Employed Education Bachelor's Degree Graduates from Iowa Public Universities



Source: U.S. Census Bureau's Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO). Excludes graduates without UI wage records, those who had 2 or more quarters of no earnings in the reference year, or who earned less than the annual equivalent of full-time work at the prevailing federal minimum wage.

At the associate degree level, graduates in health professions were more likely to be working in Iowa five years after graduation than those in most other disciplines (Figure 76). For the most recent cohort available, 74% of employed Iowa community college graduates with associate degrees in Health Professions were working in Iowa five years after graduating, which was exactly the same as the average for associate degree graduates across all fields.

Figure 76. Employment Location Five Years Post-Graduation of Employed Associate Degree Graduates from Iowa Community Colleges, by Discipline



Source: U.S. Census Bureau's Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO). Excludes graduates without UI wage records, those who had 2 or more quarters of no earnings in the reference year, or who earned less than the annual equivalent of full-time work at the prevailing federal minimum wage.

Complete data on employment and residency of Iowa private college graduates do not currently exist. Although a small number of Iowa's independent institutions have begun to submit data on their graduates to the U.S. Census Bureau's Postsecondary Employment Outcomes project (our source for the preceding graphs), their data were not yet available for analysis. Furthermore, only a subset of students at Iowa's independent institutions—those who graduated from a public high school in Iowa—are included in the state's SLDS. Many of the private institutions attempt to track their graduates through surveys, but alumni survey data are significantly less reliable than administrative data; in any case, such survey data are not public, may not be collected or measured in a consistent way, or made available for all institutions.

Supply-Demand Alignment

This section analyzes data designed to answer the questions: Where are there mismatches between educational supply and labor force demand? Are there disciplines and/or regions in

which Iowa's postsecondary institutions are not graduating enough students to meet workforce needs?

We measured occupational demand by average projected job openings in each occupation over the next 10 years. These include newly created jobs as well as vacancies arising from retirements or incumbent workers leaving the occupation. We measured educational supply by counting the number of graduates in programs linked to each occupation. In cases where programs are linked to multiple occupations, we allocated program graduates to occupations based on the size of the occupation. For Iowa residents graduating from public institutions, we allocated their awards to their region of residency, not the region where the institution is located. For nonresidents and graduates of private institutions, we allocated their awards to the region where the institution is located.

These methods are imperfect in several ways. First, there is not always a tight relationship between programs and occupations. Some occupations, such as those in management, may be filled by individuals with degrees in a wide range of disciplines. Similarly, some degrees, such as those in the liberal arts, can prepare individuals for a wide variety of occupations. Second, these comparisons do not account for migration. Graduates may move within Iowa or leave the state altogether. Finally, some job openings will be filled by people changing careers and those moving in from out of state, so graduates from Iowa colleges and universities are not the sole source of supply.

Statewide, the most significant gaps in educational supply and demand for occupations that typically require some form of postsecondary education show up for accountants and some business and management roles (Figure 77). Management occupations do not lend themselves straightforwardly to supply-demand analyses, as a wide variety of degrees can prepare students to enter business and management occupations, and business degrees prepare students for a variety of occupations.

There also appears to be an undersupply of graduates in programs that train preschool teachers. Preschool educators typically earn low wages, and institutional stakeholders confirmed that these programs often do not meet their standards for student ROI. Because of the occupation's low wages, these programs are also not eligible for state funding restricted to programs leading to high-demand/ high-wage careers. Substitute teaching appears to be undersupplied. The numbers are likely misleading in this case, as substitute teachers may have a wide variety of degree backgrounds, not just education degrees.

Conversely, the state appears to have an adequate supply of graduates prepared to become elementary and secondary school teachers. It may be the case that some graduates prepared to be elementary school teachers are able to fill openings as preschool teachers and substitute teachers.

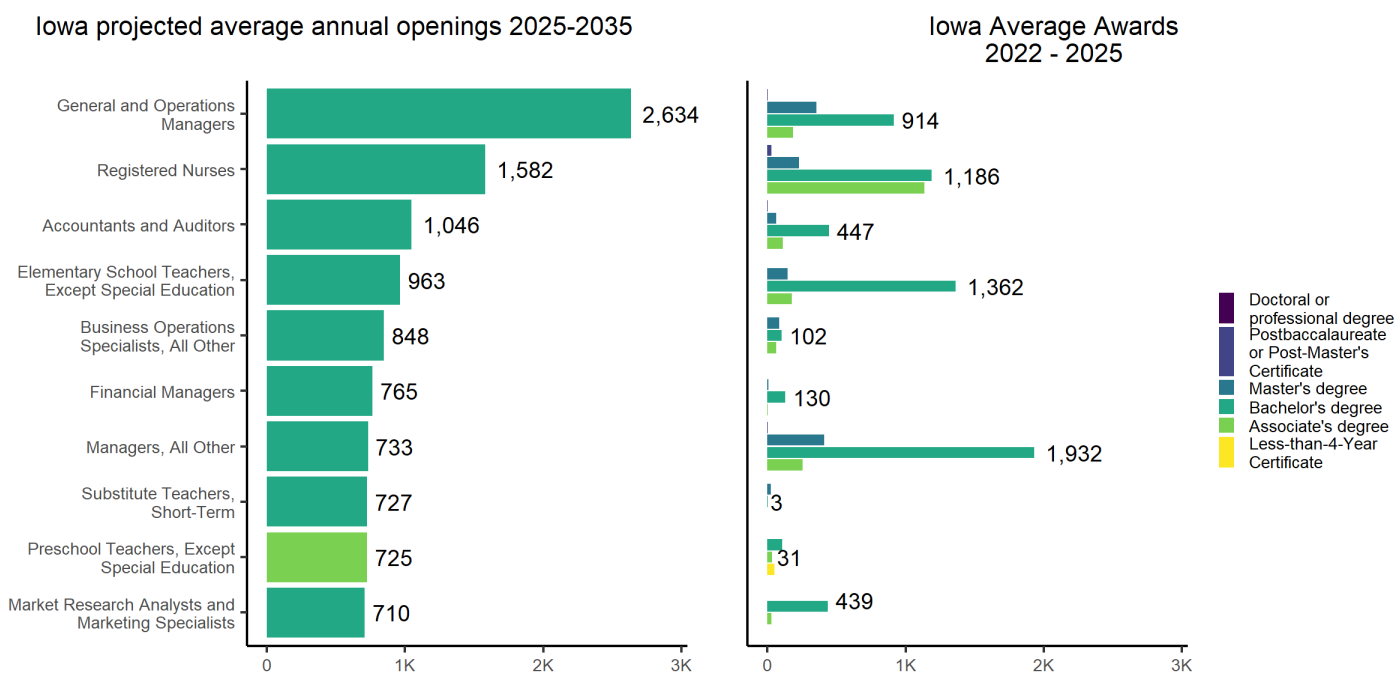
Nurses, who represent the second largest occupational group based on average annual openings and who are in chronic shortage across much of the nation, do not appear to be in short educational supply in Iowa if you consider awards at both the associate and baccalaureate levels. This observation stands in contrast to our conversations with stakeholders, however. When it comes to nursing, it is unclear whether the expressions of demand for baccalaureate-trained

nurses are linked to specific skills in short supply, to student demand for professional advancement, or a mix of both.

Software developers, who appear on the list of jobs with high numbers of projected openings in East Central Iowa and Central Iowa, are fairly evenly matched between job openings and graduates.

These gaps in supply and demand vary in acuity across the regions of the state. Region-specific graphs are included in the [Regional Data Appendix](#).

Figure 77. Top 10 Iowa Jobs that Require Postsecondary Education by Average Annual Openings and Related Educational Supply



Sources and Notes: Occupational Projections from JobsEQ. Awards data for private institutions is the 2022-2024 average of all awards at institutions located in the region, sourced from NCES IPEDS Completions Survey cYYYY_a final release files. Awards data for public institutions is the 2023-2025 average of awards earned by residents of the region at all Iowa public institutions, plus awards earned by nonresidents at institutions located in the region, sourced from the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa Board of Regents. Displays the top 10 occupations in the region, ranked by average annual openings, that typically require at least an associate degree. Awards are displayed at each occupation's typical entry level of education plus one level below and one level above. Programs and occupations are linked using JobsEQ's mapping. Awards in programs linked to multiple occupations are allocated based on each occupation's projected average annual openings. Occupation colors represent the typical entry level of education.

In our focus groups, we heard from employers across the state that the roles they consistently struggled to fill were in the skilled trades and leadership/executive positions. Employers are not looking to Iowa's postsecondary institutions for executives; they work to recruit experienced candidates from around the nation. In the skilled trades, however, there is an opportunity for Iowa institutions to help meet this workforce need.

Colleges are aware of this demand and provided us with numerous examples of active partnerships with employers in areas such as industrial maintenance and paramedics. We heard from institutions around the state, especially community colleges, that they were experiencing increasing demand for short-term certificates and noncredit programs that can be completed relatively quickly, are immediately workforce-relevant, and are set up to serve students who are

working, perhaps full-time. Colleges mentioned the success of the 260E and 260F programs, which fund these types of training for employers through colleges. (Iowa’s 2025 DOGE report called the 260 programs “outdated” but nevertheless recommended that the state continue to invest in workforce training, just through a different mechanism.¹²)

Data support the need for these efforts; Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce projects that, by 2031, Iowa will be among the states with the greatest share of jobs for workers with “middle skills,” which include associate degrees, postsecondary vocational certificates, test-based licenses, industry certifications, or some college but no degree.

We did not find evidence in the data or hear from stakeholders that there are widespread or significant gaps at the baccalaureate level. In some rural parts of Iowa, we heard there is a need for bachelor’s degree programs that can serve as career ladders, allowing workers to progress from individual contributor jobs into management roles. Modifications to existing degree programs to better serve working adults may fulfill this need, as there is scant evidence of a need to expand or create new programs.

Recommendations

This section details our recommendations, which are based on our findings from data analyses and stakeholder engagement, and are organized by audience. The recommendations are designed to be actionable and address the study’s primary objectives. We recommend actions that state agencies, college/university systems, and institutions can take to improve access for students from all backgrounds from all parts of the state, better align programs to the state’s current and future workforce needs, and clarify the roles and missions of different types of institutions in meeting those needs.

1. Improve the state’s capacity for gathering and analyzing data about the linkages between educational supply and workforce demand. Increased data capacity will not only provide critical evidence for how all the state’s postsecondary education investments are serving priorities related to meeting workforce demand, but also support each individual institution—public and private—in its ability to use data to align programs to demonstrable needs. Enhancing this capacity would be advanced by taking the following steps:
 - a. Iowa College Aid should match Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) records with National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) records as they did prior to the time the agency was folded into the Department. Such matching will allow the state to know where FAFSA applicants eventually enroll, especially at Iowa’s

¹² “DOGE Task Force Final Report,” Iowa Department of Government Efficiency, October 2025, <https://governor.iowa.gov/media/484/download?inline>.

independent institutions, as well as how likely they are to complete their programs of study.

- b. Iowa's SLDS should be more capable of addressing increasingly important questions that are at the core of this study—the alignment of education and workforce demands. That means it should include data on all college students, not just those who graduated from an Iowa public high school, and have more ready access to the data on employment outcomes that would help Iowa be better aware of how well former students perform in Iowa's workforce, as well as the extent to which students from within and outside Iowa are becoming contributors to Iowa's workforce after they complete their programs of study.
- c. Incentivize (or require) private institutions to participate in the collection, analysis, and reporting of additional data, as a condition of their eligibility for the state's Iowa Tuition Grant program and other state-funded financial aid programs. Iowa's independent institutions have varying capacities to respond to additional reporting requirements. However, the state can and should help alleviate the reporting burden on institutions as much as possible, including in part through the integration of Iowa College Aid's data into the SLDS collection as described above. Additionally:

- i. Iowa's independent institutions should be expected to submit data to the state's SLDS for all their students, ideally not just those who are recipients of a state aid award. These data can then be used to help identify the ways that the independent sector is serving the public interest by serving students who are not as likely to enroll in public institutions, whether the gaps the private institutions may be filling are related to geography, race/ethnicity, age, income-level, first-generation status, or other characteristics.

Including private institutions' data in the SLDS can also provide important information about student success and postgraduate outcomes. This can include linking student data to state employment records or to national sources such as the Postsecondary Employment Opportunities database, managed by the U.S. Census Bureau.

These data should not, however, be used exclusively for accountability purposes. Rather, the state should encourage all institutions, including independent institutions, to use these data for making their own strategic and tactical decisions about their curricula. Such decisions include which programs are being offered, who the audiences are to be served, as well as what happens in the classroom to better prepare students for success in the working world, student advising, and other initiatives.

There will likely be concern about the exposure of student-level data to the state from institutions concerned about privacy laws and regulations.

But there is precedent in other states (Connecticut and Indiana) that demonstrates these data can be shared in a responsible and legal manner. And several of Iowa's independent institutions are reportedly participating in the PSEO through submissions managed by the Board of Regents.

- ii. Enhance data collection of noncredit programs being offered by all institutions to complete a program inventory. Link the programs to licensure and re-licensure requirements where appropriate, as Iowa's community colleges have done.
2. Consider enhancing the state's ability to plan and coordinate how its higher education assets work separately and together to achieve state priorities. Iowa currently has a mix of governance structures and investments, but no single entity with the appropriate expertise is charged with coordinating policy across the varied sectors receiving investments and serving critical public purposes in the state. Instead, higher education policy at the state level is negotiated with policymakers who lack detailed, impartial expertise to inform the critical decisions they face.

With the higher education industry confronting challenging and sustained new demographic realities for the first time in a generation, states with agencies devoted to postsecondary policy leaders are better positioned to help institutions, policymakers, and other stakeholders through the significant pivot they will need to make. An agency charged with these kinds of responsibilities would be expected to have at hand at least some of the impartially sourced and interpreted data that this report contains. In addition to navigating the spaces between the institutions and institutional sectors, it would also be expected to be a point of nexus for state agencies with overlapping responsibilities for talent and economic development, working to build coherence across these different policy domains.

A critical element of being able to act in this capacity will be to provide high-quality data analyses that cross sectoral boundaries, including with employment outcomes data; thus, it would need to be a central player in participating, if not managing, the activities of Iowa's SLDS.

Iowa can consider two approaches to address the absence of the kind of policy leadership that is described here.

- a. Set a statewide educational attainment goal linked to broader economic and social goals, and supported by a statewide strategic plan for postsecondary education to be developed. Working with the private sector to create these artifacts, featuring a set of key indicators of economic and social health, Iowa can equip itself with clear goals that institutions can use to set priorities and the legislature to assess the fitness of legislative requests.
- b. Consider creating a more robust policy coordination role in Iowa. One possible option would be to establish a new state agency charged with the responsibility for

policy coordination across all public and private higher education institutions in the state (on a model similar to what exists in Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri—the latter of which is also charged with overseeing workforce development). Another option would be to charge an existing part of the state to accomplish this task. This might take advantage of Iowa College Aid’s separate board as a quasi-independent part of the state to take on these roles. A third option might be to charge the existing Iowa Coordinating Council for Post High School Education (ICCSPE) with the necessary responsibilities. This third option would likely require additional changes to ensure it could function effectively, both impartially and with sufficient authority.

3. Develop policies that promote the creation of institutional capacity to deliver programs to remote sites on an as-needed basis. We noted in this report that there are numerous postsecondary access points—in the form of community college locations (including those beyond main campuses) and ISU Extension and Outreach offices, as well as UNI’s efforts to maintain a presence on several community college campuses—spread across the state, including in areas far from the main campus of a university. These locations have the potential to meet many educational needs in rural areas. We recommend the state assess the programming and services available at each of these locations to determine whether they are well-aligned with local educational needs and make a plan for how they might better meet those needs.

Moreover, in many parts of Iowa, the demands for workforce training involve relatively few potential students and are episodic in nature. Once the immediate demand is satisfied, there is no need for continuation of the program in that locale. The state should avoid investing in permanent delivery capacity to respond to temporary needs. Rather, the state should invest in the capacity to identify these needs, in the capacity that allows institutions to deliver existing programs to remote sites on a one-time basis (likely through cohort-based programs), and in the capacity to consistently deliver high-quality student support services to students who may not be connected to a single institution. Iowa can consider whether funding incentives might better leverage existing assets to meet workforce demands and students’ needs, especially in remote locales, through collaborative partnerships among institutions or delivery sites. While such an approach would likely require recurring funding, Iowa could pilot it through thoughtfully designed grant competitions to develop the contours of that more long-term policy.

Part of that plan will likely involve online coursework accompanied by in-person support. Universities in Iowa have already implemented this model, which may be the only financially sustainable model in many cases, but stakeholders reported that its success has been uneven. We recommend that universities and community colleges partner closely together to examine the strengths and weaknesses of these programs, then improve their implementation so they work more effectively for rural and employed adult students.

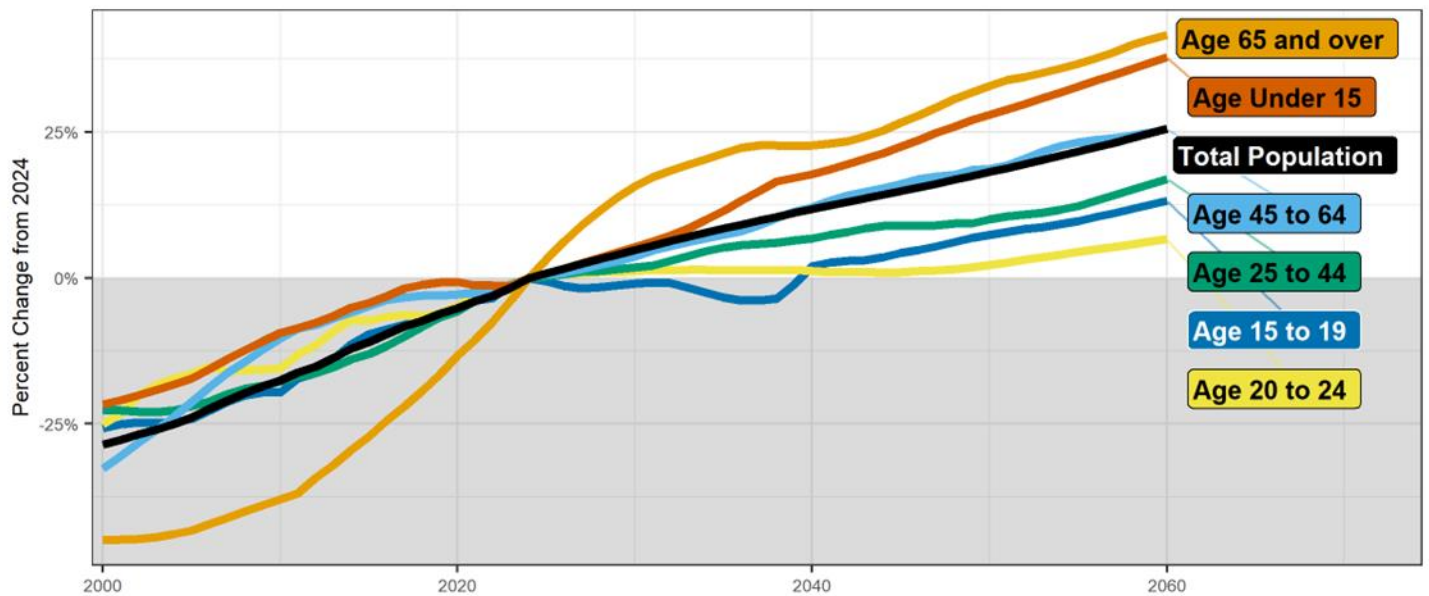
Regional Data Appendix

Central Iowa

Figure 78. Central Iowa LWDA Map

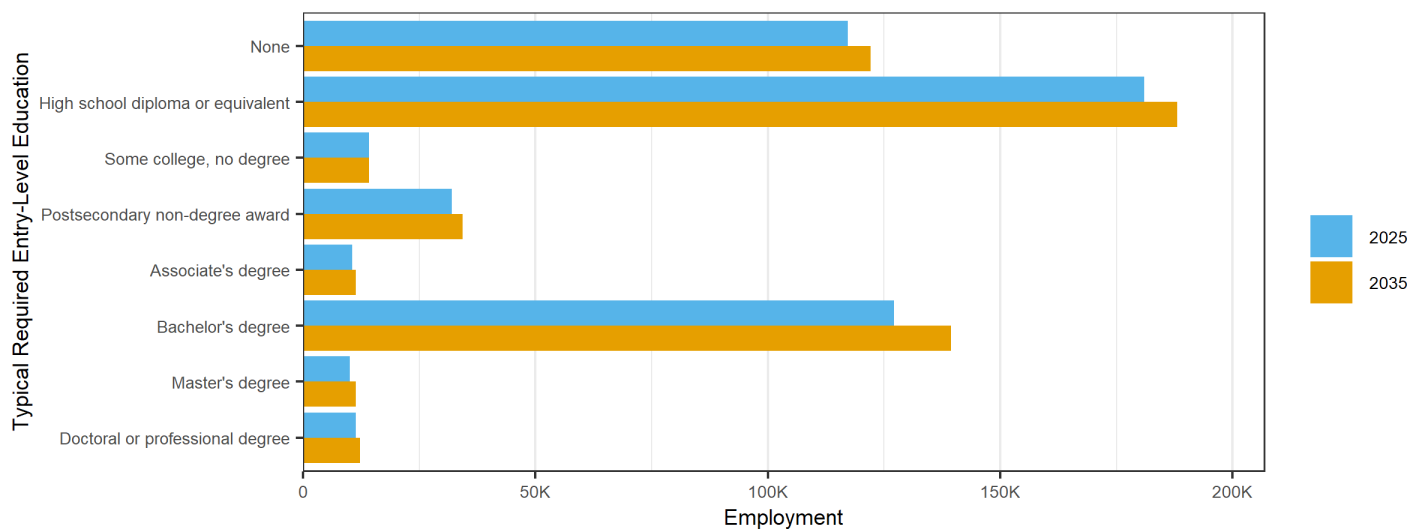


Figure 79. Central Iowa Projected Iowa Population Change from 2024, by Age Group



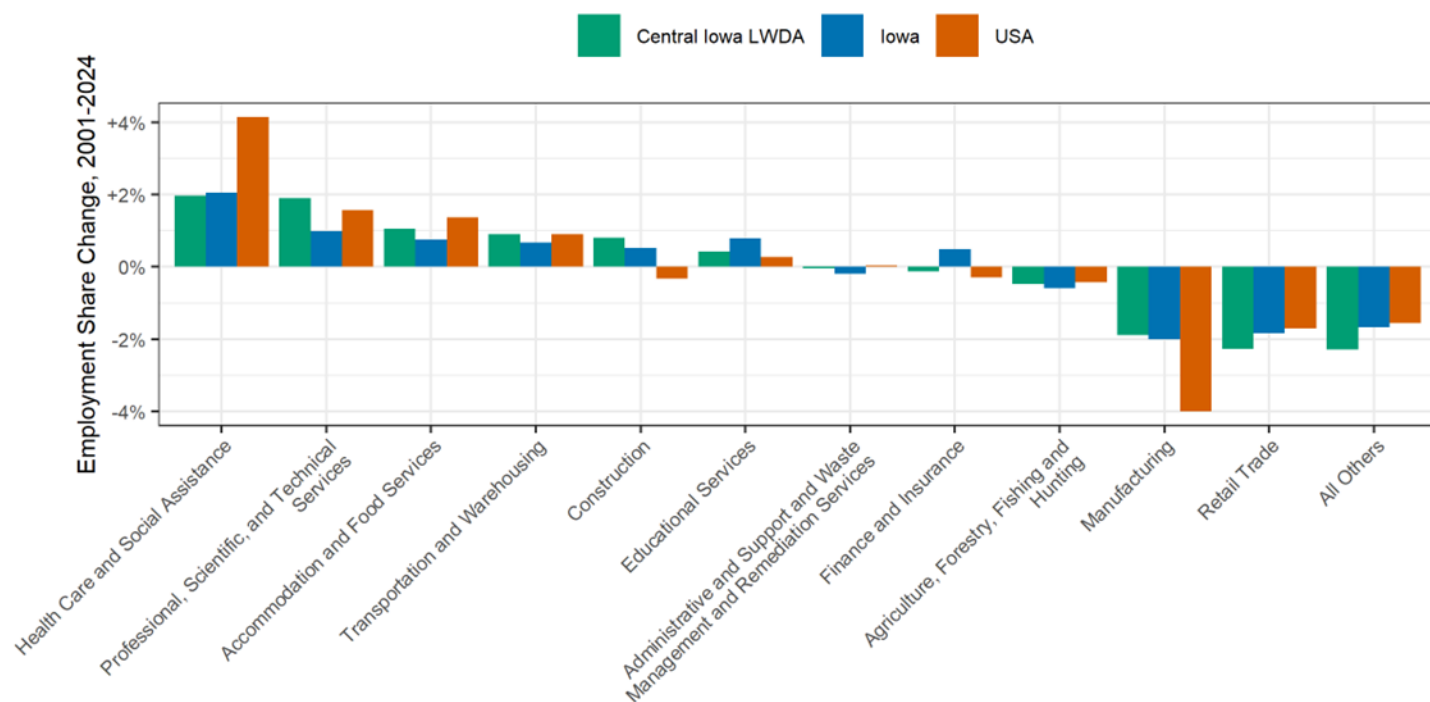
Source: 2025 Woods & Poole Economics, Inc. via the Iowa State Data Center.

Figure 80. Central Iowa Jobs by Typical Entry-Level Education, 2025 and 2035



Source: JobsEQ. Note: 2035 jobs are projections.

Figure 81. 2001-2024 Change in Share of Employment by Industry, Central Iowa, Iowa and USA



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q2.

Figure 82. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring a Postsecondary Certificate or Associate Degree, 2025-2035

Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

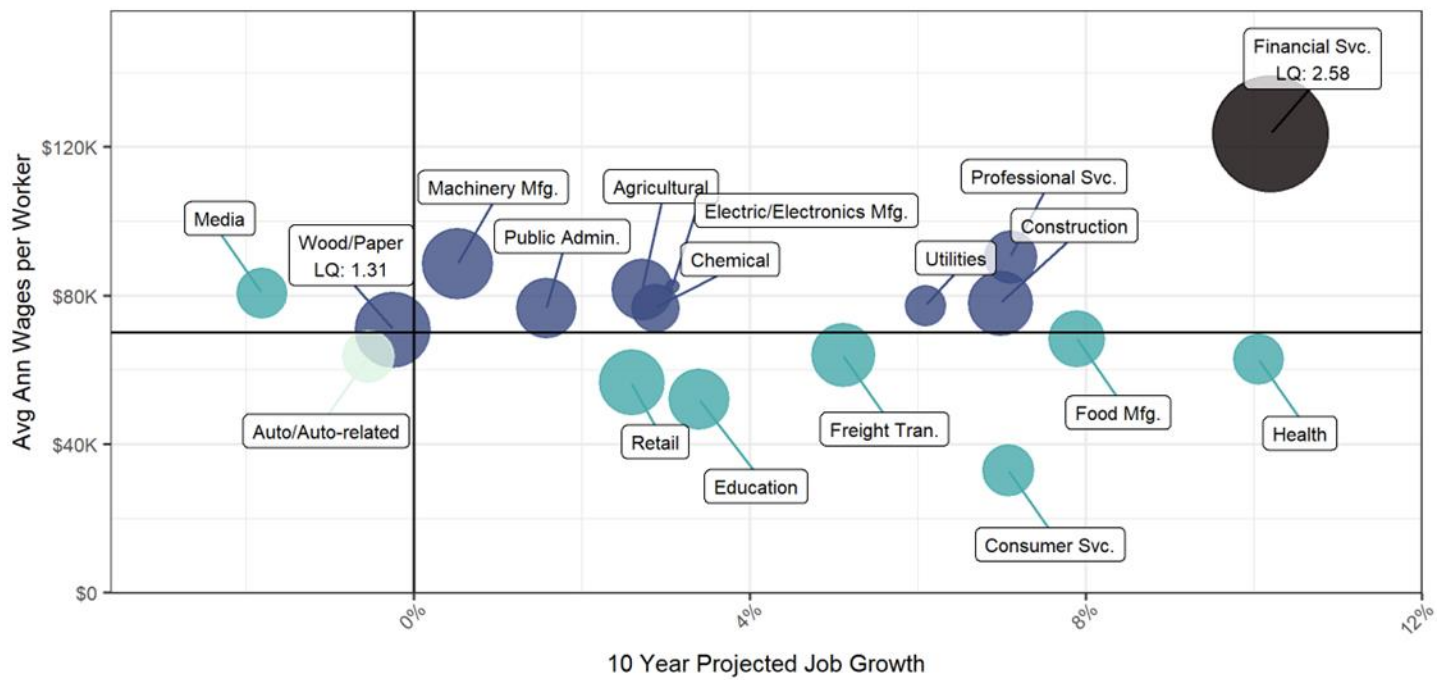
Figure 83. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring At Least a Bachelor's Degree, 2025-2035

Central Iowa LWDA

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	10,313	0.7%	11,799	\$114,600
29-1141	Registered Nurses	5,016	0.6%	8,774	\$82,200
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	4,379	0.8%	5,207	\$86,000
11-3031	Financial Managers	3,834	2.0%	4,034	\$162,900
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	3,809	0.7%	3,976	\$93,700
15-1252	Software Developers	3,469	1.8%	4,805	\$124,400
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	3,251	1.0%	3,349	\$84,900
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	2,875	0.3%	4,070	\$58,500
13-1111	Management Analysts	2,844	1.2%	2,956	\$92,200
11-9199	Managers, All Other	2,704	0.8%	3,190	\$158,100
13-1071	Human Resources Specialists	2,573	1.0%	2,812	\$78,400
25-3031	Substitute Teachers, Short-Term	2,135	0.7%	1,671	\$40,000
13-1082	Project Management Specialists	2,069	0.8%	2,659	\$100,000
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	2,053	0.3%	3,064	\$62,800
11-9111	Medical and Health Services Managers	2,036	2.4%	1,976	\$124,200

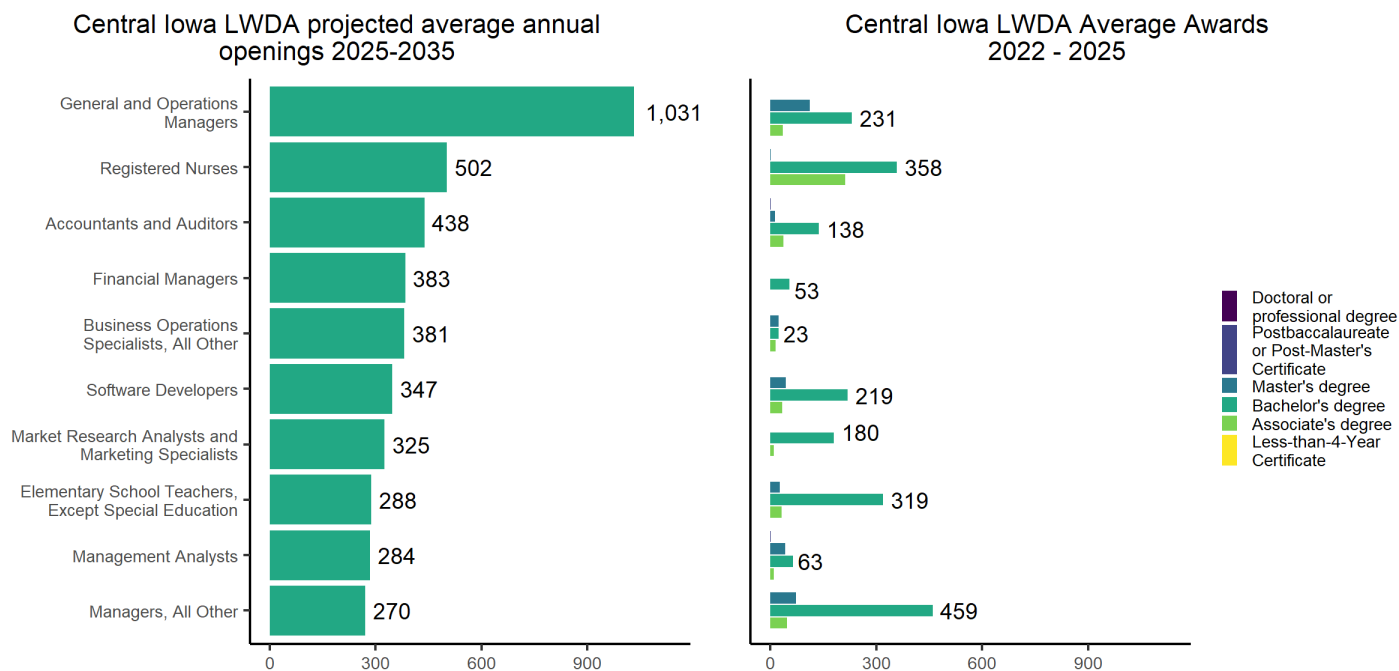
Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

Figure 84. Central Iowa LWDA Comparative Advantage by Industry Cluster



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q3. Bubble size reflects the 4-quarter average Location Quotient (LQ). Only industry clusters with an LQ higher than .5 are displayed. Darker colors indicate more advantages: Above-average wages, projected job growth, and/or local competitive advantage (as measured by Location Quotient).

Figure 85. Top 10 Central Iowa Jobs that Require Postsecondary Education by Average Annual Openings and Related Educational Supply



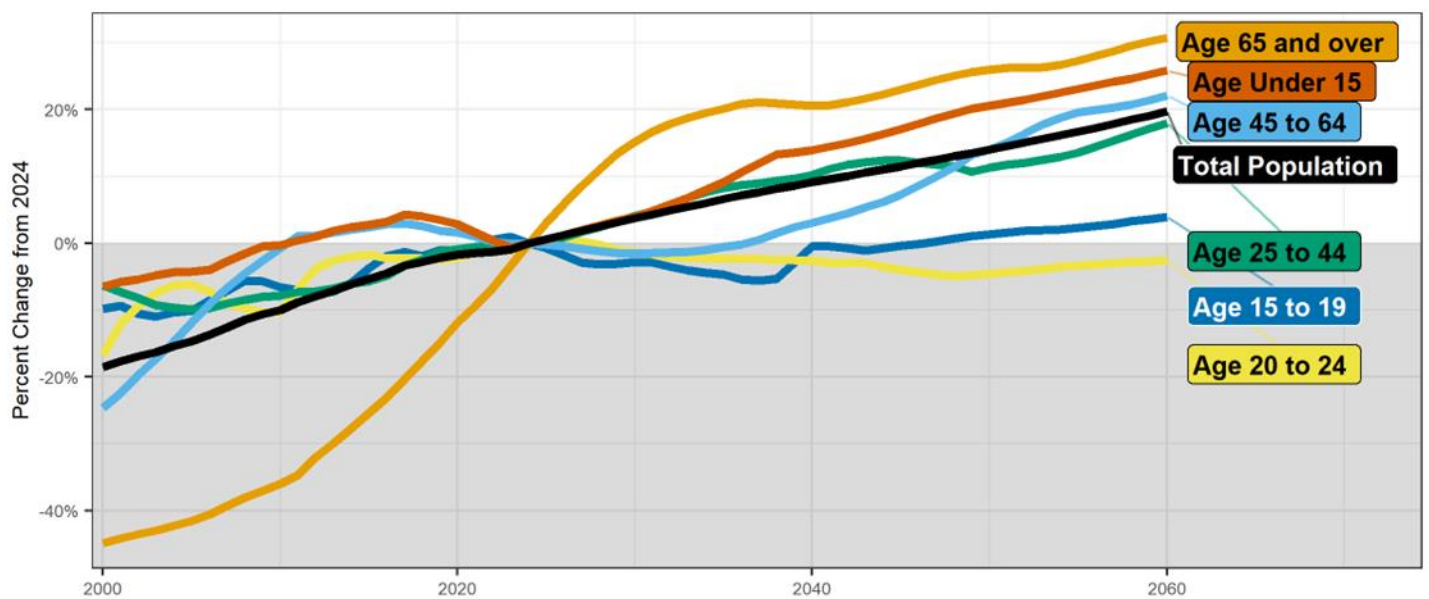
Sources and Notes: Occupational Projections from JobsEQ. Awards data for private institutions is the 2022-2024 average of all awards at institutions located in the region, sourced from NCES IPEDS Completions Survey cYYYY_a final release files. Awards data for public institutions is the 2023-2025 average of awards earned by residents of the region at all Iowa public institutions, plus awards earned by nonresidents at institutions located in the region, sourced from the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa Board of Regents. Displays the top 10 occupations in the region, ranked by average annual openings, that typically require at least an associate degree. Awards are displayed at each occupation's typical entry level of education plus one level below and one level above. Programs and occupations are linked using JobsEQ's mapping. Awards in programs linked to multiple occupations are allocated based on each occupation's projected average annual openings. Occupation colors represent the typical entry level of education.

East Central Iowa

Figure 86. East Central Iowa LWDA Map

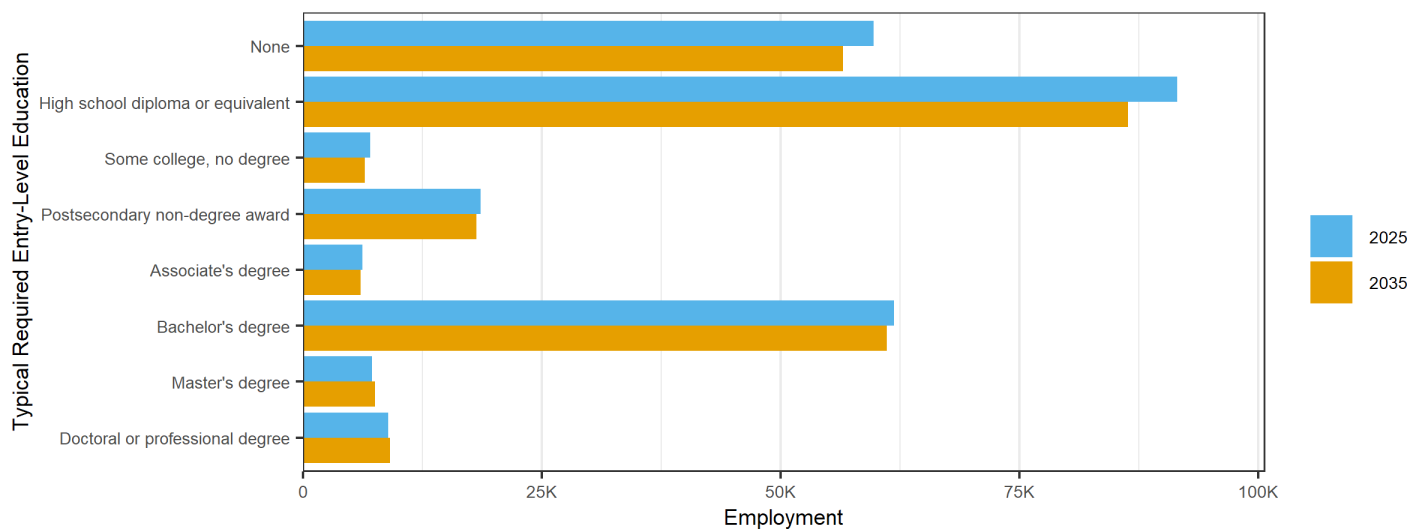


Figure 87. East Central Iowa Projected Iowa Population Change from 2024, by Age Group



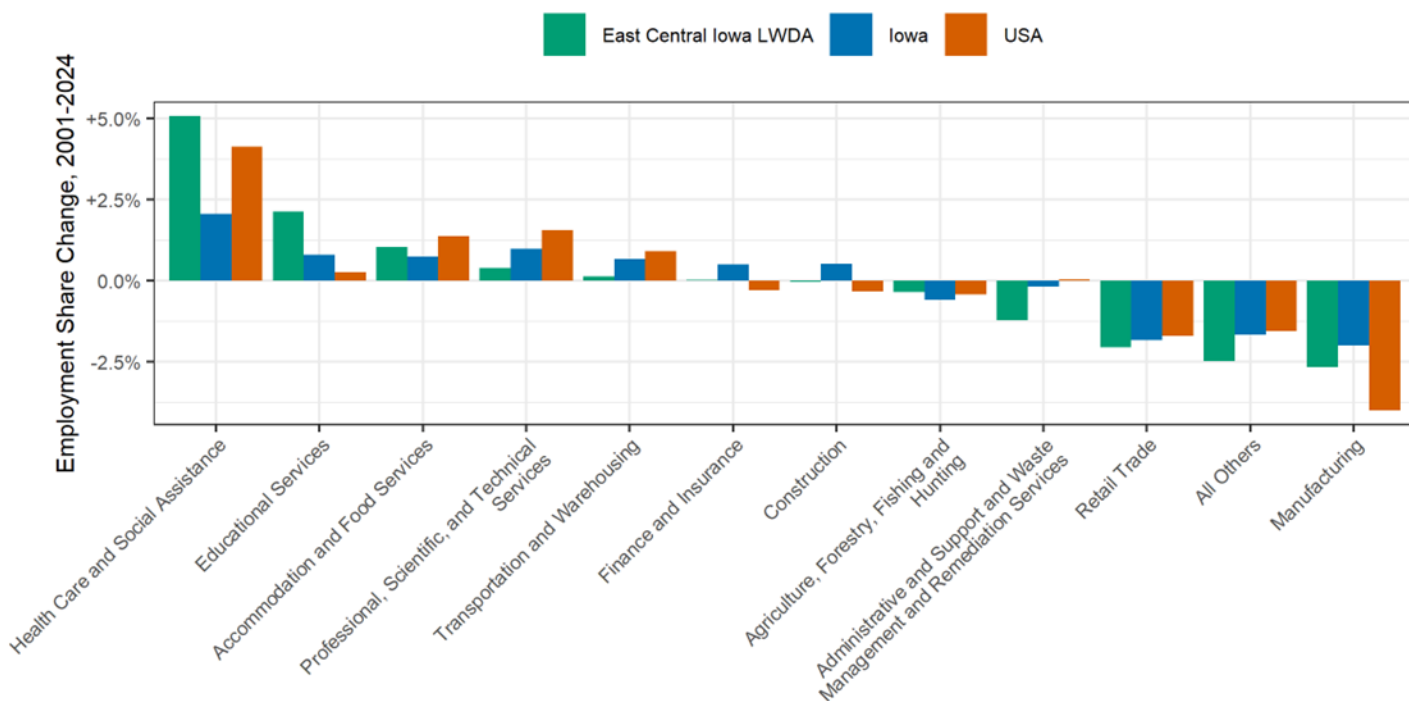
Source: 2025 Woods & Poole Economics, Inc. via the Iowa State Data Center.

Figure 88. East Central Iowa Jobs by Typical Entry-Level Education, 2025 and 2035



Source: JobsEQ. Note: 2035 jobs are projections.

Figure 89. 2001-2024 Change in Share of Employment by Industry, East Central Iowa, Iowa and USA



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q2.

Figure 90. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring a Postsecondary Certificate or Associate Degree, 2025-2035

East Central Iowa LWDA

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
25-2011	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	1,249	-0.1%	1,140	\$34,100
23-2011	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	343	-0.6%	362	\$59,100
31-2021	Physical Therapist Assistants	269	1.4%	164	\$62,300
19-4099	Life, Physical, and Social Science Technicians, All Other	258	0.0%	214	\$54,000
29-2034	Radiologic Technologists and Technicians	229	-0.4%	502	\$70,100
29-2056	Veterinary Technologists and Technicians	205	0.1%	215	\$44,500
19-4012	Agricultural Technicians	203	0.0%	136	\$49,600
29-1292	Dental Hygienists	192	0.0%	329	\$86,700
17-3023	Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technologists and Technicians	179	-1.3%	257	\$69,800
15-1231	Computer Network Support Specialists	169	-0.6%	316	\$66,700
29-1126	Respiratory Therapists	142	0.6%	258	\$74,800
43-4161	Human Resources Assistants, Except Payroll and Timekeeping	129	-1.3%	149	\$48,300
17-3026	Industrial Engineering Technologists and Technicians	124	-0.7%	170	\$68,300
49-9062	Medical Equipment Repairers	111	0.1%	124	\$63,400
17-3011	Architectural and Civil Drafters	107	-0.3%	134	\$64,400

Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

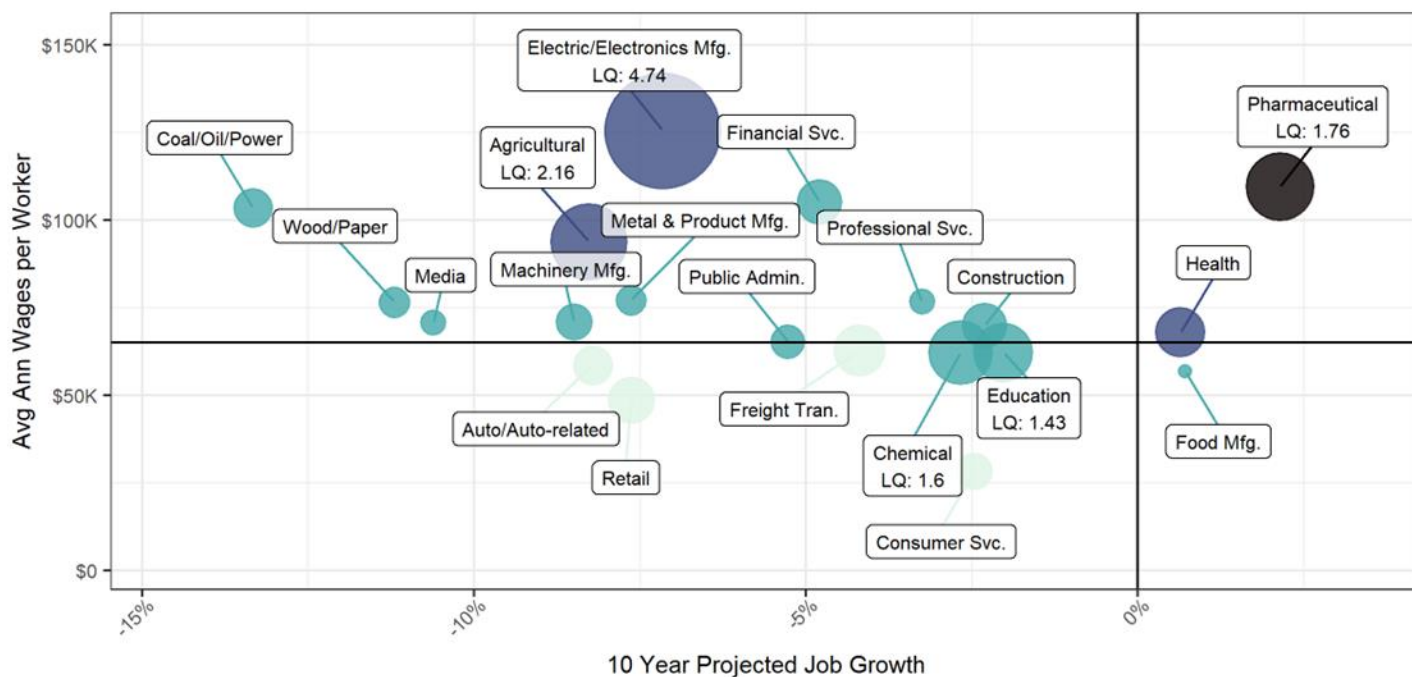
Figure 91. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring At Least a Bachelor's Degree, 2025-2035

East Central Iowa LWDA

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	3,784	-0.3%	5,235	\$103,700
29-1141	Registered Nurses	3,412	-0.2%	7,303	\$83,600
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	1,470	-0.3%	2,120	\$83,600
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	1,361	-0.5%	2,237	\$58,900
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	1,355	-0.2%	1,658	\$74,600
15-1252	Software Developers	1,215	0.5%	2,216	\$118,300
11-9199	Managers, All Other	1,122	-0.2%	1,576	\$128,400
11-9111	Medical and Health Services Managers	1,097	1.5%	1,222	\$119,300
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	1,052	-0.1%	1,304	\$74,600
25-3031	Substitute Teachers, Short-Term	1,045	-0.1%	910	\$42,100
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	972	-0.4%	1,693	\$61,800
25-1071	Health Specialties Teachers, Postsecondary	962	1.4%	1,064	\$130,600
11-3031	Financial Managers	937	0.7%	1,247	\$142,300
13-1071	Human Resources Specialists	937	-0.1%	1,230	\$71,300
27-2022	Coaches and Scouts	874	0.1%	683	\$93,000

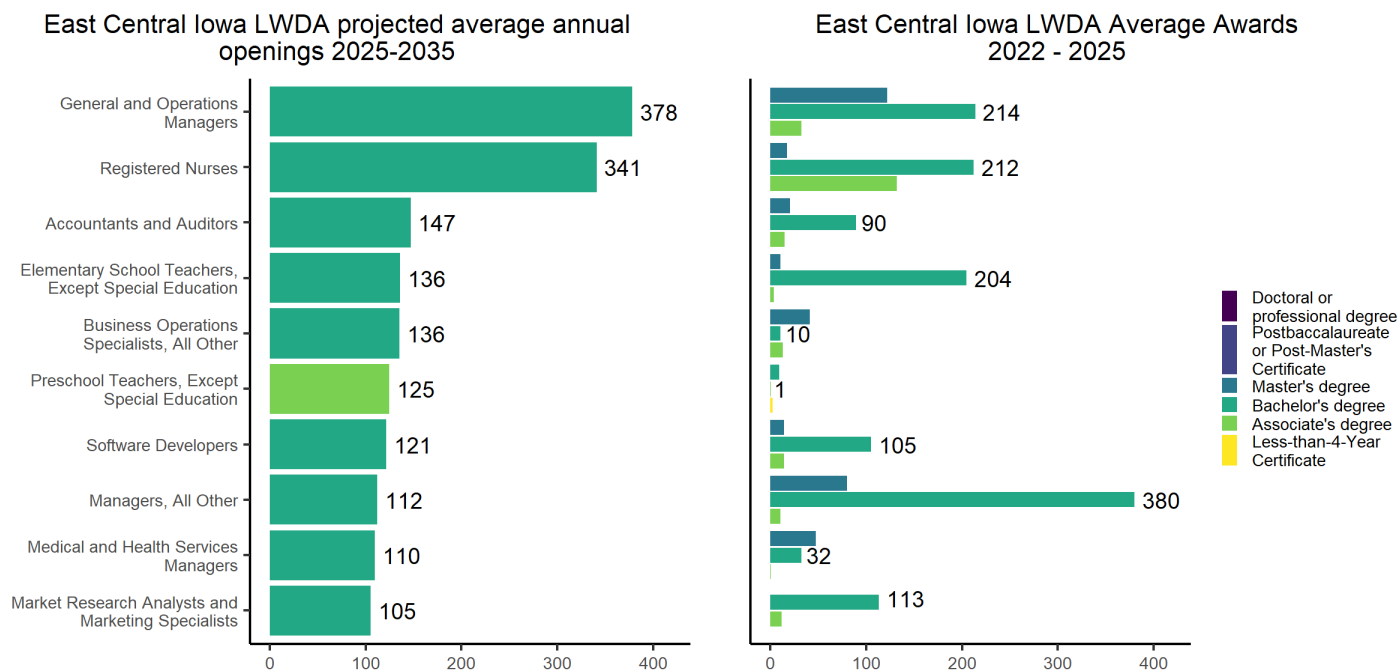
Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

Figure 92. East Central Iowa LWDA Comparative Advantage by Industry Cluster



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q3. Bubble size reflects the 4-quarter average Location Quotient (LQ). Only industry clusters with an LQ higher than .5 are displayed. Darker colors indicate more advantages: Above-average wages, projected job growth, and/or local competitive advantage (as measured by Location Quotient).

Figure 93. Top 10 East Central Iowa Jobs that Require Postsecondary Education by Average Annual Openings and Related Educational Supply



Sources and Notes: Occupational Projections from JobsEQ. Awards data for private institutions is the 2022-2024 average of all awards at institutions located in the region, sourced from NCES IPEDS Completions Survey cYYYY_a final release files. Awards data for public institutions is the 2023-2025 average of awards earned by residents of the region at all Iowa public institutions, plus awards earned by nonresidents at institutions located in the region, sourced from the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa Board of Regents. Displays the top 10 occupations in the region, ranked by average annual openings, that typically require at least an associate degree. Awards are displayed at each occupation's typical entry level of education plus one level below and one level above. Programs and occupations are linked using JobsEQ's mapping. Awards in programs linked to multiple occupations are allocated based on each occupation's projected average annual openings. Occupation colors represent the typical entry level of education.

Iowa Plains/Green Hills

Figure 94. Iowa Plains LWDA/Green Hills AEA

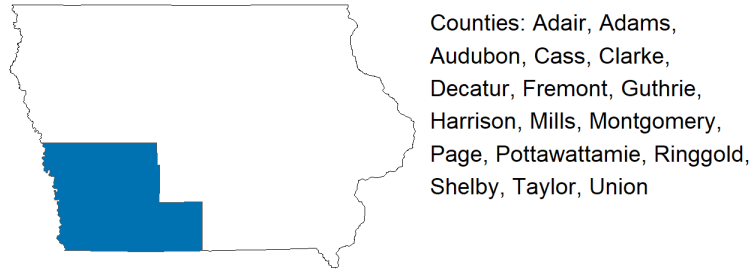
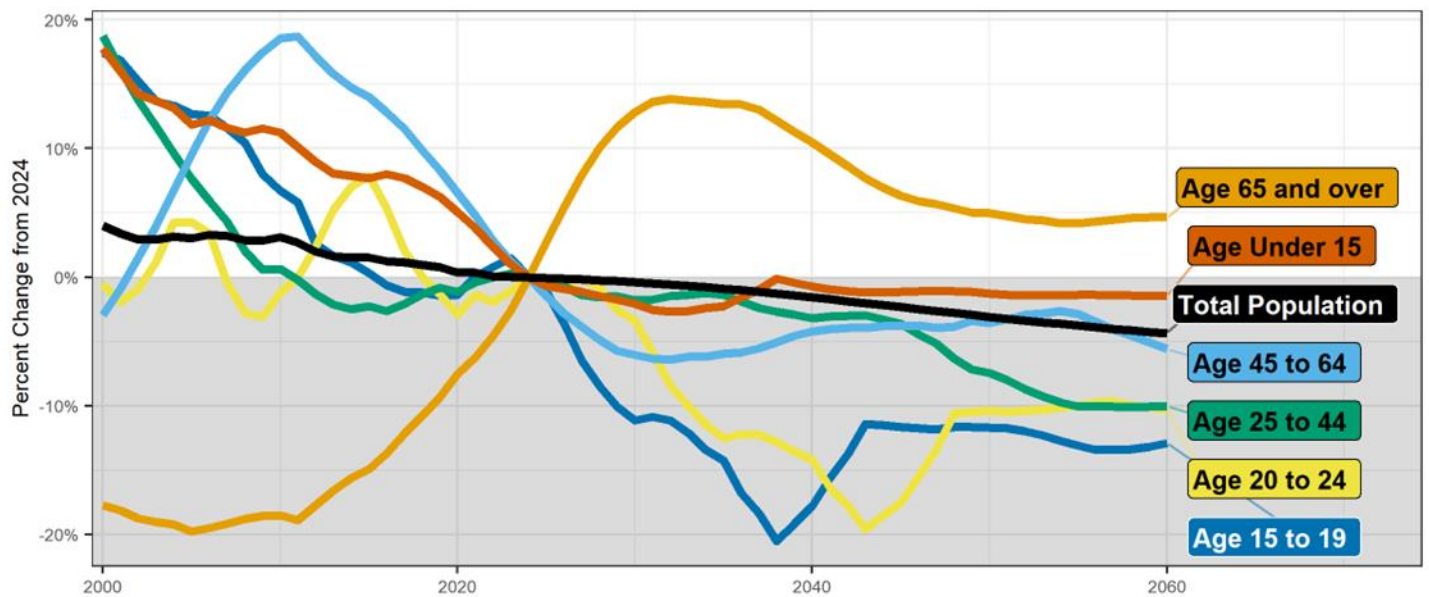
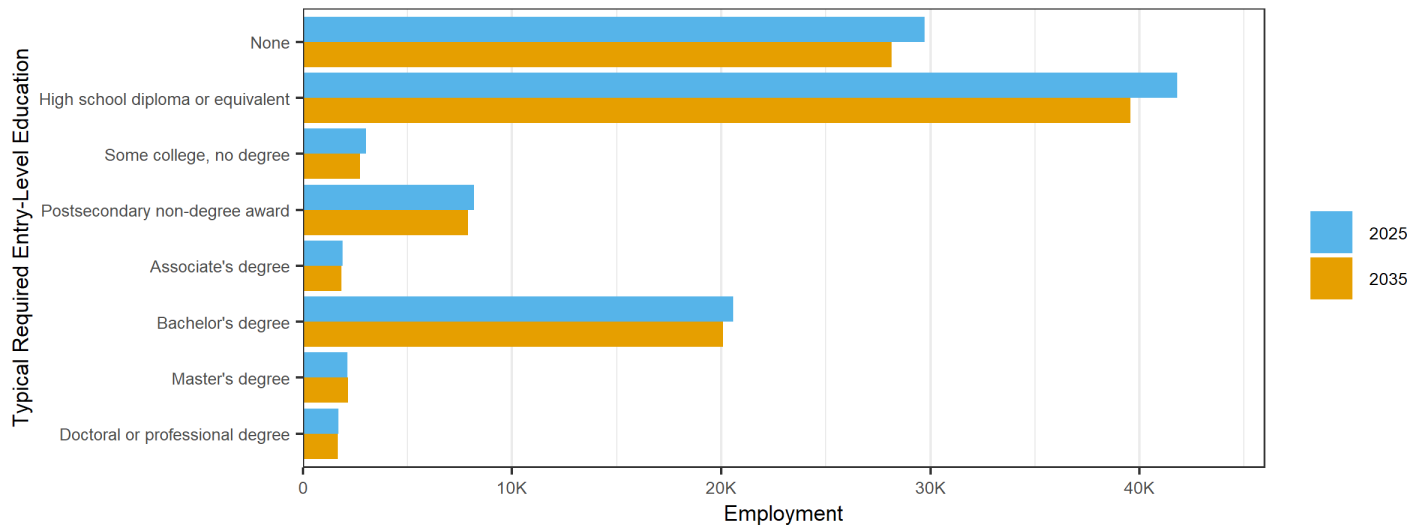


Figure 95. Iowa Plains/Green Hills Projected Iowa Population Change from 2024, by Age Group



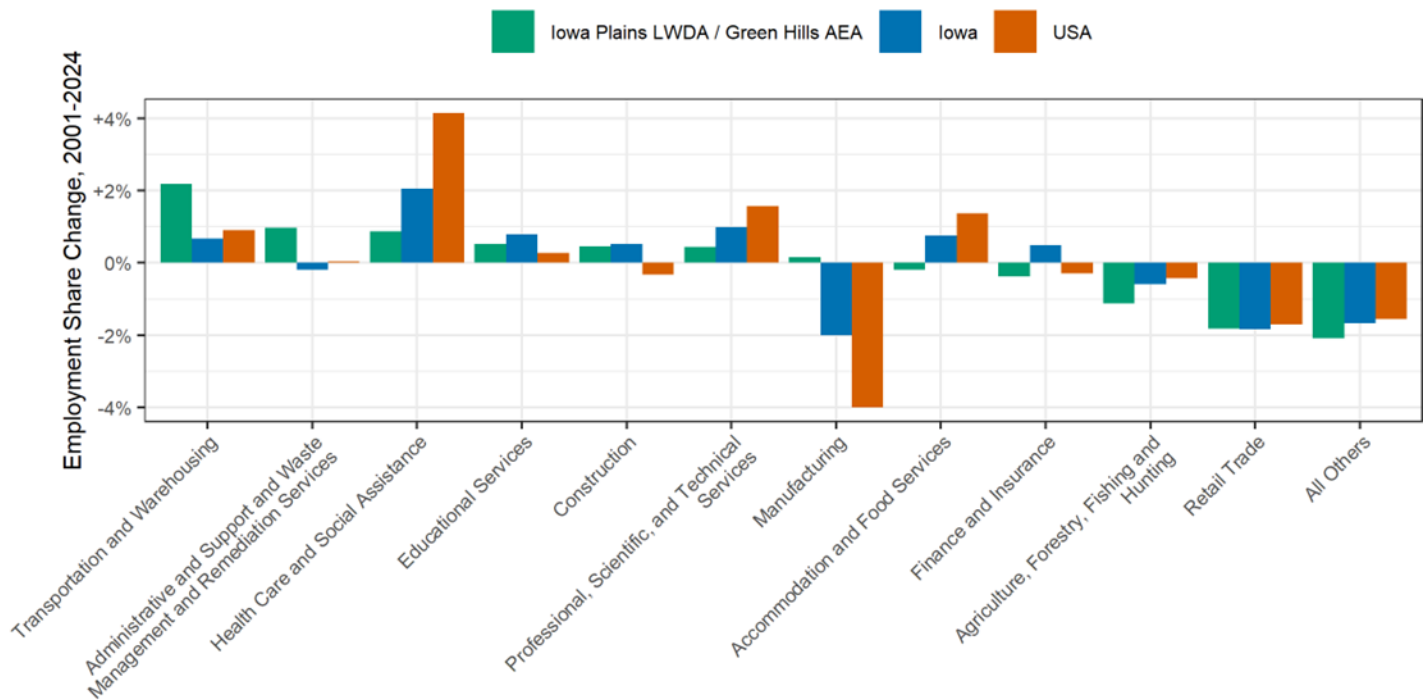
Source: 2025 Woods & Poole Economics, Inc. via the Iowa State Data Center.

Figure 96. Iowa Plains/Green Hills Jobs by Typical Entry-Level Education, 2025 and 2035



Source: JobsEQ. Note: 2035 jobs are projections.

Figure 97. 2001-2024 Change in Share of Employment by Industry, Iowa Plains/Green Hills, Iowa and USA



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q2.

Figure 98. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring a Postsecondary Certificate or Associate Degree, 2025-2035

Iowa Plains LWDA / Green Hills AEA

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
25-2011	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	379	-0.2%	354	\$39,100
23-2011	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	114	-0.6%	119	\$57,400
31-2021	Physical Therapist Assistants	114	1.0%	73	\$62,800
29-2056	Veterinary Technologists and Technicians	73	0.2%	76	\$44,900
29-2034	Radiologic Technologists and Technicians	72	-0.5%	163	\$71,000
19-4012	Agricultural Technicians	67	-0.2%	46	\$41,200
29-1292	Dental Hygienists	59	0.0%	101	\$85,000
19-4013	Food Science Technicians	53	-0.2%	37	\$47,700
43-4161	Human Resources Assistants, Except Payroll and Timekeeping	51	-1.3%	60	\$47,200
15-1231	Computer Network Support Specialists	48	-0.7%	92	\$66,200
31-2011	Occupational Therapy Assistants	42	0.8%	33	\$63,600
29-1126	Respiratory Therapists	41	0.3%	79	\$76,400
39-4031	Morticians, Undertakers, and Funeral Arrangers	41	-0.4%	39	\$68,700
17-3022	Civil Engineering Technologists and Technicians	33	-0.3%	43	\$69,000
23-2099	Legal Support Workers, All Other	32	-0.6%	37	\$56,300

Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

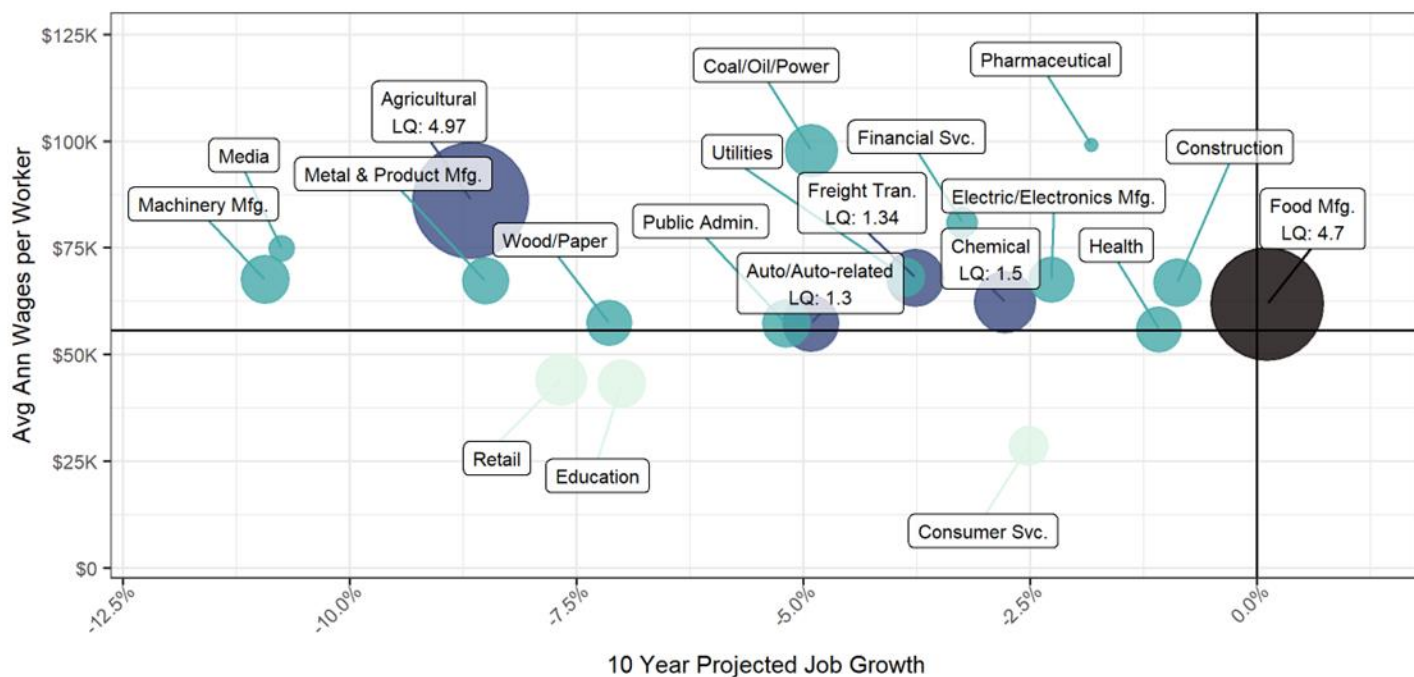
Figure 99. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring At Least a Bachelor's Degree, 2025-2035

Iowa Plains LWDA / Green Hills AEA

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	1,393	-0.3%	1,923	\$99,400
29-1141	Registered Nurses	978	-0.4%	2,221	\$80,900
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	697	-0.9%	1,248	\$56,800
25-3031	Substitute Teachers, Short-Term	549	-0.4%	495	\$48,700
11-9199	Managers, All Other	505	-0.2%	713	\$112,100
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	496	-0.8%	944	\$58,300
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	479	-0.2%	687	\$75,500
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	377	-0.3%	466	\$75,500
11-9111	Medical and Health Services Managers	356	1.3%	410	\$117,600
13-1071	Human Resources Specialists	329	-0.1%	433	\$66,100
25-2022	Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	317	-0.9%	567	\$58,800
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	302	-0.1%	369	\$67,200
11-3031	Financial Managers	284	0.7%	376	\$134,700
15-1252	Software Developers	237	0.7%	410	\$115,100
11-9021	Construction Managers	227	0.2%	298	\$107,400

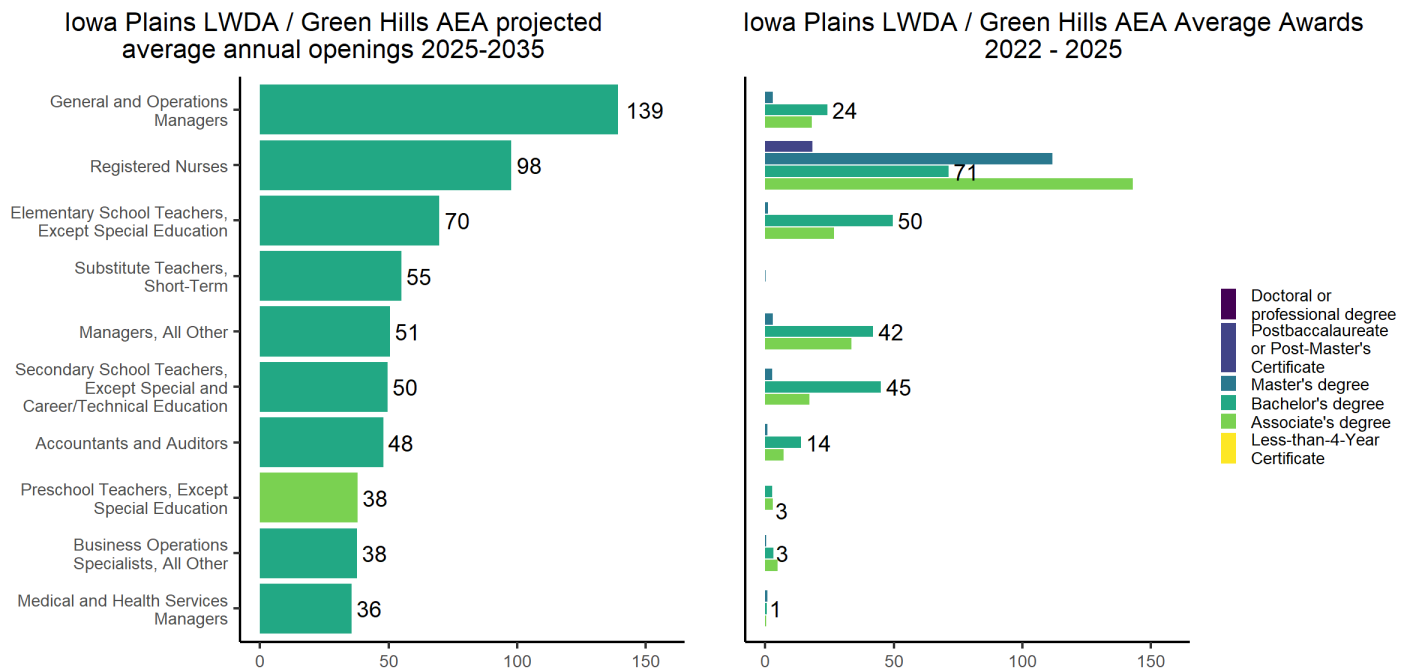
Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

Figure 100. Iowa Plains LWDA/Green Hills AEA Comparative Advantage by Industry Cluster



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q3. Bubble size reflects the 4-quarter average Location Quotient (LQ). Only industry clusters with an LQ higher than .5 are displayed. Darker colors indicate more advantages: Above-average wages, projected job growth, and/or local competitive advantage (as measured by Location Quotient).

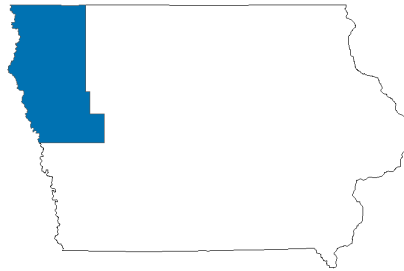
Figure 101. Top 10 Iowa Plains/Green Hills Jobs that Require Postsecondary Education by Average Annual Openings and Related Educational Supply



Sources and Notes: Occupational Projections from JobsEQ. Awards data for private institutions is the 2022-2024 average of all awards at institutions located in the region, sourced from NCES IPEDS Completions Survey cYYYY_a final release files. Awards data for public institutions is the 2023-2025 average of awards earned by residents of the region at all Iowa public institutions, plus awards earned by nonresidents at institutions located in the region, sourced from the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa Board of Regents. Displays the top 10 occupations in the region, ranked by average annual openings, that typically require at least an associate degree. Awards are displayed at each occupation's typical entry level of education plus one level below and one level above. Programs and occupations are linked using JobsEQ's mapping. Awards in programs linked to multiple occupations are allocated based on each occupation's projected average annual openings. Occupation colors represent the typical entry level of education.

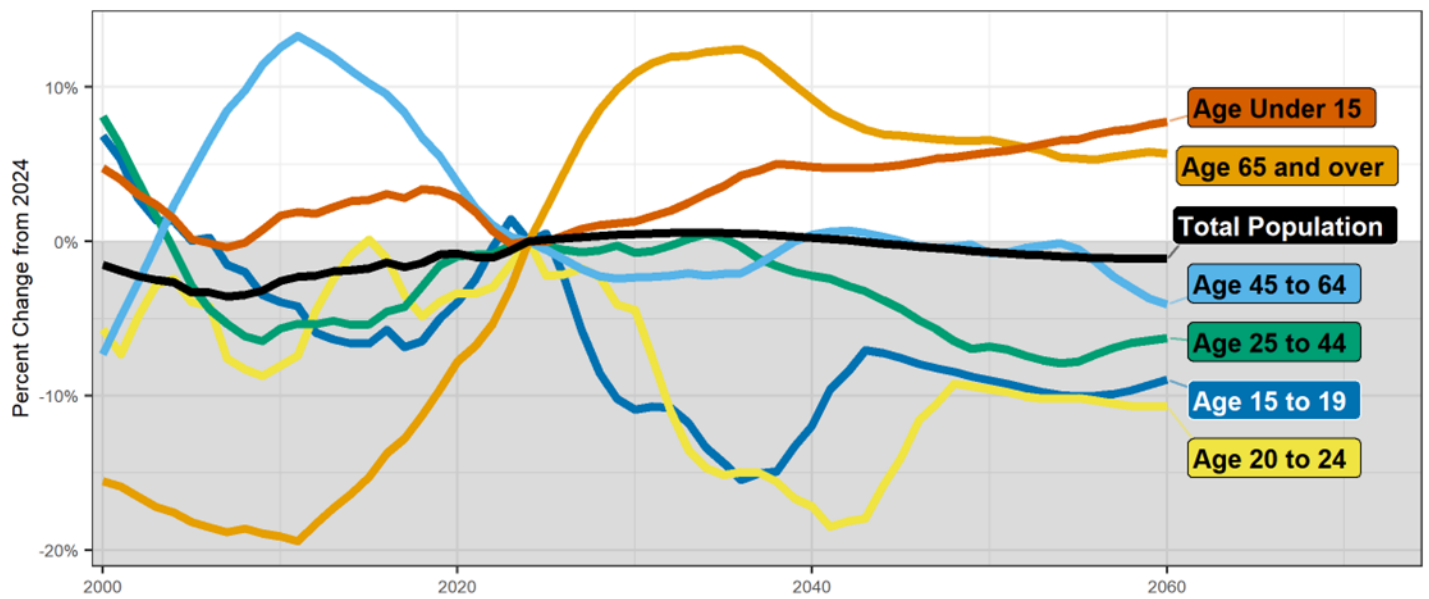
Iowa Plains/Northwest

Figure 102. Iowa Plains LWDA/Northwest AEA



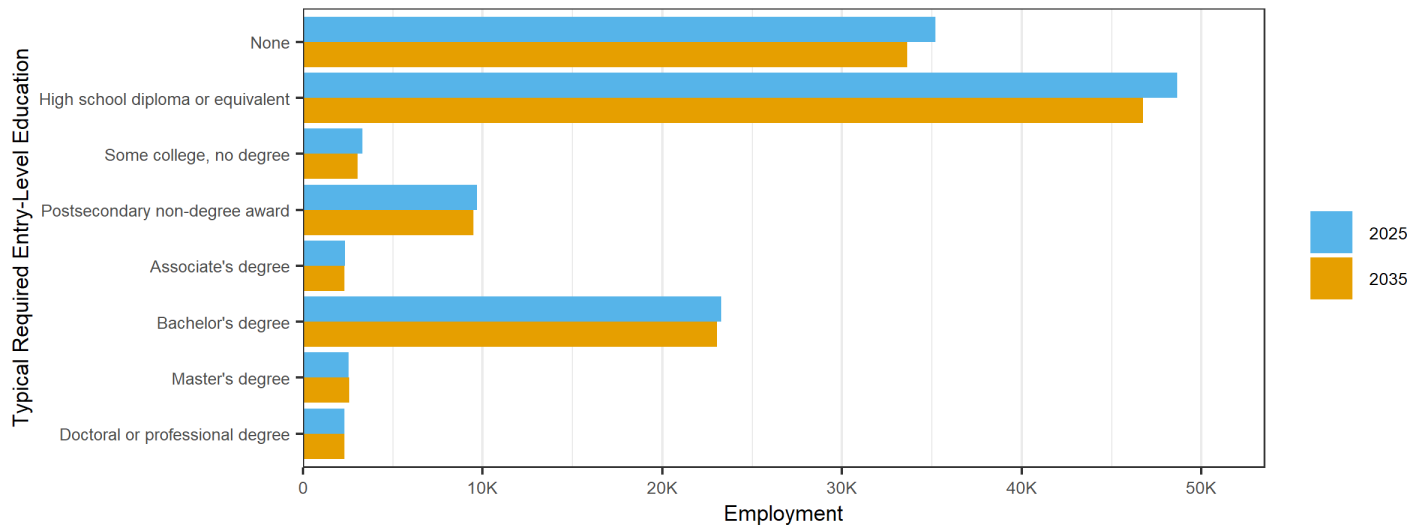
Counties: Cherokee, Crawford,
Ida, Lyon, Monona, O'Brien,
Osceola, Plymouth, Sioux,
Woodbury

Figure 103. Iowa Plains/Northwest Projected Iowa Population Change from 2024, by Age Group



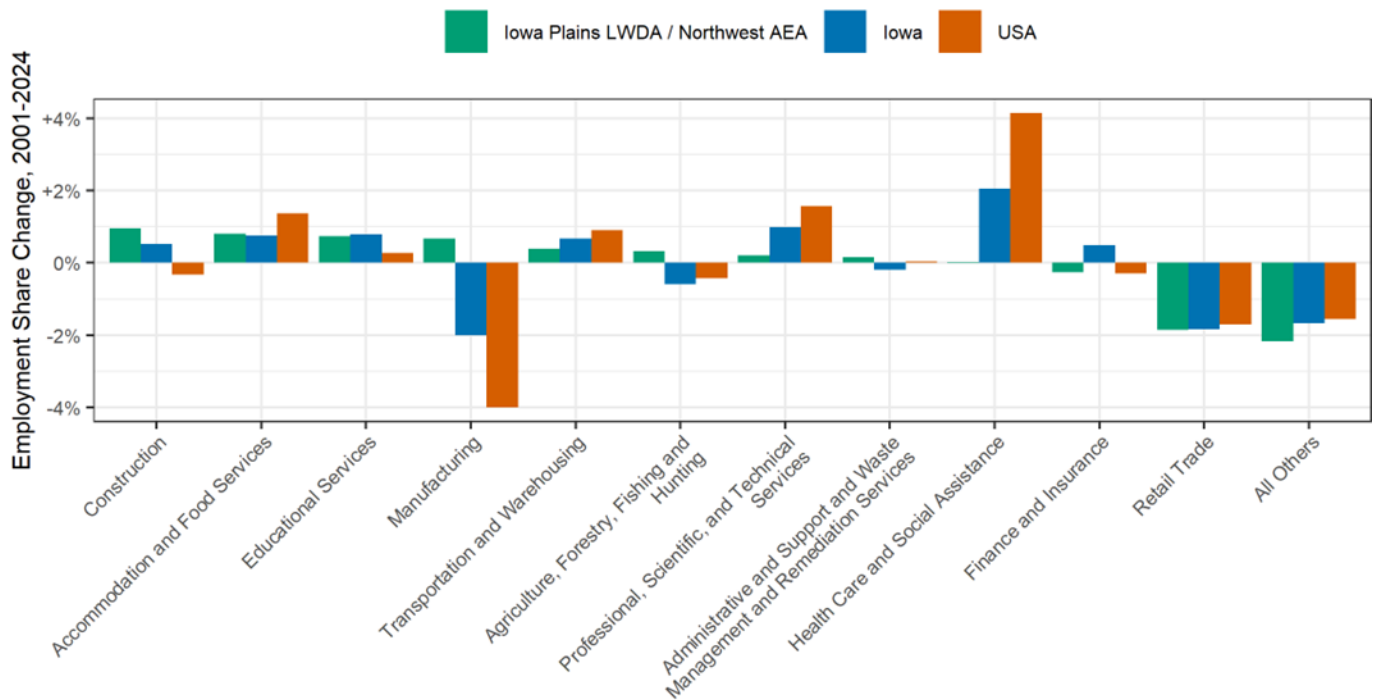
Source: 2025 Woods & Poole Economics, Inc. via the Iowa State Data Center.

Figure 104. Iowa Plains/Northwest Jobs by Typical Entry-Level Education, 2025 and 2035



Source: JobsEQ. Note: 2035 jobs are projections.

Figure 105. 2001-2024 Change in Share of Employment by Industry, Iowa Plains/Northwest, Iowa and USA



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q2.

Figure 106. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring a Postsecondary Certificate or Associate Degree, 2025-2035

Iowa Plains LWDA / Northwest AEA

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
25-2011	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	539	0.0%	487	\$36,700
19-4012	Agricultural Technicians	145	-0.1%	99	\$41,500
23-2011	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	143	-0.5%	149	\$54,400
19-4013	Food Science Technicians	127	0.1%	84	\$53,100
31-2021	Physical Therapist Assistants	100	1.0%	64	\$60,900
29-1292	Dental Hygienists	81	0.1%	135	\$88,000
29-2034	Radiologic Technologists and Technicians	80	-0.3%	169	\$66,500
29-2056	Veterinary Technologists and Technicians	77	0.4%	77	\$41,900
43-4161	Human Resources Assistants, Except Payroll and Timekeeping	61	-1.3%	70	\$48,100
19-4031	Chemical Technicians	47	-0.2%	43	\$54,200
15-1231	Computer Network Support Specialists	44	-0.8%	85	\$62,800
39-4031	Morticians, Undertakers, and Funeral Arrangers	44	-0.3%	40	\$61,800
29-1126	Respiratory Therapists	43	0.5%	81	\$71,700
19-4099	Life, Physical, and Social Science Technicians, All Other	42	-0.2%	36	\$53,400
17-3023	Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technologists and Technicians	40	-0.3%	48	\$73,700

Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

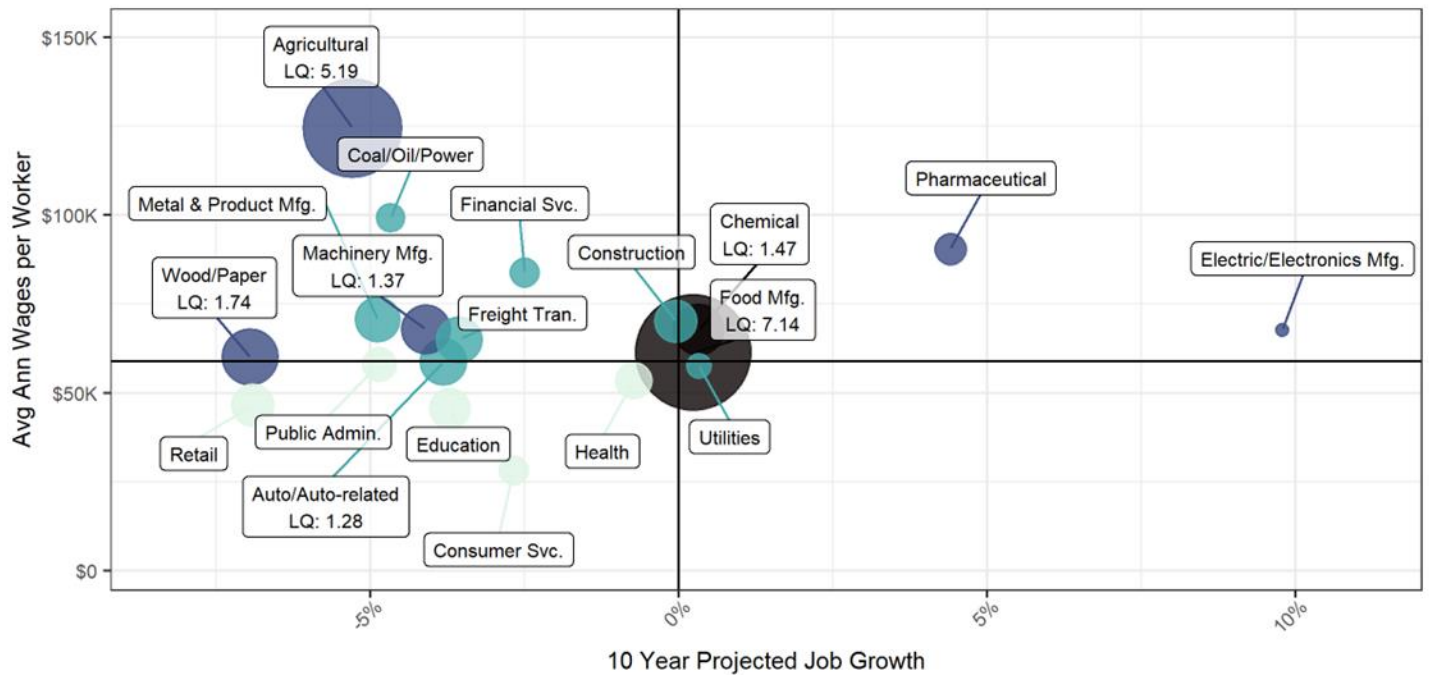
Figure 107. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring At Least a Bachelor's Degree, 2025-2035

Iowa Plains LWDA / Northwest AEA

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	1,718	-0.3%	2,343	\$100,700
29-1141	Registered Nurses	1,099	-0.3%	2,402	\$77,400
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	803	-0.4%	1,291	\$58,700
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	610	-0.1%	859	\$80,700
25-3031	Substitute Teachers, Short-Term	582	0.0%	500	\$41,800
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	575	-0.3%	982	\$59,000
11-9199	Managers, All Other	438	-0.2%	612	\$119,300
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	437	-0.3%	537	\$69,300
11-9111	Medical and Health Services Managers	396	1.4%	446	\$116,000
13-1071	Human Resources Specialists	389	-0.1%	508	\$69,000
25-2022	Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	366	-0.4%	588	\$55,800
11-3031	Financial Managers	364	0.9%	471	\$134,300
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	340	-0.1%	418	\$66,100
13-1023	Purchasing Agents, Except Wholesale, Retail, and Farm Products	286	0.2%	265	\$75,700
27-2022	Coaches and Scouts	284	0.0%	227	\$48,200

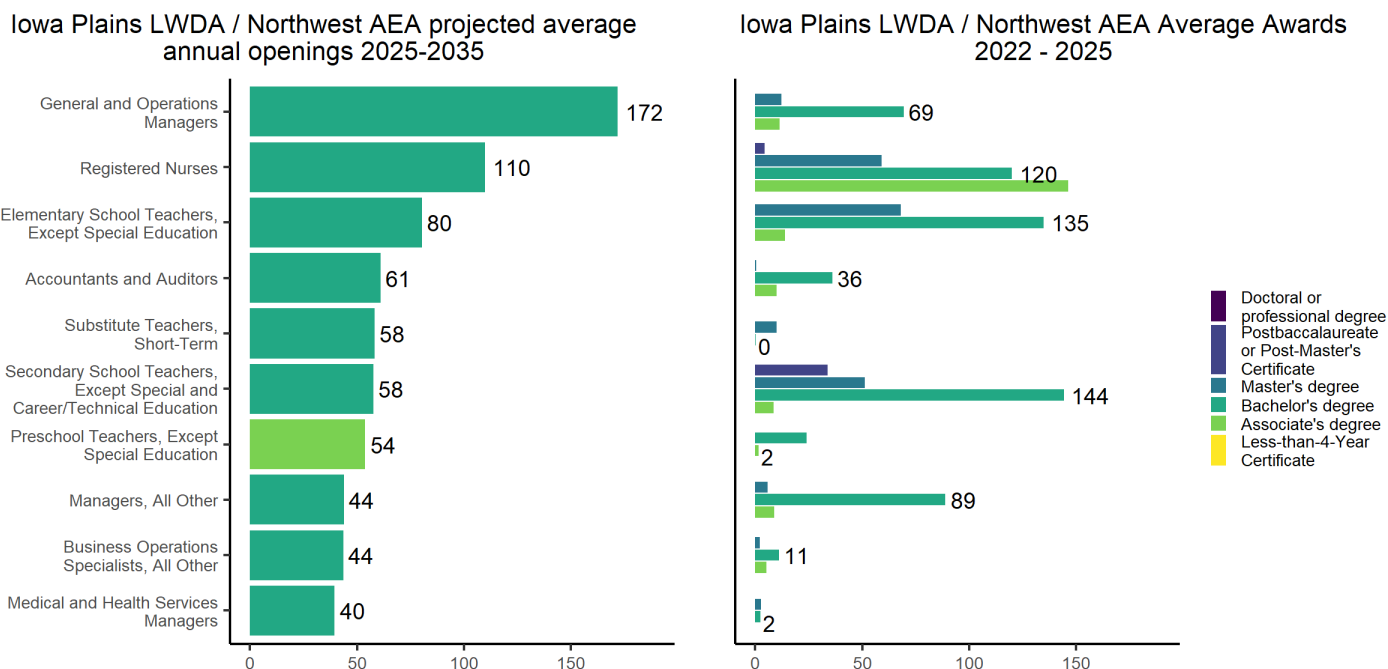
Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

Figure 108. Iowa Plains LWDA/Northwest AEA Comparative Advantage by Industry Cluster



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q3. Bubble size reflects the 4-quarter average Location Quotient (LQ). Only industry clusters with an LQ higher than .5 are displayed. Darker colors indicate more advantages: Above-average wages, projected job growth, and/or local competitive advantage (as measured by Location Quotient).

Figure 109. Top 10 Iowa Plains/Northwest Jobs that Require Postsecondary Education by Average Annual Openings and Related Educational Supply



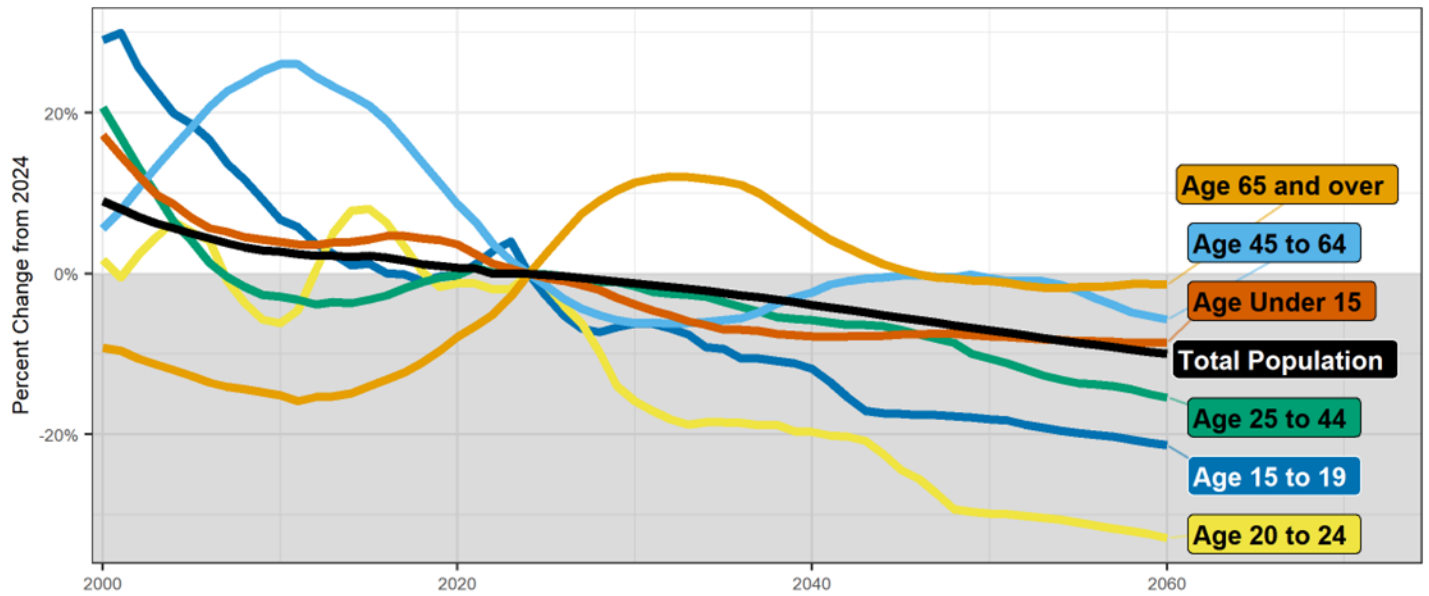
Sources and Notes: Occupational Projections from JobsEQ. Awards data for private institutions is the 2022-2024 average of all awards at institutions located in the region, sourced from NCES IPEDS Completions Survey cYYYY_a final release files. Awards data for public institutions is the 2023-2025 average of awards earned by residents of the region at all Iowa public institutions, plus awards earned by nonresidents at institutions located in the region, sourced from the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa Board of Regents. Displays the top 10 occupations in the region, ranked by average annual openings, that typically require at least an associate degree. Awards are displayed at each occupation's typical entry level of education plus one level below and one level above. Programs and occupations are linked using JobsEQ's mapping. Awards in programs linked to multiple occupations are allocated based on each occupation's projected average annual openings. Occupation colors represent the typical entry level of education.

Iowa Plains/Prairie Lakes

Figure 110. Iowa Plains LWDA/Prairie Lakes AEA

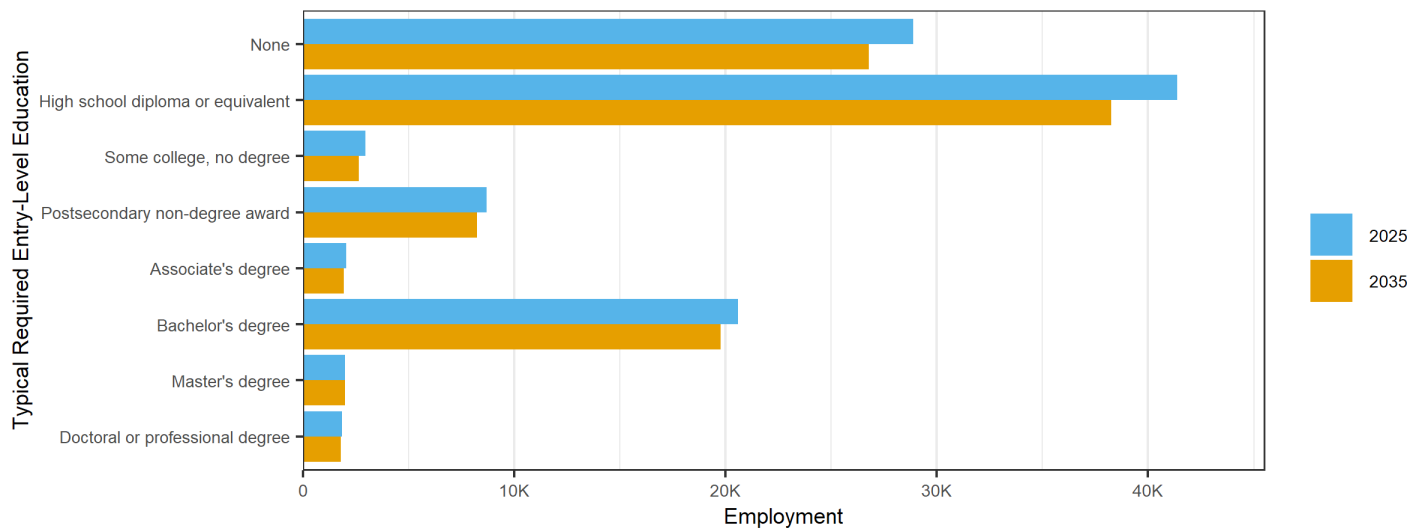


Figure 111. Iowa Plains/Prairie Lakes Projected Iowa Population Change from 2024, by Age Group



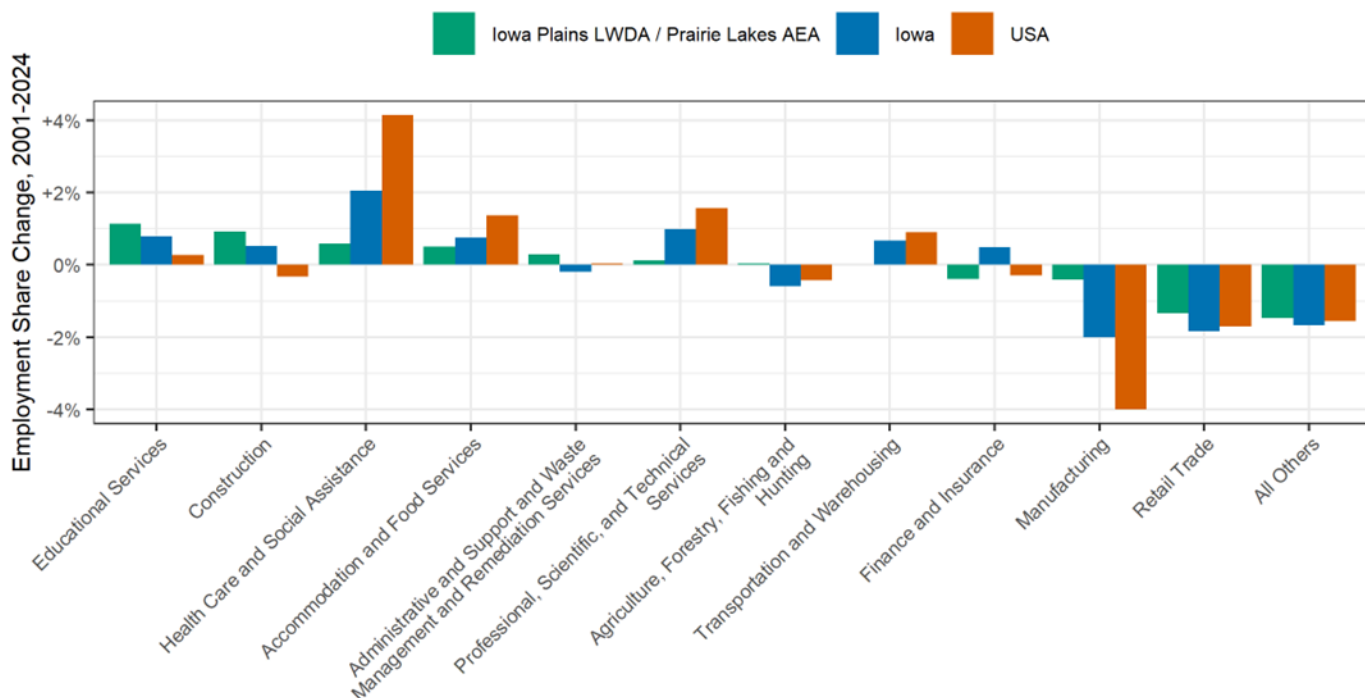
Source: 2025 Woods & Poole Economics, Inc. via the Iowa State Data Center.

Figure 112. Iowa Plains/Prairie Lakes Jobs by Typical Entry-Level Education, 2025 and 2035



Source: JobsEQ. Note: 2035 jobs are projections.

Figure 113. 2001-2024 Change in Share of Employment by Industry, Iowa Plains/Prairie Lakes, Iowa and USA



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q2.

Figure 114. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring a Postsecondary Certificate or Associate Degree, 2025-2035

Iowa Plains LWDA / Prairie Lakes AEA

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
25-2011	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	465	-0.4%	443	\$35,700
23-2011	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	114	-0.8%	123	\$51,800
19-4012	Agricultural Technicians	98	-0.5%	70	\$40,300
31-2021	Physical Therapist Assistants	94	0.6%	63	\$62,500
29-2056	Veterinary Technologists and Technicians	84	0.0%	89	\$41,700
29-2034	Radiologic Technologists and Technicians	66	-0.7%	157	\$68,600
29-1292	Dental Hygienists	65	-0.2%	114	\$89,800
19-4013	Food Science Technicians	60	-0.3%	42	\$55,900
43-4161	Human Resources Assistants, Except Payroll and Timekeeping	45	-1.6%	54	\$48,400
39-4031	Morticians, Undertakers, and Funeral Arrangers	41	-0.6%	40	\$69,900
29-1126	Respiratory Therapists	39	0.1%	79	\$76,100
15-1231	Computer Network Support Specialists	38	-1.0%	79	\$64,400
19-4031	Chemical Technicians	38	-0.5%	37	\$55,200
31-2011	Occupational Therapy Assistants	37	0.4%	30	\$66,300
19-4099	Life, Physical, and Social Science Technicians, All Other	34	-0.4%	30	\$50,500

Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

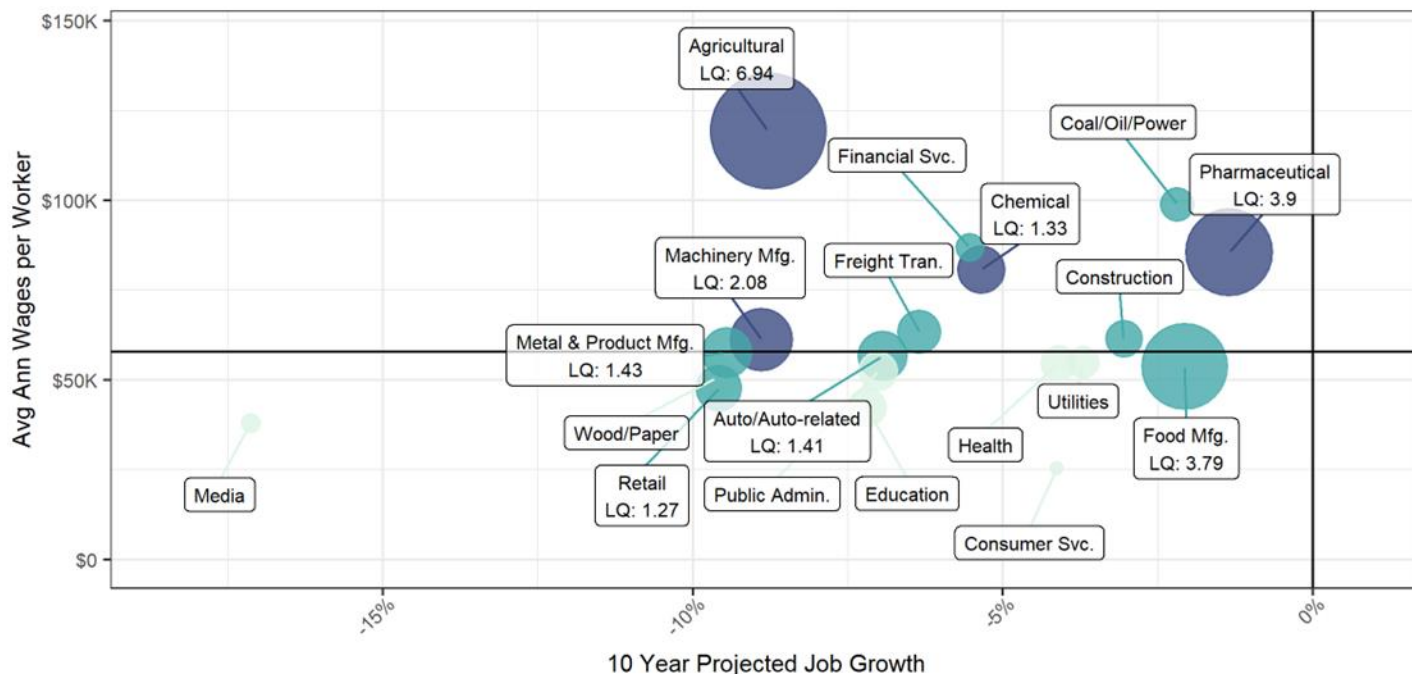
Figure 115. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring At Least a Bachelor's Degree, 2025-2035

Iowa Plains LWDA / Prairie Lakes AEA

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	1,384	-0.6%	1,993	\$94,300
29-1141	Registered Nurses	894	-0.6%	2,140	\$79,100
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	669	-0.8%	1,172	\$56,500
25-3031	Substitute Teachers, Short-Term	504	-0.4%	452	\$38,300
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	500	-0.4%	746	\$79,400
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	474	-0.7%	884	\$57,800
11-9199	Managers, All Other	459	-0.4%	666	\$118,100
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	346	-0.5%	444	\$66,200
11-9111	Medical and Health Services Managers	330	1.1%	396	\$113,400
25-2022	Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	304	-0.8%	533	\$55,800
13-1071	Human Resources Specialists	299	-0.4%	410	\$68,600
11-3031	Financial Managers	299	0.5%	409	\$129,800
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	286	-0.4%	367	\$68,100
13-1023	Purchasing Agents, Except Wholesale, Retail, and Farm Products	241	-0.2%	236	\$73,900
11-9021	Construction Managers	234	0.0%	315	\$107,400

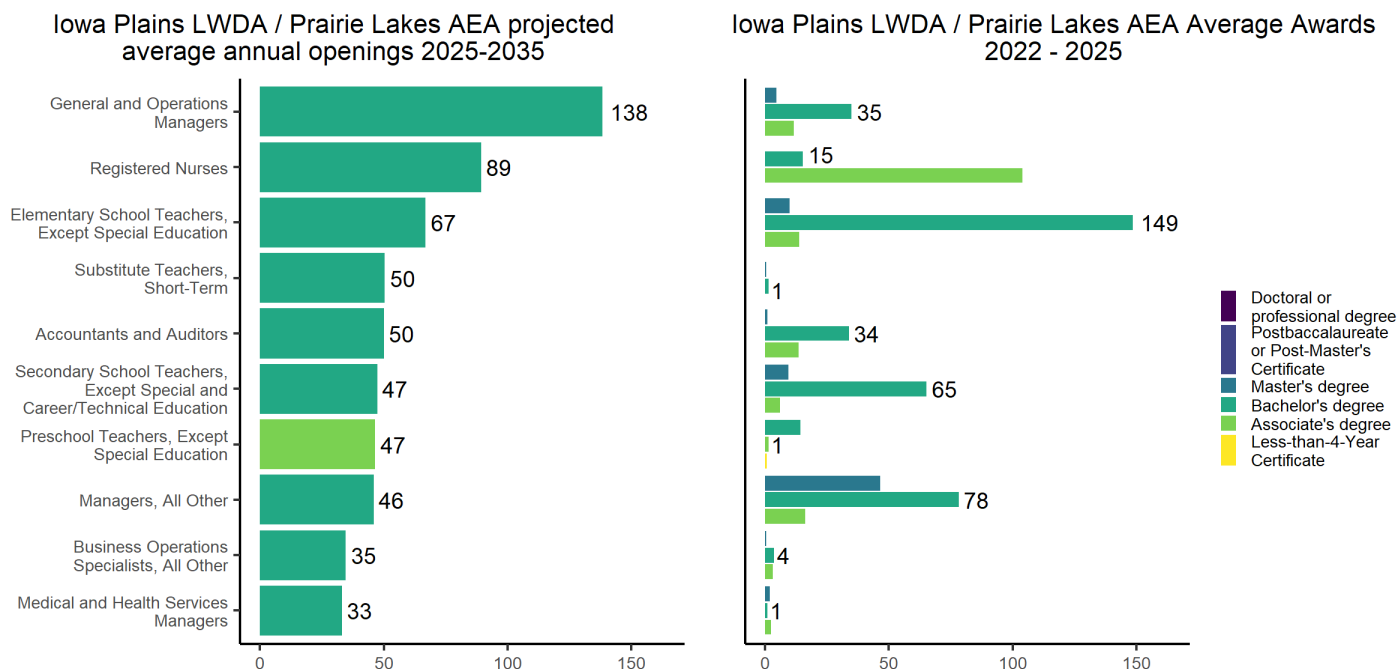
Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

Figure 116. Iowa Plains LWDA/Prairie Lakes AEA Comparative Advantage by Industry Cluster



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q3. Bubble size reflects the 4-quarter average Location Quotient (LQ). Only industry clusters with an LQ higher than .5 are displayed. Darker colors indicate more advantages: Above-average wages, projected job growth, and/or local competitive advantage (as measured by Location Quotient).

Figure 117. Top 10 Iowa Plains/Prairie Lakes Jobs that Require Postsecondary Education by Average Annual Openings and Related Educational Supply



Sources and Notes: Occupational Projections from JobsEQ. Awards data for private institutions is the 2022-2024 average of all awards at institutions located in the region, sourced from NCES IPEDS Completions Survey cYYYY_a final release files. Awards data for public institutions is the 2023-2025 average of awards earned by residents of the region at all Iowa public institutions, plus awards earned by nonresidents at institutions located in the region, sourced from the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa Board of Regents. Displays the top 10 occupations in the region, ranked by average annual openings, that typically require at least an associate degree. Awards are displayed at each occupation's typical entry level of education plus one level below and one level above. Programs and occupations are linked using JobsEQ's mapping. Awards in programs linked to multiple occupations are allocated based on each occupation's projected average annual openings. Occupation colors represent the typical entry level of education.

Mississippi Valley

Figure 118. Mississippi Valley LWDA

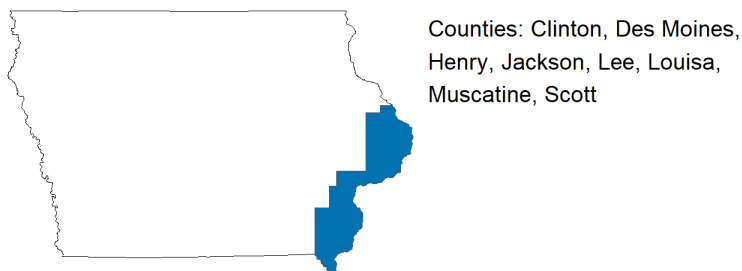
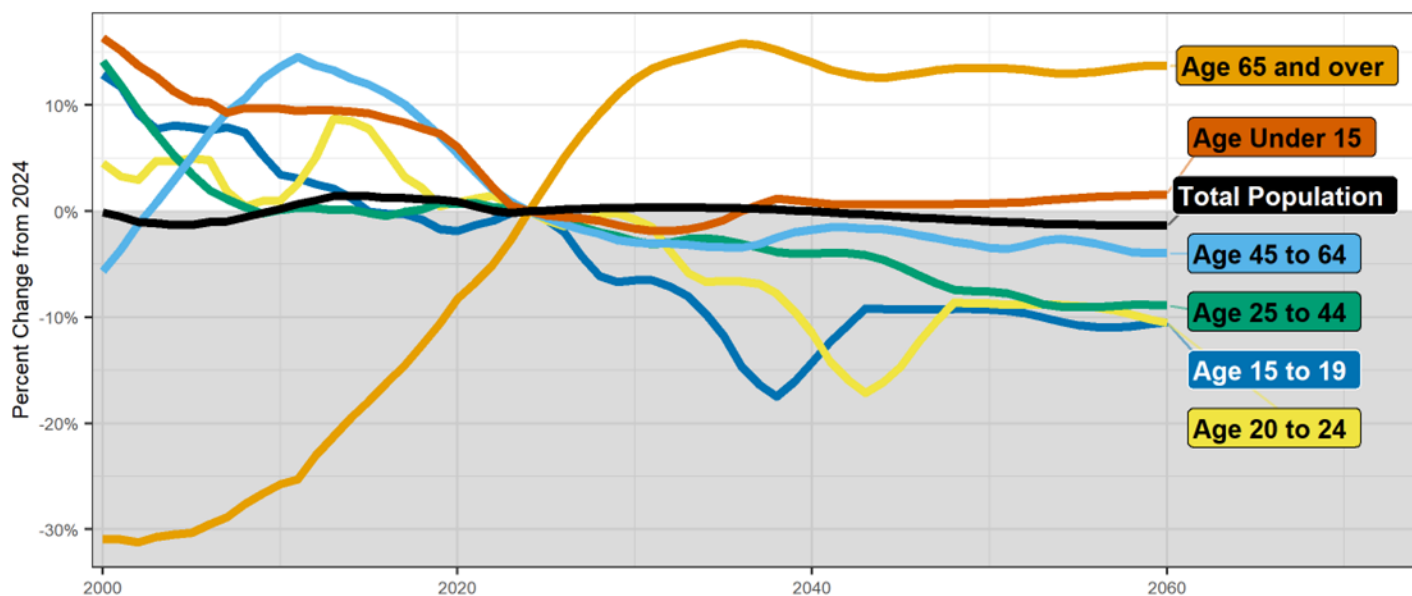
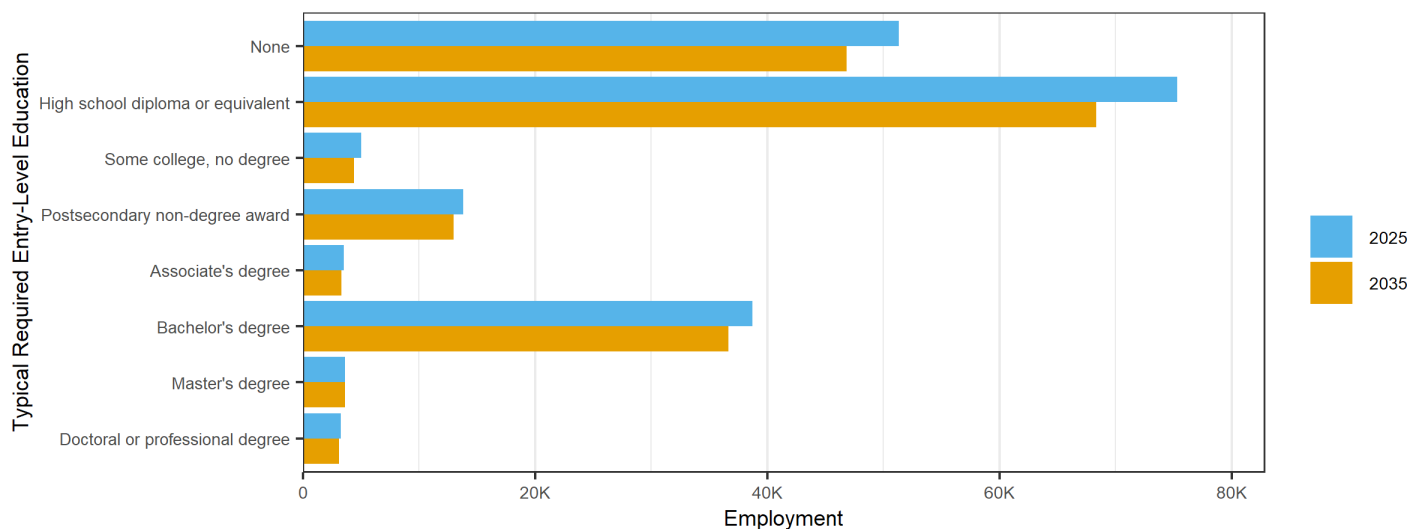


Figure 119. Mississippi Valley Projected Iowa Population Change from 2024, by Age Group



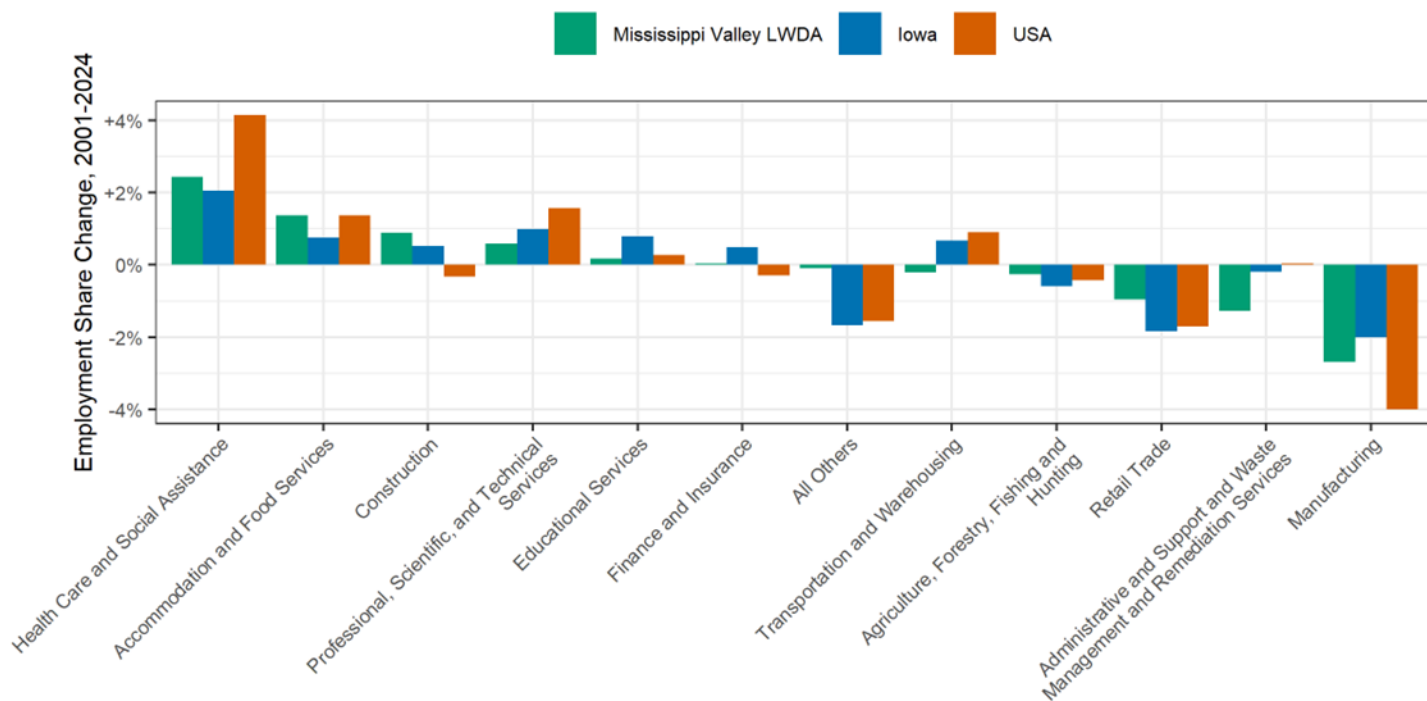
Source: 2025 Woods & Poole Economics, Inc. via the Iowa State Data Center.

Figure 120. Mississippi Valley Jobs by Typical Entry-Level Education, 2025 and 2035



Source: JobsEQ. Note: 2035 jobs are projections.

Figure 121. 2001-2024 Change in Share of Employment by Industry, Mississippi Valley, Iowa and USA



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q2.

Figure 122. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring a Postsecondary Certificate or Associate Degree, 2025-2035

Mississippi Valley LWDA,

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
25-2011	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	572	-0.6%	563	\$38,700
23-2011	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	192	-0.9%	212	\$53,100
31-2021	Physical Therapist Assistants	191	1.0%	122	\$64,700
29-1292	Dental Hygienists	146	-0.3%	268	\$85,400
29-2056	Veterinary Technologists and Technicians	129	-0.1%	141	\$43,100
29-2034	Radiologic Technologists and Technicians	99	-0.6%	230	\$68,400
43-4161	Human Resources Assistants, Except Payroll and Timekeeping	93	-1.7%	115	\$50,200
17-3023	Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technologists and Technicians	84	-1.3%	119	\$79,600
15-1231	Computer Network Support Specialists	80	-1.0%	163	\$73,200
17-3026	Industrial Engineering Technologists and Technicians	75	-1.1%	111	\$69,900
19-4031	Chemical Technicians	75	-0.9%	77	\$54,800
17-3011	Architectural and Civil Drafters	74	-0.7%	99	\$65,800
17-3022	Civil Engineering Technologists and Technicians	66	-0.9%	95	\$70,000
31-2011	Occupational Therapy Assistants	66	0.7%	52	\$64,200
19-4013	Food Science Technicians	64	-0.7%	47	\$51,300

Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

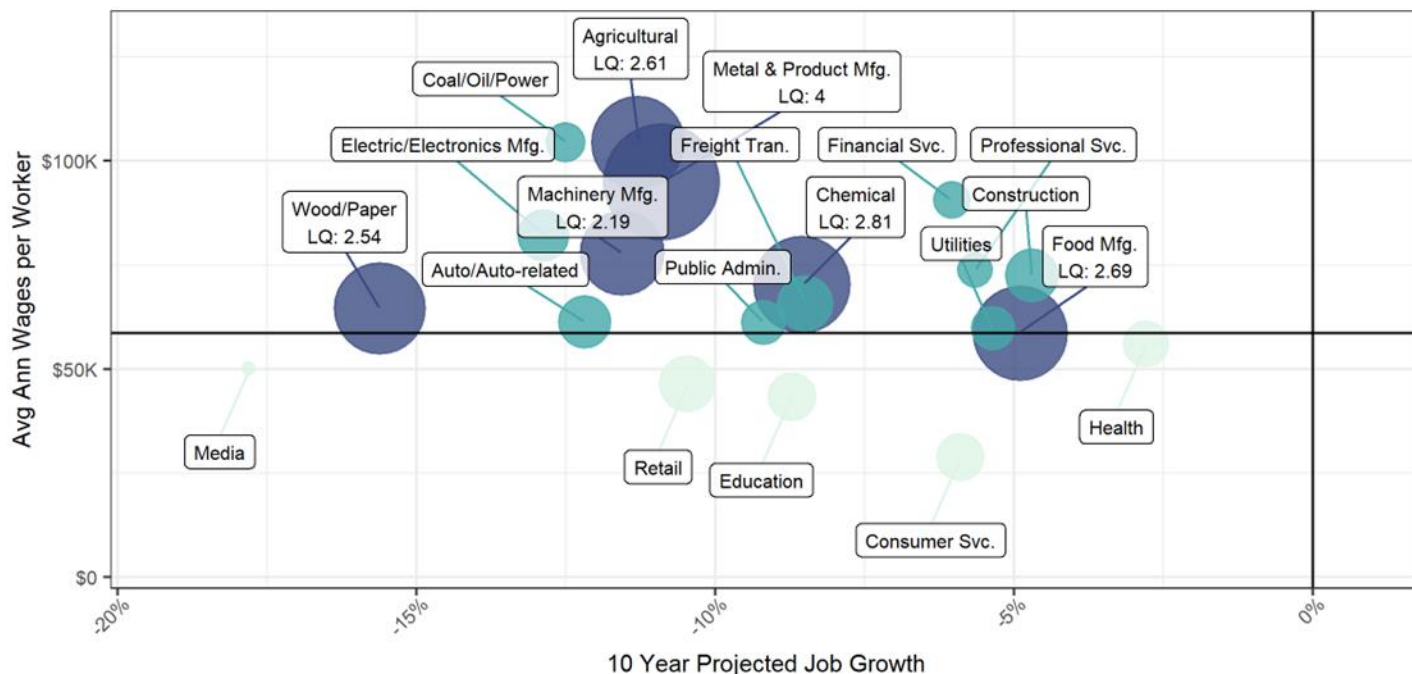
Figure 123. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring At Least a Bachelor's Degree, 2025-2035

Mississippi Valley LWDA

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	2,673	-0.7%	3,963	\$105,200
29-1141	Registered Nurses	1,332	-0.6%	3,208	\$80,000
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	997	-1.0%	1,833	\$58,500
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	996	-0.6%	1,537	\$83,400
25-3031	Substitute Teachers, Short-Term	786	-0.6%	731	\$37,600
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	740	-0.6%	960	\$83,000
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Ed	706	-1.0%	1,383	\$62,400
13-1071	Human Resources Specialists	654	-0.5%	912	\$78,900
11-9199	Managers, All Other	634	-0.6%	965	\$130,500
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	629	-0.5%	826	\$83,800
11-3031	Financial Managers	603	0.4%	851	\$140,400
11-9111	Medical and Health Services Managers	589	1.1%	697	\$117,600
15-1252	Software Developers	485	0.2%	936	\$115,100
13-1023	Purchasing Agents, Except Wholesale, Retail, and Farm Products	475	-0.5%	484	\$80,800
13-1082	Project Management Specialists	465	-0.6%	792	\$103,100

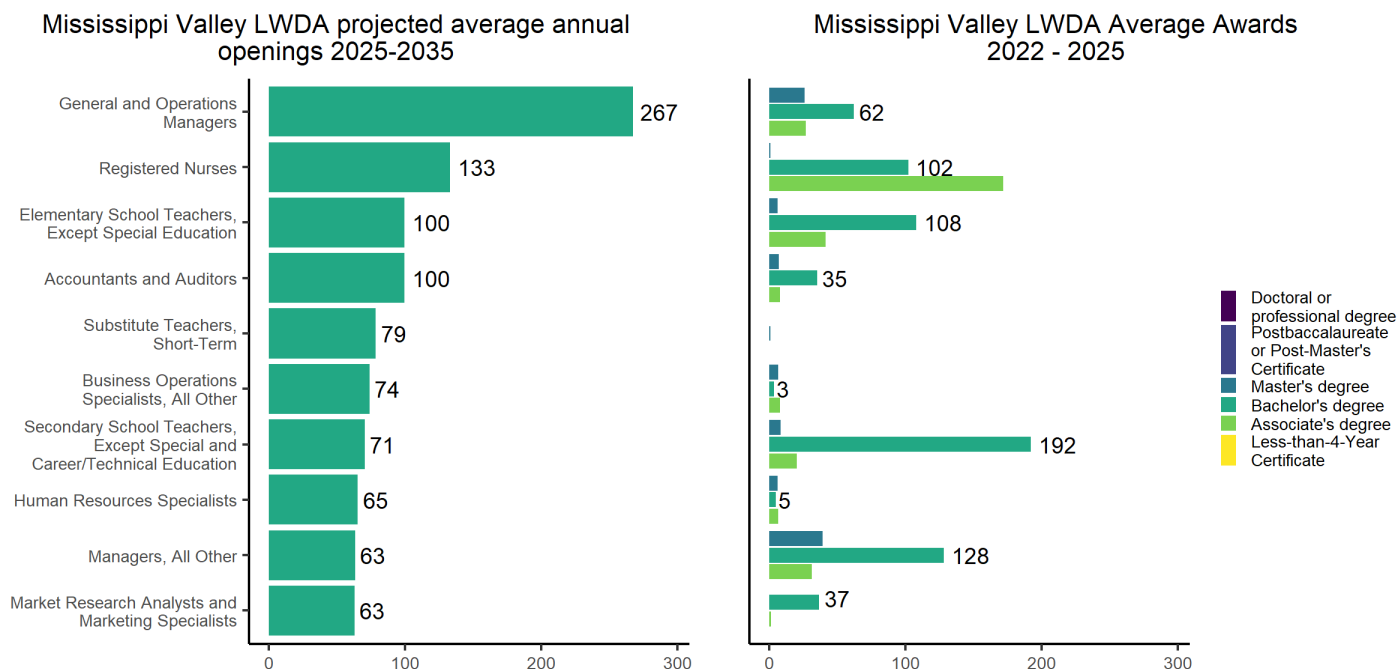
Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

Figure 124. Mississippi Valley LWDA Comparative Advantage by Industry Cluster



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q3. Bubble size reflects the 4-quarter average Location Quotient (LQ). Only industry clusters with an LQ higher than .5 are displayed. Darker colors indicate more advantages: Above-average wages, projected job growth, and/or local competitive advantage (as measured by Location Quotient).

Figure 125. Top 10 Mississippi Valley Jobs that Require Postsecondary Education by Average Annual Openings and Related Educational Supply



Sources and Notes: Occupational Projections from JobsEQ. Awards data for private institutions is the 2022-2024 average of all awards at institutions located in the region, sourced from NCES IPEDS Completions Survey cYYYY_a final release files. Awards data for public institutions is the 2023-2025 average of awards earned by residents of the region at all Iowa public institutions, plus awards earned by nonresidents at institutions located in the region, sourced from the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa Board of Regents. Displays the top 10 occupations in the region, ranked by average annual openings, that typically require at least an associate degree. Awards are displayed at each occupation's typical entry level of education plus one level below and one level above. Programs and occupations are linked using JobsEQ's mapping. Awards in programs linked to multiple occupations are allocated based on each occupation's projected average annual openings. Occupation colors represent the typical entry level of education.

Northeast Iowa/Central Rivers

Figure 126. Northeast Iowa LWDA/Central Rivers AEA

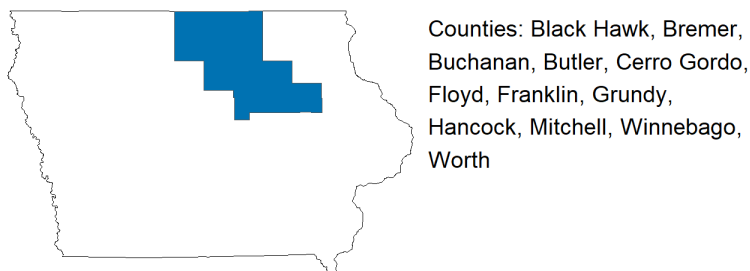
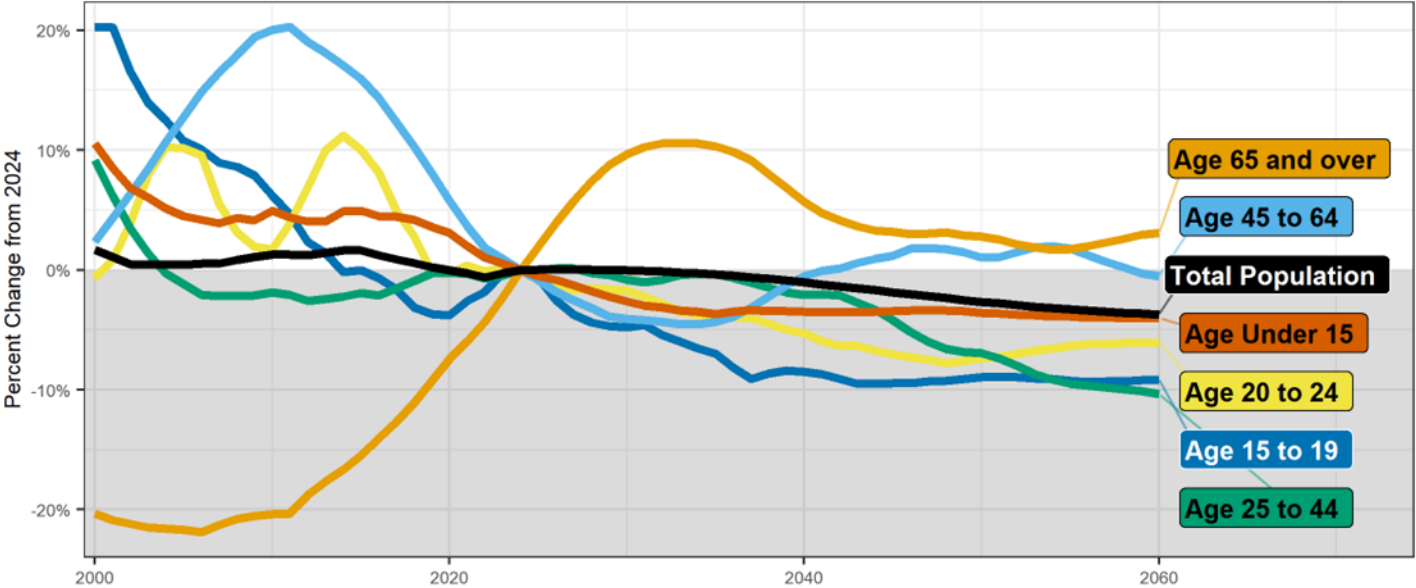
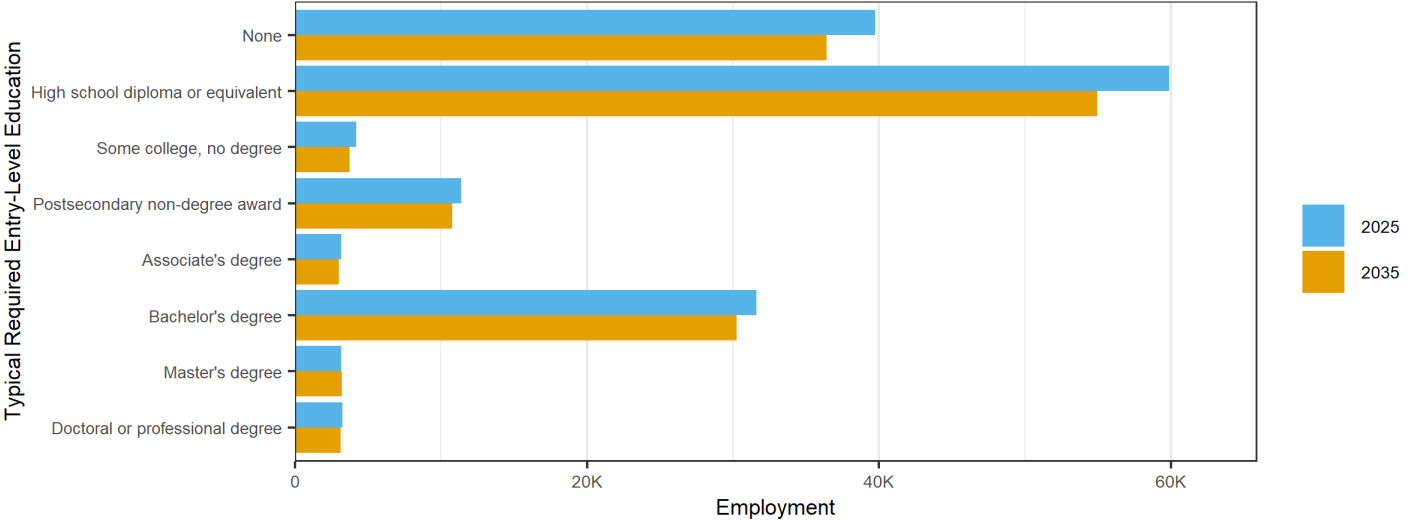


Figure 127. Northeast Iowa/Central Rivers Projected Iowa Population Change from 2024, by Age Group



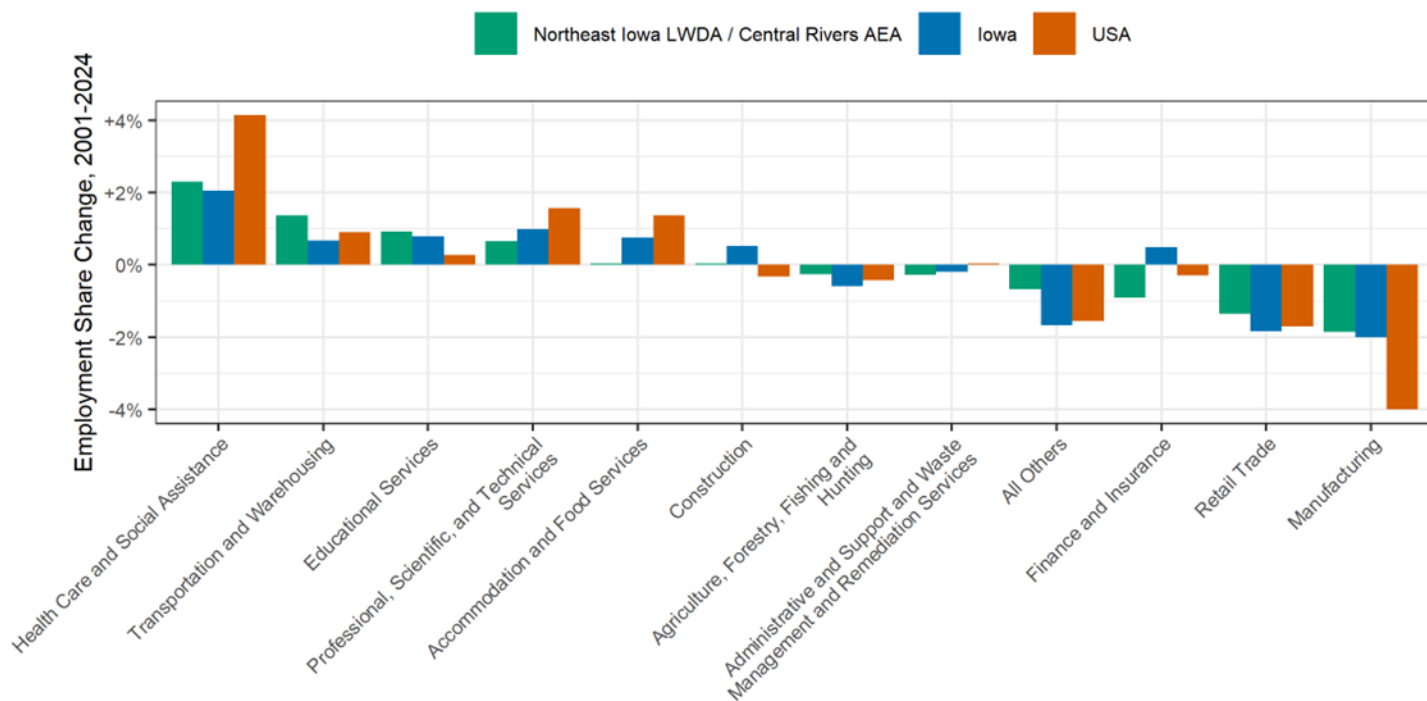
Source: 2025 Woods & Poole Economics, Inc. via the Iowa State Data Center.

Figure 128. Northeast Iowa/Central Rivers Jobs by Typical Entry-Level Education, 2025 and 2035



Source: JobsEQ. Note: 2035 jobs are projections.

Figure 129. 2001-2024 Change in Share of Employment by Industry, Northeast Iowa/Central Rivers, Iowa and USA



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q2.

Figure 130. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring a Postsecondary Certificate or Associate Degree, 2025-2035

Northeast Iowa LWDA / Central Rivers AEA

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
25-2011	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	685	-0.4%	655	\$35,900
31-2021	Physical Therapist Assistants	170	0.9%	110	\$61,000
23-2011	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	166	-0.9%	181	\$52,800
29-2034	Radiologic Technologists and Technicians	106	-0.7%	252	\$68,400
29-1292	Dental Hygienists	105	-0.3%	192	\$85,400
29-2056	Veterinary Technologists and Technicians	104	0.0%	111	\$42,500
19-4012	Agricultural Technicians	81	-0.5%	58	\$42,100
43-4161	Human Resources Assistants, Except Payroll and Timekeeping	71	-1.6%	86	\$50,000
15-1231	Computer Network Support Specialists	64	-0.9%	129	\$66,600
19-4099	Life, Physical, and Social Science Technicians, All Other	64	-0.6%	58	\$49,500
31-2011	Occupational Therapy Assistants	64	0.6%	51	\$66,500
17-3026	Industrial Engineering Technologists and Technicians	60	-0.9%	86	\$62,000
29-1126	Respiratory Therapists	59	0.1%	120	\$70,800
19-4031	Chemical Technicians	55	-0.6%	53	\$55,200
39-4031	Morticians, Undertakers, and Funeral Arrangers	54	-0.7%	53	\$70,500

Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

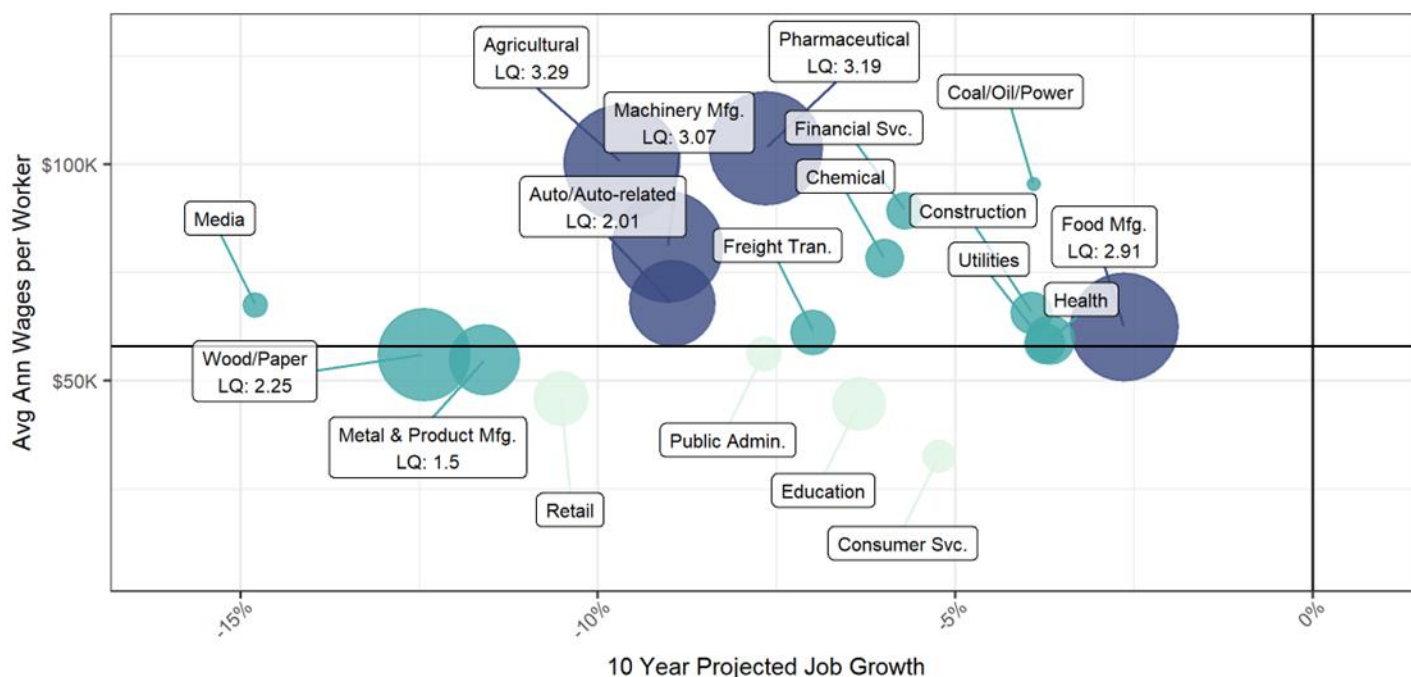
Figure 131. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring At Least a Bachelor's Degree, 2025-2035

Northeast Iowa LWDA / Central Rivers AEA

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	2,030	-0.6%	2,972	\$96,200
29-1141	Registered Nurses	1,377	-0.7%	3,360	\$77,100
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	868	-0.7%	1,496	\$58,000
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	753	-0.5%	1,148	\$81,700
25-3031	Substitute Teachers, Short-Term	683	-0.3%	607	\$40,100
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	627	-0.7%	1,146	\$61,700
11-9199	Managers, All Other	580	-0.4%	852	\$110,900
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	560	-0.5%	722	\$68,500
11-9111	Medical and Health Services Managers	525	1.0%	633	\$109,300
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	479	-0.4%	622	\$69,900
11-3031	Financial Managers	477	0.5%	662	\$131,400
13-1071	Human Resources Specialists	465	-0.4%	645	\$68,800
25-2022	Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	395	-0.7%	681	\$57,800
13-1023	Purchasing Agents, Except Wholesale, Retail, and Farm Products	384	-0.4%	385	\$74,700
15-1252	Software Developers	373	0.4%	699	\$116,500

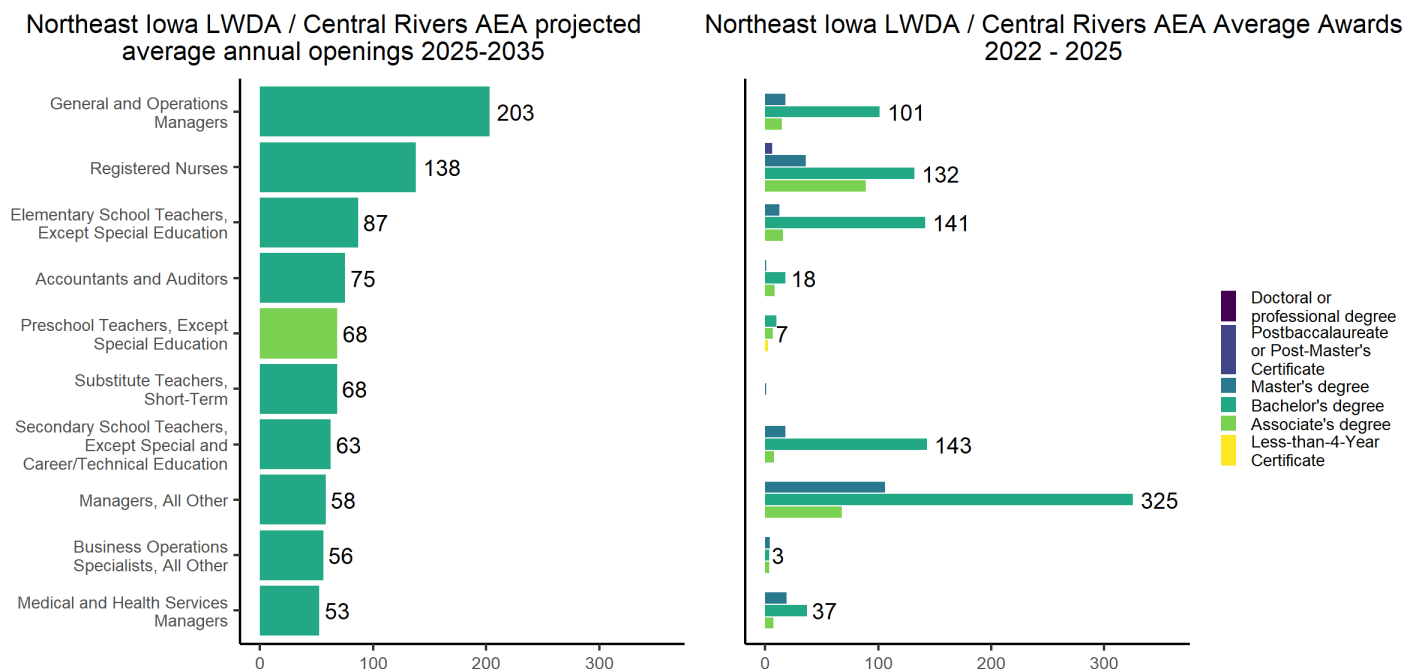
Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

Figure 132. Northeast Iowa LWDA/Central Rivers AEA Comparative Advantage by Industry Cluster



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q3. Bubble size reflects the 4-quarter average Location Quotient (LQ). Only industry clusters with an LQ higher than .5 are displayed. Darker colors indicate more advantages: Above-average wages, projected job growth, and/or local competitive advantage (as measured by Location Quotient).

Figure 133. Top 10 Northeast Iowa/Central Rivers Jobs that Require Postsecondary Education by Average Annual Openings and Related Educational Supply



Sources and Notes: Occupational Projections from JobsEQ. Awards data for private institutions is the 2022-2024 average of all awards at institutions located in the region, sourced from NCES IPEDS Completions Survey cYYYY_a final release files. Awards data for public institutions is the 2023-2025 average of awards earned by residents of the region at all Iowa public institutions, plus awards earned by nonresidents at institutions located in the region, sourced from the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa Board of Regents. Displays the top 10 occupations in the region, ranked by average annual openings, that typically require at least an associate degree. Awards are displayed at each occupation's typical entry level of education plus one level below and one level above. Programs and occupations are linked using JobsEQ's mapping. Awards in programs linked to multiple occupations are allocated based on each occupation's projected average annual openings. Occupation colors represent the typical entry level of education.

Northeast Iowa/Keystone

Figure 134. Northeast Iowa LWDA/Keystone AEA

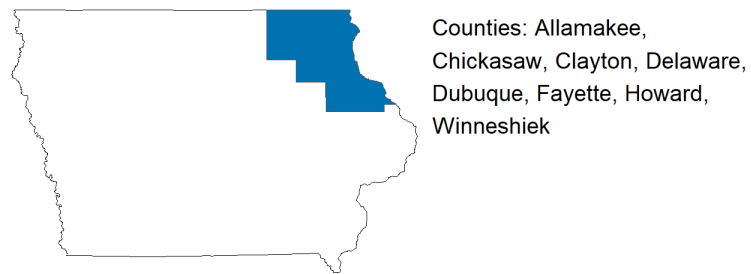
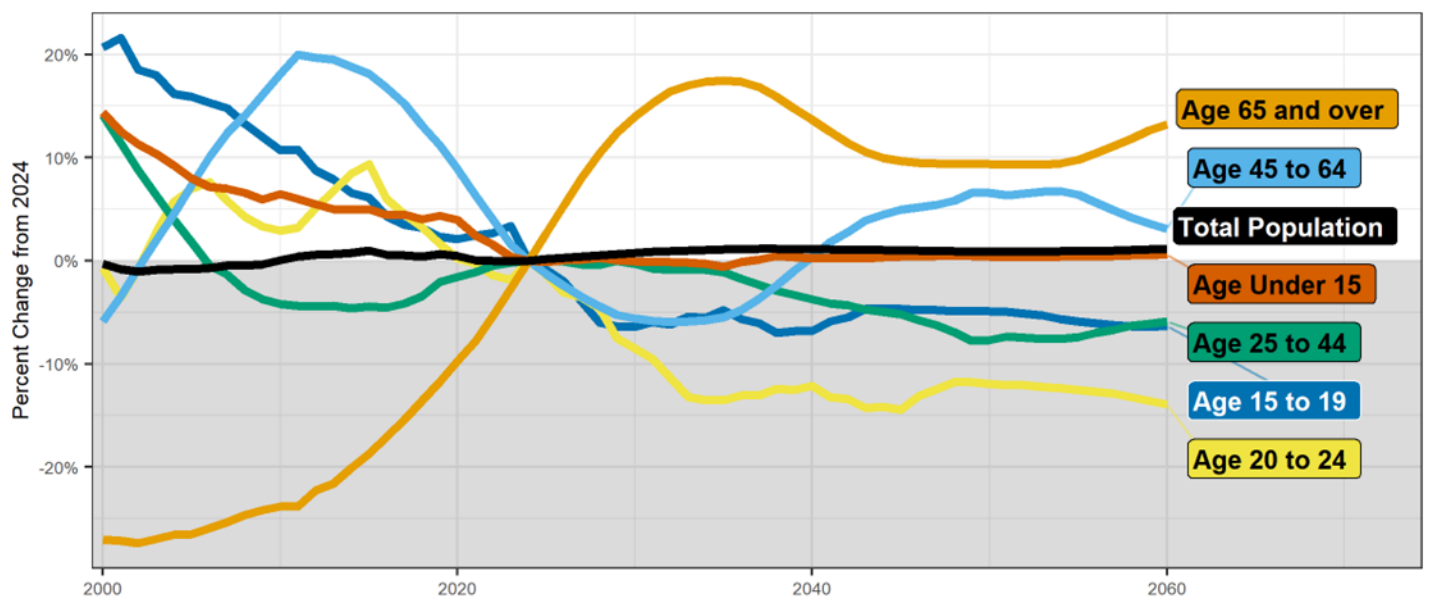
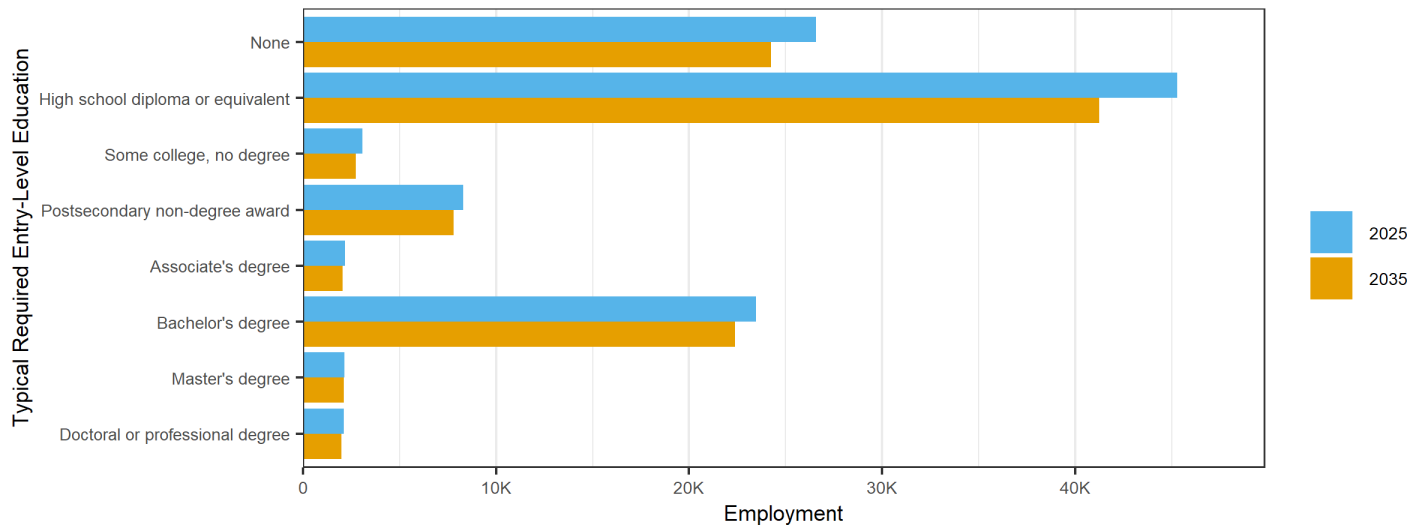


Figure 135. Northeast Iowa/Keystone Projected Iowa Population Change from 2024, by Age Group



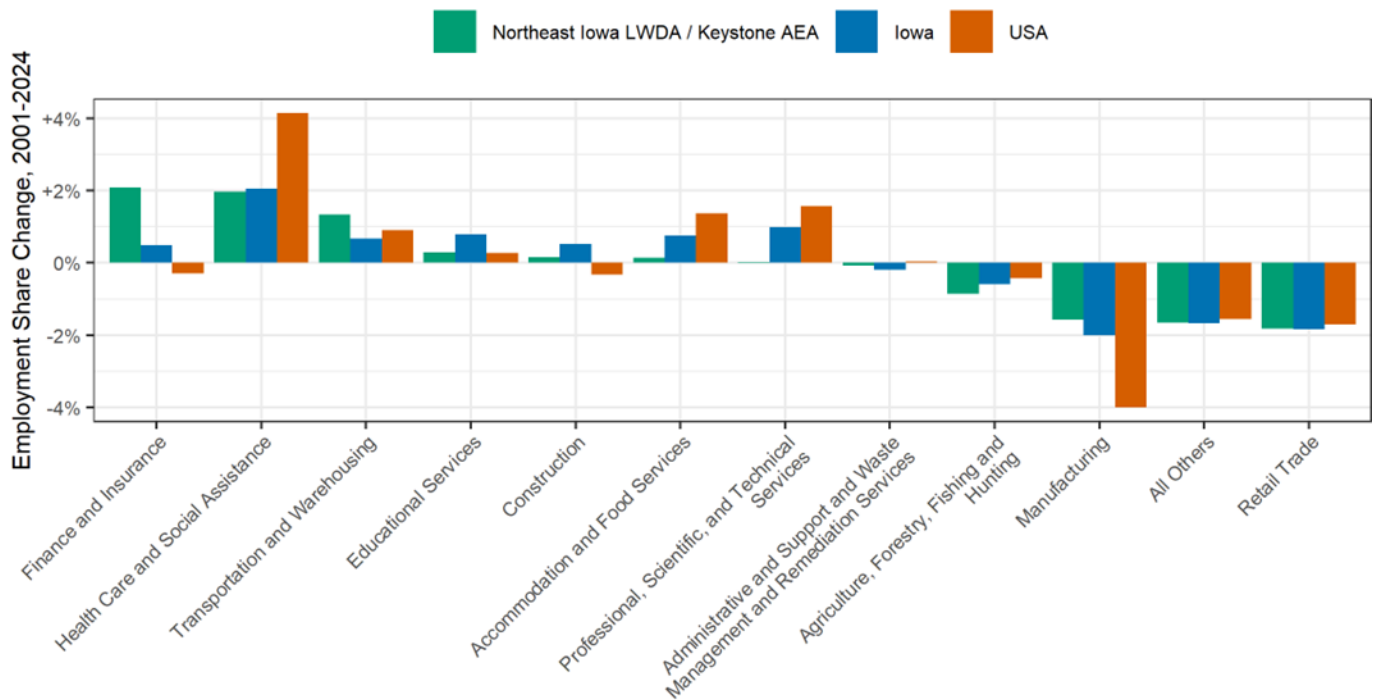
Source: 2025 Woods & Poole Economics, Inc. via the Iowa State Data Center.

Figure 136. Northeast Iowa/Keystone Jobs by Typical Entry-Level Education, 2025 and 2035



Source: JobsEQ. Note: 2035 jobs are projections.

Figure 137. 2001-2024 Change in Share of Employment by Industry, Northeast Iowa/Keystone, Iowa and USA



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q2.

Figure 138. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring a Postsecondary Certificate or Associate Degree, 2025-2035

Northeast Iowa LWDA / Keystone AEA

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
25-2011	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	474	-0.5%	461	\$35,400
31-2021	Physical Therapist Assistants	117	0.8%	76	\$58,000
23-2011	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	103	-0.9%	113	\$54,300
29-1292	Dental Hygienists	84	-0.3%	152	\$83,500
29-2034	Radiologic Technologists and Technicians	71	-0.6%	163	\$65,900
29-2056	Veterinary Technologists and Technicians	64	-0.1%	69	\$41,600
43-4161	Human Resources Assistants, Except Payroll and Timekeeping	50	-1.6%	61	\$43,600
17-3011	Architectural and Civil Drafters	47	-0.6%	62	\$66,900
19-4012	Agricultural Technicians	47	-0.7%	34	\$40,500
49-9062	Medical Equipment Repairers	46	0.4%	50	\$63,800
19-4013	Food Science Technicians	46	-0.3%	32	\$50,900
15-1231	Computer Network Support Specialists	44	-1.0%	92	\$67,500
17-3026	Industrial Engineering Technologists and Technicians	43	-0.7%	60	\$65,800
31-2011	Occupational Therapy Assistants	41	0.6%	33	\$66,200
17-3023	Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technologists and Technicians	40	-0.6%	50	\$71,400

Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

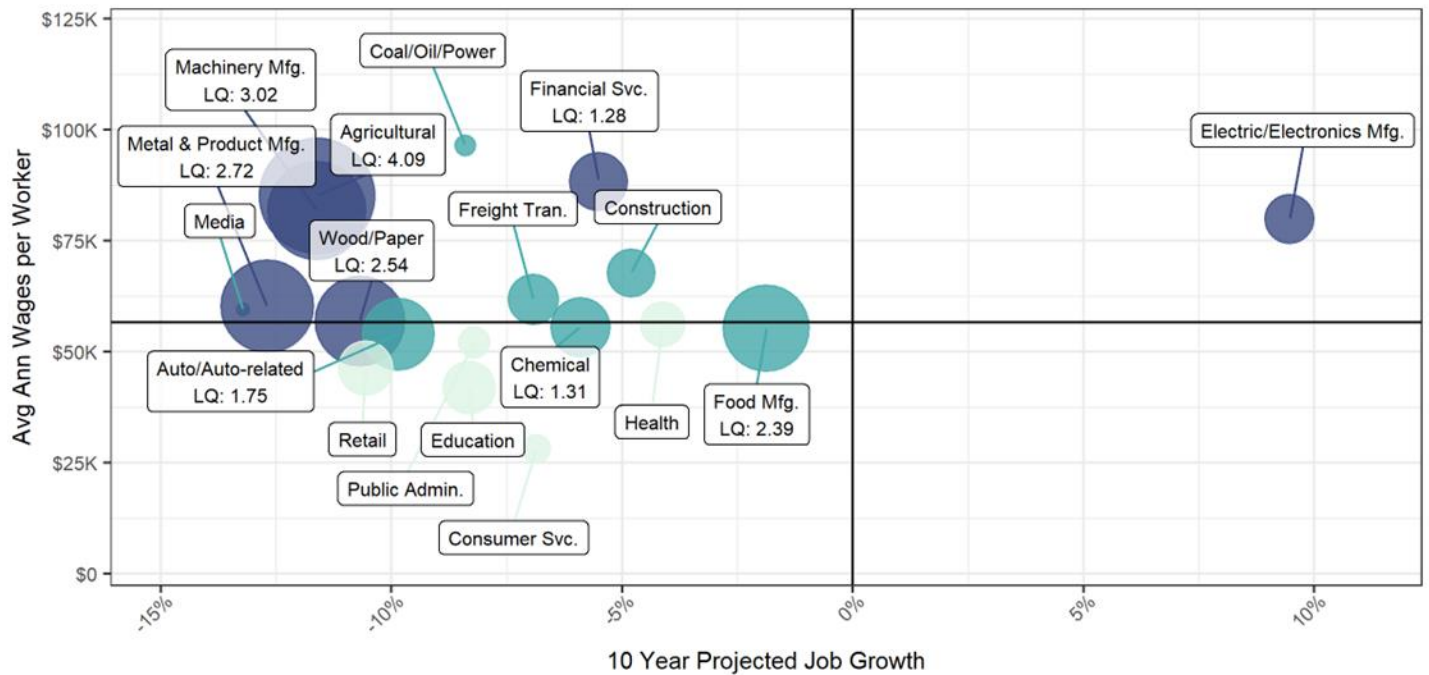
Figure 139. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring At Least a Bachelor's Degree, 2025-2035

Northeast Iowa LWDA / Keystone AEA

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	1,554	-0.6%	2,271	\$101,900
29-1141	Registered Nurses	941	-0.6%	2,259	\$75,800
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	657	-0.8%	1,169	\$55,600
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	624	-0.5%	949	\$78,600
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	472	-0.8%	896	\$58,000
25-3031	Substitute Teachers, Short-Term	456	-0.5%	418	\$38,600
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	407	-0.5%	525	\$76,300
11-3031	Financial Managers	398	0.5%	550	\$130,800
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	368	-0.4%	480	\$68,800
11-9111	Medical and Health Services Managers	368	1.1%	439	\$108,600
11-9199	Managers, All Other	356	-0.5%	531	\$115,600
13-1071	Human Resources Specialists	343	-0.4%	477	\$68,000
25-2022	Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	300	-0.8%	533	\$55,900
27-2022	Coaches and Scouts	298	-0.4%	251	\$51,100
13-1023	Purchasing Agents, Except Wholesale, Retail, and Farm Products	283	-0.3%	281	\$72,500

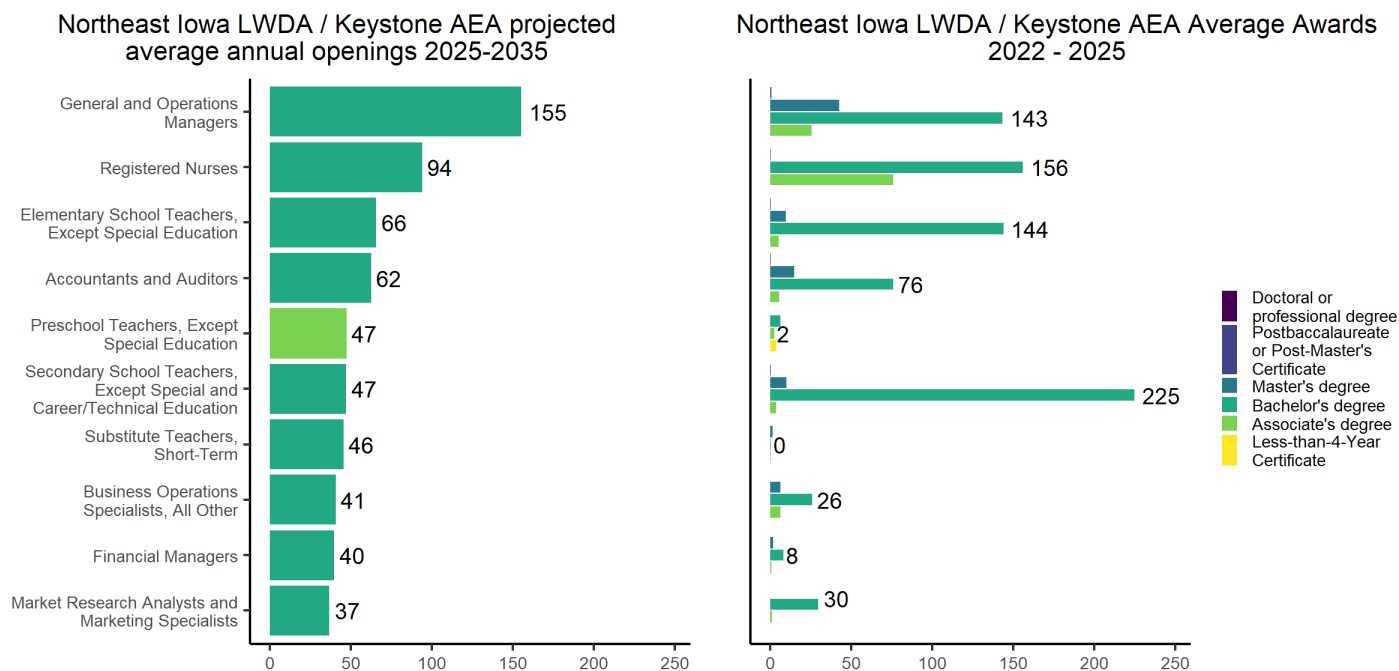
Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

Figure 140. Northeast Iowa LWDA/Keystone AEA Comparative Advantage by Industry Cluster



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q3. Bubble size reflects the 4-quarter average Location Quotient (LQ). Only industry clusters with an LQ higher than .5 are displayed. Darker colors indicate more advantages: Above-average wages, projected job growth, and/or local competitive advantage (as measured by Location Quotient).

Figure 141. Top 10 Northeast Iowa/Keystone Jobs that Require Postsecondary Education by Average Annual Openings and Related Educational Supply



Sources and Notes: Occupational Projections from JobsEQ. Awards data for private institutions is the 2022-2024 average of all awards at institutions located in the region, sourced from NCES IPEDS Completions Survey cYYYY_a final release files. Awards data for public institutions is the 2023-2025 average of awards earned by residents of the region at all Iowa public institutions, plus awards earned by nonresidents at institutions located in the region, sourced from the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa Board of Regents. Displays the top 10 occupations in the region, ranked by average annual openings, that typically require at least an associate degree. Awards are displayed at each occupation's typical entry level of education plus one level below and one level above. Programs and occupations are linked using JobsEQ's mapping. Awards in programs linked to multiple occupations are allocated based on each occupation's projected average annual openings. Occupation colors represent the typical entry level of education.

South Central Iowa

Figure 142. South Central Iowa LWDA

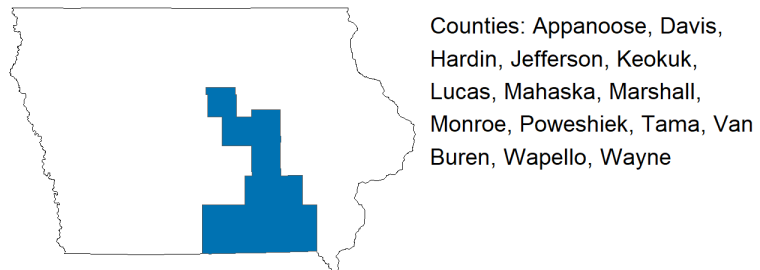
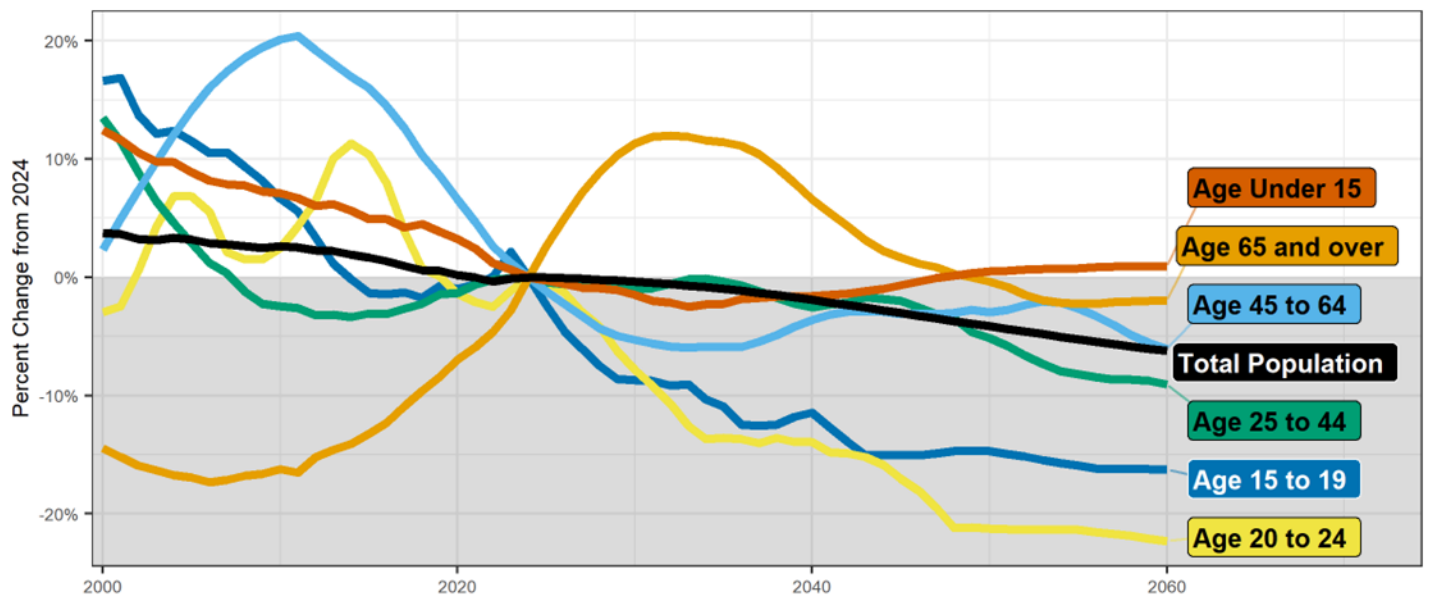
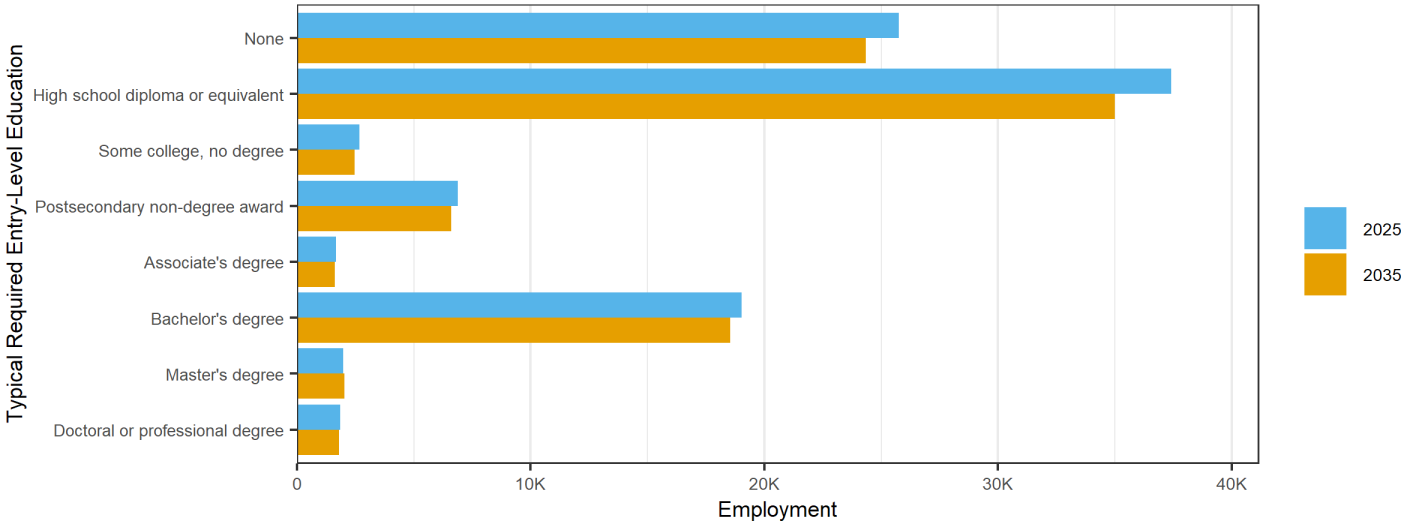


Figure 143. South Central Iowa Projected Iowa Population Change from 2024, by Age Group



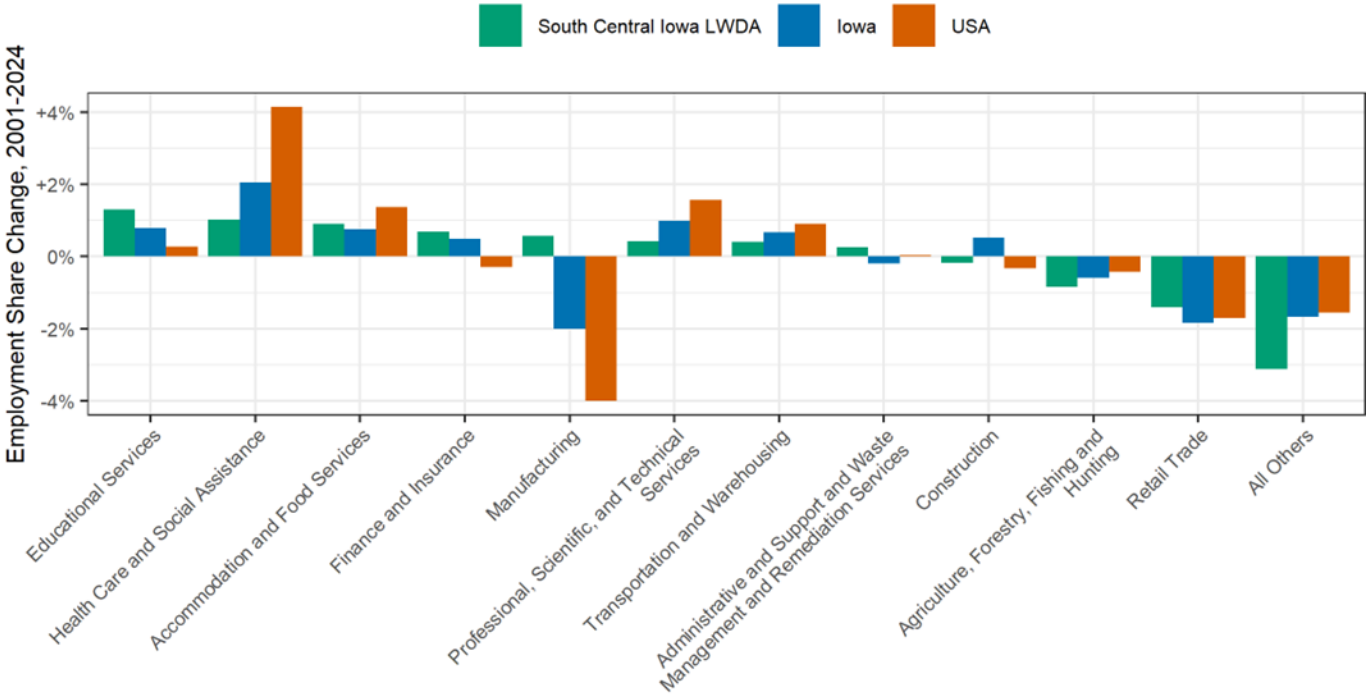
Source: 2025 Woods & Poole Economics, Inc. via the Iowa State Data Center.

Figure 144. South Central Iowa Projected Jobs by Typical Entry-Level Education, 2025 and 2035



Source: JobsEQ. Note: 2035 jobs are projections.

Figure 145. 2001-2024 Change in Share of Employment by Industry, South Central Iowa, Iowa and USA



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q2.

Figure 146. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring a Postsecondary Certificate or Associate Degree, 2025-2035

South Central Iowa LWDA

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
25-2011	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	316	-0.2%	292	\$38,000
31-2021	Physical Therapist Assistants	101	1.1%	64	\$62,800
23-2011	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	98	-0.6%	103	\$48,100
29-2056	Veterinary Technologists and Technicians	75	0.2%	78	\$41,200
19-4012	Agricultural Technicians	61	-0.3%	43	\$43,200
19-4013	Food Science Technicians	55	-0.1%	37	\$51,000
29-1292	Dental Hygienists	54	0.0%	93	\$87,000
29-2034	Radiologic Technologists and Technicians	51	-0.5%	114	\$68,000
43-4161	Human Resources Assistants, Except Payroll and Timekeeping	45	-1.4%	53	\$49,900
39-4031	Morticians, Undertakers, and Funeral Arrangers	45	-0.4%	42	\$72,400
31-2011	Occupational Therapy Assistants	40	0.8%	31	\$68,000
15-1231	Computer Network Support Specialists	36	-0.9%	73	\$67,300
17-3026	Industrial Engineering Technologists and Technicians	35	-0.7%	48	\$63,000
17-3023	Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technologists and Technicians	31	-0.7%	40	\$76,000
19-4099	Life, Physical, and Social Science Technicians, All Other	31	-0.4%	28	\$49,700

Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

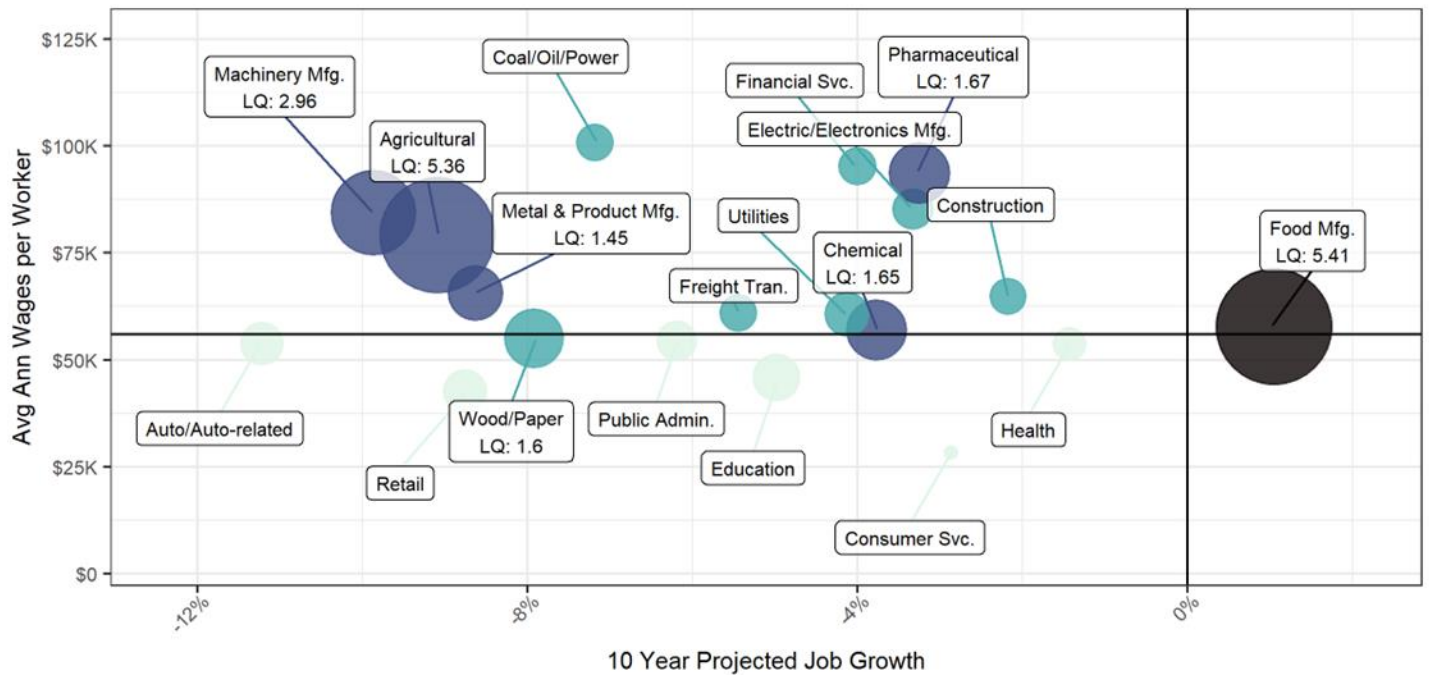
Figure 147. Top 15 Occupations with the Largest Forecasted Demand Typically Requiring At Least a Bachelor's Degree, 2025-2035

South Central Iowa LWDA

SOC	Occupation	10-Year Forecasted Demand (1)	Forecasted Annual Percent Growth	Current Employment 2025 (2)	Mean Annual Wage (3)
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	1,210	-0.4%	1,704	\$94,300
29-1141	Registered Nurses	712	-0.4%	1,616	\$78,500
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	688	-0.5%	1,136	\$54,200
25-3031	Substitute Teachers, Short-Term	507	-0.1%	437	\$34,400
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	489	-0.5%	857	\$55,700
11-9199	Managers, All Other	488	-0.2%	691	\$123,400
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	463	-0.3%	678	\$78,400
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	338	-0.4%	423	\$68,500
25-2022	Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	313	-0.5%	517	\$54,900
11-3031	Financial Managers	311	0.6%	419	\$125,300
11-9111	Medical and Health Services Managers	284	1.3%	327	\$113,500
13-1071	Human Resources Specialists	282	-0.2%	378	\$72,200
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	268	-0.3%	338	\$72,300
27-2022	Coaches and Scouts	243	-0.2%	200	\$44,300
13-1023	Purchasing Agents, Except Wholesale, Retail, and Farm Products	228	-0.2%	223	\$72,100

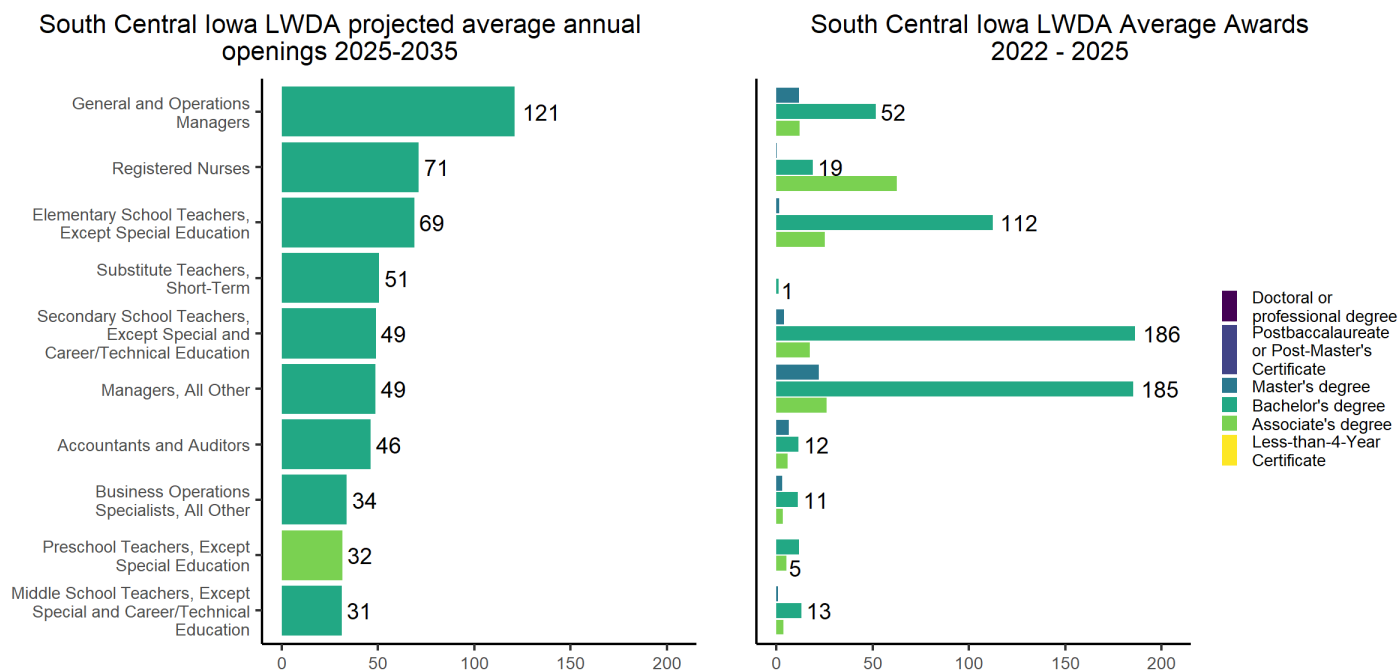
Source: JobsEQ. Data as of 2025Q2. (1) Forecasted demand includes expected new growth and vacancies due to workers leaving the occupation (exits and transfers). (2) Data based on a four-quarter moving average. (3) Wage data represents the average for all covered occupations.

Figure 148. South Central LWDA Comparative Advantage by Industry Cluster



Source: Jobs EQ. Data current through 2025Q3. Bubble size reflects the 4-quarter average Location Quotient (LQ). Only industry clusters with an LQ higher than .5 are displayed. Darker colors indicate more advantages: Above-average wages, projected job growth, and/or local competitive advantage (as measured by Location Quotient).

Figure 149. Top 10 South Central Iowa Jobs that Require Postsecondary Education by Average Annual Openings and Related Educational Supply



Sources and Notes: Occupational Projections from JobsEQ. Awards data for private institutions is the 2022-2024 average of all awards at institutions located in the region, sourced from NCES IPEDS Completions Survey cYYYY_a final release files. Awards data for public institutions is the 2023-2025 average of awards earned by residents of the region at all Iowa public institutions, plus awards earned by nonresidents at institutions located in the region, sourced from the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa Board of Regents. Displays the top 10 occupations in the region, ranked by average annual openings, that typically require at least an associate degree. Awards are displayed at each occupation's typical entry level of education plus one level below and one level above. Programs and occupations are linked using JobsEQ's mapping. Awards in programs linked to multiple occupations are allocated based on each occupation's projected average annual openings. Occupation colors represent the typical entry level of education.