

Baccalaureate Attainment Policies and Initiatives for Community College Students in the Great Lakes: Synthesis of the April 2024 Virtual Convening

By Debra D. Bragg

2024



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Bragg & Associates, Inc. and
Community College Baccalaureate Association (CCBA)

June 25, 2024

Overview

On April 23, 2024, Bragg & Associates, Inc. and the Community College Baccalaureate Association (CCBA) hosted a [virtual convening](#) on policies and programs to advance baccalaureate attainment for community college students in seven Great Lakes states. A panel of researchers, state policy leaders, and community college educators met to discuss how higher education systems and institutions in the Great Lakes states are working to create more affordable, high quality bachelor's degrees for community college students.

This brief highlights the major points and perspectives of the speakers and panelists. Presenters in order of appearance in the virtual convening follow. Click on the link to navigate directly to their remarks.

- [Emily Goldman](#), Joyce Foundation
- [Nicole Smith](#), Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW)
- [Debra Bragg](#), Bragg & Associates, Inc.
- [Tim Harmon](#), Workforce Enterprise Services, Inc.
- [Angela Kersenbrock](#), Community College Baccalaureate Association (CCBA)
- [Brian Durham](#), Illinois Community College Board (ICCB)
- [Jim Reed](#), Illinois Council of Community College Trustees (ICCTA)
- [Monica Hingst](#), Ivy Tech Community College
- [Brandy Johnson](#), Michigan Community College Association (MCCA)
- [Donald MacMaster](#), Alpena Community College
- [Rick Woodfield](#), Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC)
- [Cynthia Spiers](#), Rhodes State College
- [Kelly Gray](#), North Central State College

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Joyce Foundation and Emily Goldman, in particular, for supporting this study. The grant funding for this research and the virtual convening would not have been possible without Bragg & Associates' partnership with the Community College Baccalaureate Association (CCBA), with special thanks to Angela Kersenbrock and Shelley Ouellette for their enthusiastic support. Special thanks to Tim Harmon, who has been an invaluable thought partner throughout this journey, as well as to Colleen Pawlicki of Troy Street Professional Services, who helped create and bring this document to fruition. Last, a heartfelt appreciation goes to the presenters and participants in the virtual convening. Hopefully this brief will help disseminate lessons on advancement in baccalaureate attainment for community college students to a wider audience of higher education changemakers.

Recommended citation:

Bragg, D. D. (2024). *Baccalaureate attainment policies and initiatives for community college students: Synthesis of the April 2024 virtual convening*. Community College Baccalaureate and Bragg & Associates, Inc.

Introduction to Baccalaureate Attainment in the Great Lake States

Emily Goldman, [Joyce Foundation](#)

The Joyce Foundation invests in public policies and strategies to advance racial equity and economic mobility for the next generation across the Great Lakes region. We recognize a college degree is the surest path to social and economic mobility, fueling our investments in efforts to eliminate barriers to college access and success, particularly for students of color and students from low-income households.

While we have seen progress with degree attainment over the last decade, there are stubborn disparities in college access, transfer, and degree completion across race and income that limit higher education's impact as a vehicle for upward mobility. To improve the value of higher education, the Joyce Foundation funds research and policy to improve two- and four-year college outcomes, including building the evidence base on student success strategies, exploring strategies for improving baccalaureate degree completion for students who start at community college, and supporting efforts that build state and institutional capacity for implementing and scaling evidence-based completion strategies.

Across the Great Lakes region, states are looking to transfer to address enrollment declines, meet urgent workforce demands, and help diversify college campuses. Institutions are building robust partnerships and articulation agreements with local universities, states are adopting guaranteed admissions programs, and higher ed leaders are exploring direct admissions policies between community college and four-year institutions. These innovations have the potential to ease transfer pathways and help millions more community college students earn a bachelor's degree.

As an alternative strategy to boost access to four-year degrees for community college students, Joyce's support for research on CCB degrees has illuminated the potential for these degrees to help expand access to affordable, high quality bachelor's degrees in workforce demand areas while being part of a broader transfer and baccalaureate attainment ecosystem that offers increased access to bachelor's degrees for underserved students. Our conversation today provides an opportunity to look more deeply at these issues in the Great Lakes region, where the Joyce Foundation makes its home.

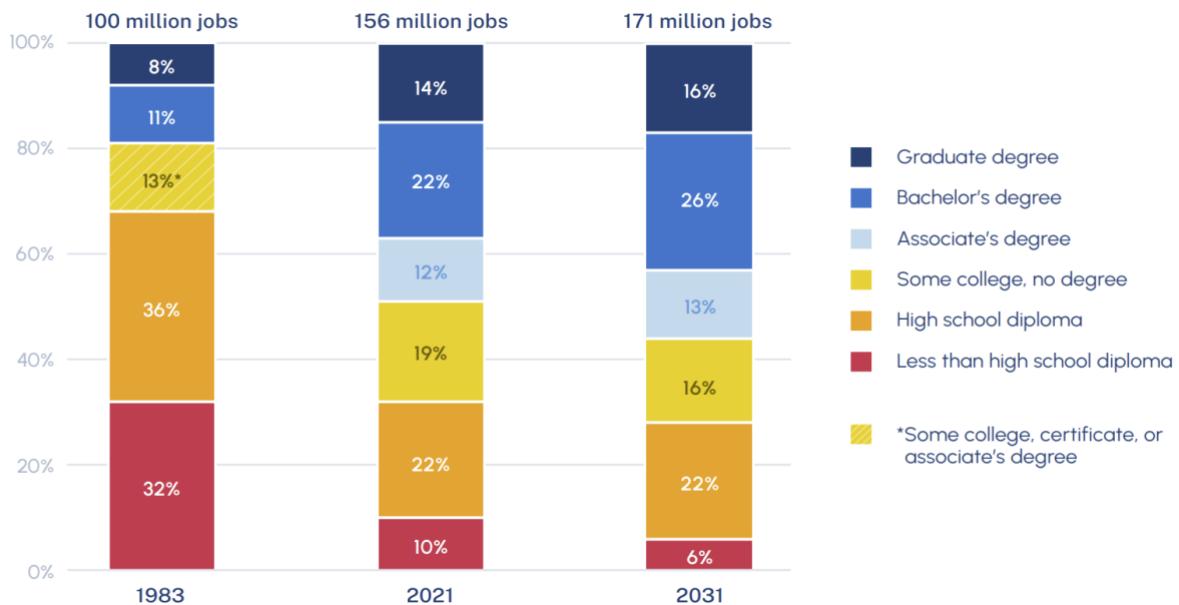
The Future of BAs: Projections of Jobs and Opportunities through 2031

Nicole Smith, *Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce (CEW)*

Over the past half century, postsecondary education has assumed a progressively more important role in career preparation in the United States. Having a college credential has become more valuable in the labor market but also more expensive, with the burden of paying for college increasingly falling on students. Despite the cost, national data on baccalaureate attainment shows bachelor's degrees continue to grow in importance across the workforce, including in blue collar and other jobs not previously requiring such degrees. So, while college is less affordable, particularly for students with households having a modest income, bachelor's degrees matter more than ever to finding good jobs.

New reports from the Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce (CEW), titled [After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training requirements through 2031](#), provide national and state-by-state analysis of educational attainment and jobs projections to answer the question of whether bachelor's degrees matter into the future. This research focuses on newly created jobs as well as existing jobs filled by individuals who are extending their working years. Figure 1 shows the distribution of jobs by education level in the baseline year of 2021 compared to 2031 and shows results for 1983. It reveals 26 percent of all jobs in the U.S. economy will require a bachelor's degree by 2031. Another 16 percent of all jobs will require graduate degrees. The number of jobs with a bachelor's degree increased from 11 to 22 percent from 1983 to 2021 and will continue to increase from 22 to 26 percent from 2021 to 2031. This change is the biggest of any degree type that CEW researchers studied, indicating the country needs to continue to graduate people at the baccalaureate level.

Figure 1. Comparison of the Distribution of Diplomas and Degrees by U.S. Jobs in 1983, 2021, and 2031



Source: *After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training requirements through 2031*, Figure 2, page 14.

Our analysis also shows the biggest and most significant change in education relative to employment appears for jobs at the bottom of the distribution. Here, we see a dramatic drop in the percentage of people who don't have a high school diploma, from 32 percent in 1983 to 10 percent in 2021, a decline that will continue by another 6 percent by 2031. We think this trend reflects the rise and fall of manufacturing, a very important sector in the U.S. However, despite the decline in the number of people working in manufacturing, due largely to automation, this sector still has an outsized impact on gross domestic product (GDP). Today, each worker in U.S. manufacturing contributes about \$300,000 to the GDP compared to 30 years ago, when a single manufacturing worker contributed about \$100,000.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of jobs projected by level of education and state in 2031, contributing to understanding how different state policies and strategies may help prepare students for employment. The percentage of jobs requiring a bachelor's or higher degree is higher in Illinois and Minnesota than other states in the Great Lakes region, with 40 percent of jobs in Illinois and 39 percent of jobs in Minnesota requiring a bachelor's or higher degree in 2031 (Figure 2). By contrast, 33 or 34 percent of jobs are projected to require a bachelor's or higher degree in the other states in the region by this date.

Figure 3 shows the U.S. economy divided by broad occupational classifications and education levels, where fields like education, STEM, managerial and professional jobs, and healthcare require a bachelor's degree. This is not unforeseen, but what is surprising is that blue-collar, skilled trades, sales and office support, food and personal services, and healthcare occupations are all associated with more bachelor's degrees than in earlier years. The shift in bachelor's degrees associated with blue-collar and skilled trades is important to understand because these jobs make up a very large proportion of workers in the U.S. economy. These results suggest that the U.S. will need more baccalaureate programs to meet workforce demand in a growing number of occupations.

Figure 2. Percentage of Jobs Projected by Level of Education and State in 2031

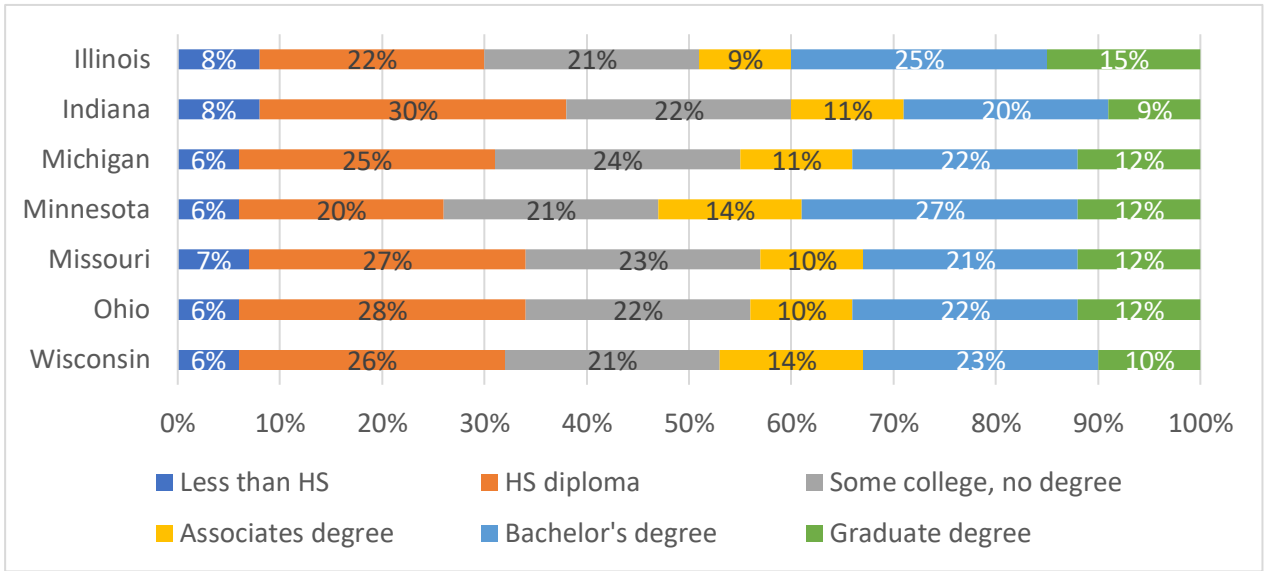
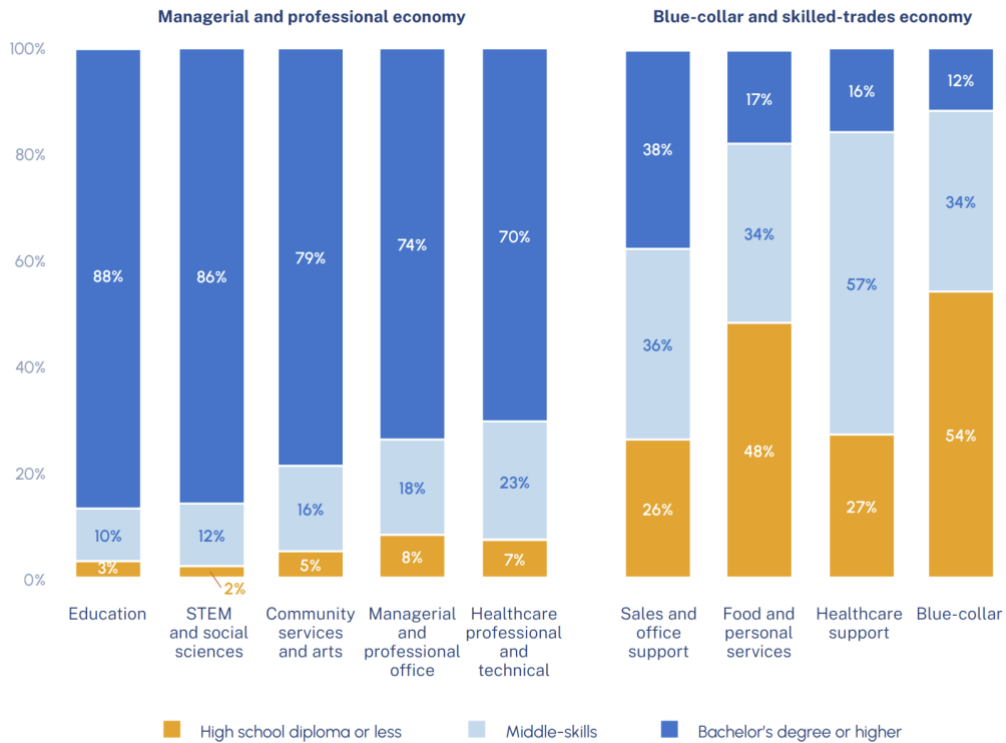


Figure 3. The U.S. Economy By Broad Occupational Classifications and Education Levels in 2031



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce forecast using data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS); US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS); US Bureau of Labor Statistics; IHS Markit LLC; and Lightcast.

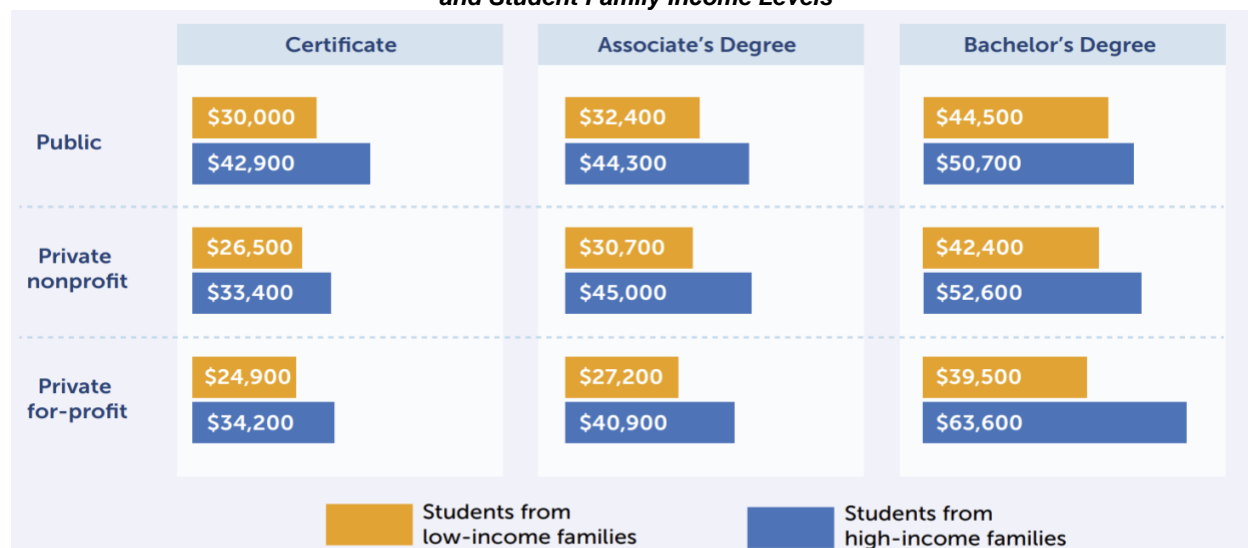
Note: Columns may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: *After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training requirements through 2031*, Figure 6, page 41.

Bachelor's degrees have come under fire in recent years, most likely due to the rising cost of tuition and claims of dubious long-run returns on investment for some degrees. However, our data show a substantial wage premium for bachelor's graduates relative to graduates with lesser credentials. Despite a range of potential earnings by education level, including some bachelor's earnings falling below associate earnings, we see lifetime earnings for bachelor's graduates far exceeding those with associate degrees only. Specifically, median lifetime earnings of associate degree graduates are \$2.9 million compared to \$4.1 million for bachelor's graduates, and even higher median earnings for students completing graduate degrees. These findings point to the need for counselors and advisors to guide students to select the best career pathways available to them. Consistent with the Joyce Foundation's commitment to equity, we need to position students for the best possible future employment and earnings.

Figure 4 shows median earnings for students from different socioeconomic backgrounds 10 years after enrolling in college by institutional control (public, private nonprofit, and private for-profit) and credential. We see consistently lower median earnings for students from low-income families than for students from high-income families regardless of institutional control and credential. Looking at students from low-income families specifically, median earnings are highest with a bachelor's degree from a public institution, at \$44,500. The gap between earnings for students from low-income families compared to students from high-income families is still sizeable, at \$6,200, but this is the smallest gap of all the median earnings comparisons. This gap in earnings is concerning, but the economic value of the bachelor's degree is substantial for students from low-income families.

Figure 4. Comparison of Earnings by Level of Credential, Institutional Control, and Student Family Income Levels



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of US Department of Education College Scorecard data, 2020.

We also found evidence that students' earning potential is related to the colleges and universities they attend and not only the credentials they earn. CEW's new report titled [Progress Interrupted](#) considers the Supreme Court's decision to strike down affirmative action and its impact on college outcomes, revealing the stratification of the nation's higher education systems by race and class. This report points to the importance of high school and college advising to inform students about their options and help higher education systems create more equitable pathways. While not a causal relationship, these data suggest strong association between students' family income and whether students attend a more selective or open-access college.

To review the full slide deck from Nicole Smith's presentation, click [here](#).

Baccalaureate Attainment in the Great Lake States

Debra Bragg, Bragg & Associates, Inc.

Since late 2023, Tim Harmon and I have been studying the baccalaureate attainment of community college students in seven Great Lakes states: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin. We researched six of these states (IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI) in 2020 when conducting a study of CCB degrees, and our current focus broadened to look at baccalaureate attainment policy and initiatives. We continued to study how CCBs fit in state baccalaureate attainment agendas, which led us to add Missouri to understand how these degrees are evolving since state CCB adoption in 2018.

To provide context for baccalaureate attainment for community college students in the Great Lakes region, we reviewed data on the percentage of the population age 25 or older with a bachelor's degree. Results from the U.S. Census show the average baccalaureate attainment rate varies from 38 percent in Minnesota to 28 percent in Indiana, with Illinois at 37 percent, Wisconsin at 32 percent, Michigan at 31 percent, and both Missouri and Ohio at 30 percent. As reference, the national average is 34 percent, indicating the Great Lakes region has states both above and below the national average.¹ These findings support Dr. Smith's recommendation to look at state-level data to appreciate how higher education policies and initiatives play out within and across states.

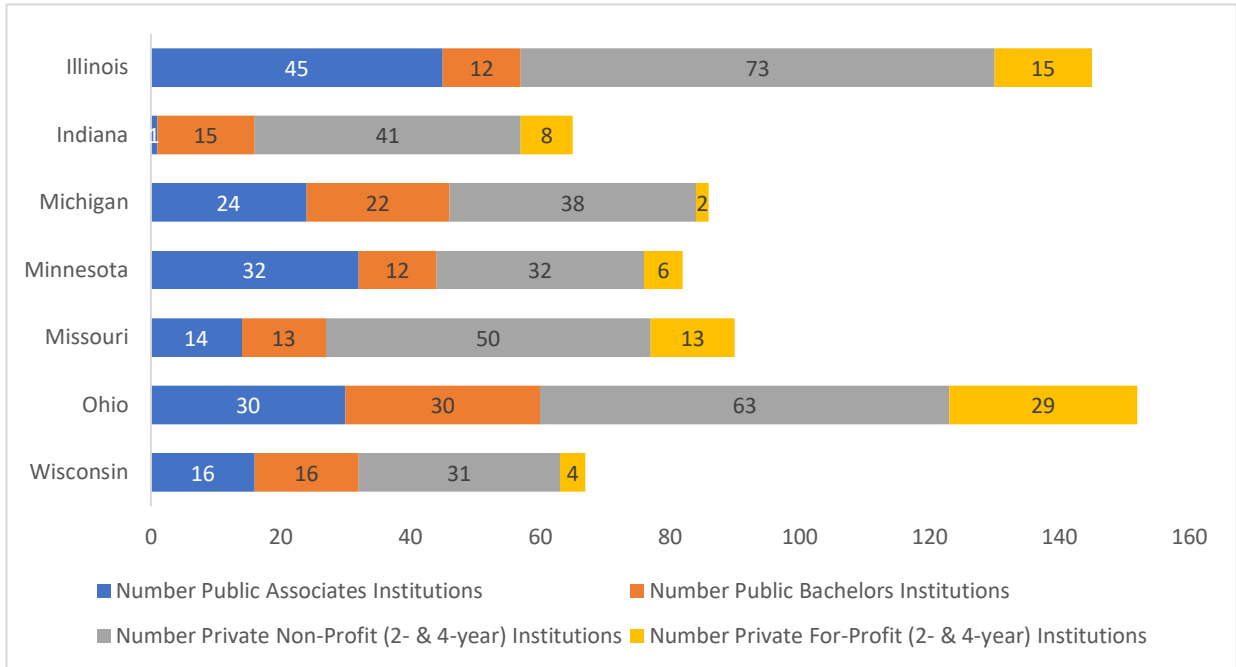
Figure 5 shows the number of public associate institutions, public bachelor's institutions, private nonprofit institutions (two- and four-year), and private for-profit institutions (two- and four-year) in each state, revealing a major difference in institutional composition in the Great Lakes region. Also, to understand the graph fully, it is important to know that Ivy Tech College in Indiana is treated as a single accredited institution by the U.S. Department of Education, despite having 45 locations. This fact creates the appearance of limited associate degree programming in Indiana relative to other states in the region, but this is not the case. Ivy Tech offers extensive enrollment at the associate-dominant college level, similar to other states in the Great Lakes region.

Understanding this caveat for Indiana, Figure 5 shows the largest total number of higher education institutions in Illinois and Ohio, the two states with the largest state populations. They have the largest number of public and private nonprofit institutions. Ohio's institutional count is also high relative to other states because of the large number of private for-profit institutions.

Figure 6 shows the number of higher education degrees conferred by the states and institutions that are included in Figure 5. The pattern of degree conferral is similar to results shown in Figure 5. Illinois and Ohio, which have a large number of higher education institutions, also offer a large number of degrees at the associate and bachelor's levels. Michigan stands out as a state offering a large number of bachelor's degrees relative to the number of institutions, exceeding the number of public bachelor's degrees conferred by Illinois and approaching the number conferred by Ohio. Indiana also offers a sizeable number of public bachelor's degrees relative to the total number of institutions in the state, exceeding the number conferred by Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin. One other pattern worth noting because of its uniqueness to the region is that Illinois confers a similar number of associate degrees (31,347), public bachelor's (31,517), and private nonprofit bachelor's (30,527).

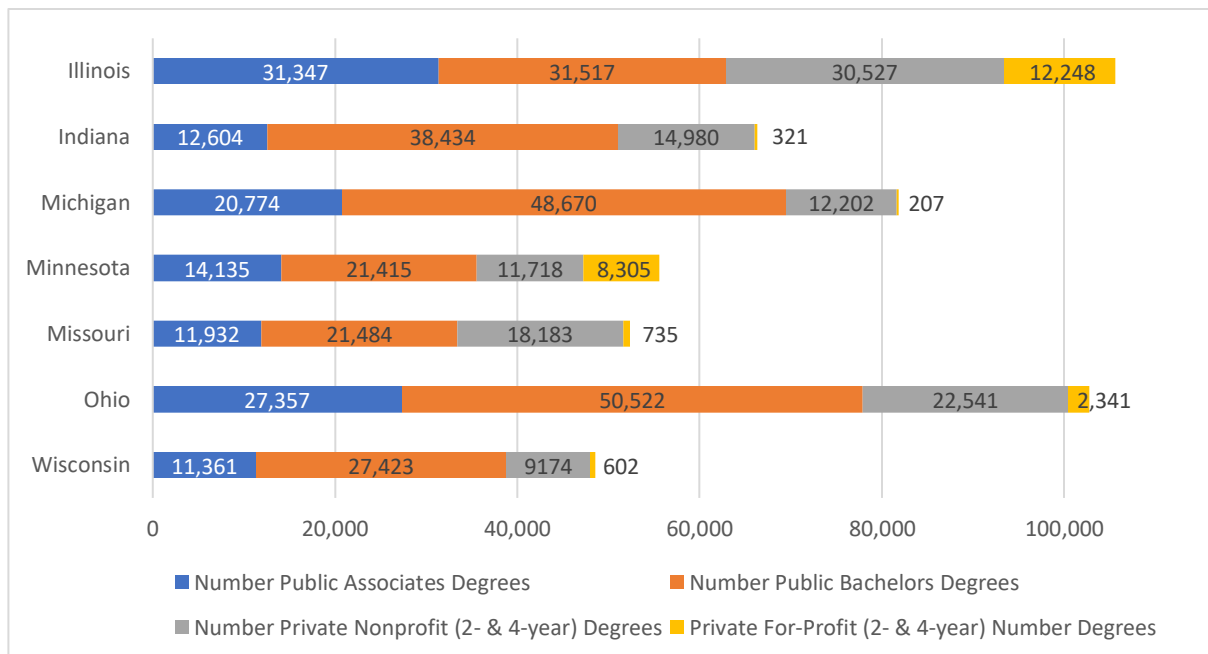
¹ U.S. Census, Quick Facts, Population estimates, July 1, 2023, [Bachelor's Degree or Higher, Percent of age 25 years+, 2018-2022](#).

Figure 5. Number of Higher Education Institutions by Control, Classification, and State for Academic Year 2022-23



Source: Digest of Education Statistics, [Table 317.20](#). Degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by control and classification of institution and state or jurisdiction: Academic Year 2022-23.

Figure 6. Number of Higher Education Degrees by Control, Level, and State for Academic Year 2021-22



Source: Digest of Education Statistics, [Table 319.10](#). Degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by control of institution, level of degree, and state or jurisdiction: Academic year 2021-22.

Understanding patterns of degree conferral is helpful to understanding the baccalaureate attainment landscape in the Great Lakes region. To delve more deeply, we interviewed higher education leaders in the seven states to surface six major themes related to the baccalaureate attainment of community college students. Some of what we learned is echoed in our earlier brief titled [Prospects for Scaling Community College Baccalaureates in Six Great Lakes States](#), but we also found new developments, including efforts to recover and grow enrollment, reform state funding, improve transfer pathways, and address gaps in outcomes for historically marginalized student groups.

Table 1. Major Themes in Baccalaureate Attainment for Community College Students in the Great Lakes

| Major Theme | Examples |
|--|---|
| Policy and structural shifts to address higher education enrollment and funding declines | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused advocacy to recover enrollment • Institutional mergers and closures • State coordinated task forces |
| Address inequities in baccalaureate attainment, including affordability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackle student affordability • Reform state funding of higher education • Close racial equity gaps in outcomes |
| Align higher education and workforce development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forge industry partnerships • Use data analytics to address workforce needs |
| Invest in transfer and articulation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve articulation agreements • Address loss of credit in the transfer process • Streamline transfer pathways |
| Incent consortia and partnerships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support new models and innovation to improve student outcomes |
| Engage leaders in strategic change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore mission differentiation and institutional roles • Endorse data-driven decision-making |

Most leaders spoke about enrollment declines in higher education institutions in their states, especially community colleges and public regional universities, but also private institutions. Noting that enrollment declines and dropping revenues resulted in mergers or closures, Great Lakes leaders observed enrollments were declining before COVID. To this point, Wisconsin plans to [merge](#) the University of Wisconsin two-year liberal arts colleges with four-year institutions and [shutter](#) the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee’s branch campus in Waukesha. Though not unique to Wisconsin, these challenges, heightened during the pandemic, are contributing to longer term structural changes moving forward.

Whereas higher education leaders recognized gaps in outcomes for students of color, we found several states attempting to tackle affordability issues as a particular contributor to inequities in baccalaureate attainment. State leaders from Illinois, Michigan, and Minnesota expressed concerns about how the high cost of college is disproportionately affecting completion for racially minoritized students. Illinois is exploring [large-scale higher education funding reform](#) at public universities, with an eye toward funding reform for community colleges. Minnesota is focusing on student affordability in its new [North Star Promise](#) Scholarship program, which is scheduled to begin fall 2024. The North Star Promise offers a “tuition and fee-free pathway to higher education for eligible [Minnesota residents](#) at eligible institutions as a ‘last-dollar’ program by covering the balance of tuition and fees remaining after other scholarships, grants, stipends and tuition waivers have been applied.” Minnesota state leaders attributed enrollment increases in fall 2024 to these new financial awards.

We also heard from state leaders in Michigan, Missouri, and Ohio who are linking postsecondary preparation to growing industry sectors and workforce needs. In these states, projected job growth in healthcare, manufacturing, and information technology were identified as important to preparing a diverse workforce. Community colleges are vital to workforce development and good jobs. As an example, partnerships between [Intel](#) and all levels of education in Ohio, including community colleges, are being forged to fill gaps in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workforce. Intel’s major investment of \$20 billion is helping to construct two leading-edge chip factories in Licking County. Similarly, \$2 million of Michigan state money is being invested in community college and university

partnerships to create [new pathways](#) from the Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) to Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), helping to address the state's nursing shortage.

We also heard about the Great Lakes states investing in transfer and articulation. Across the region, we found states seeking to improve transfer, with intentional recognition that transfer reforms of the past have not been especially effective for community college students. In Indiana and Wisconsin, where technical education predominates the two-year college landscape, community and technical colleges are creating pathways with transfer options. In both of these states, transfer is assuming a larger role as bachelor's degrees are rising in importance to securing well-paying jobs. For example, [agreements](#) struck by the Wisconsin Technical College System allow AAS students to transfer to public and private universities in Wisconsin or across state lines.

Also linked to transfer reform, we see states encouraging collaborations and partnerships, including creating consortia involving two- and four-year institutions. The nursing consortium in Michigan is a good example of community colleges and universities coming together to address sectorial workforce needs. Another example of collaboration is occurring in the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) in Illinois. Created through [Public Act 102-0174](#) and a state investment of [\\$200 million](#), the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) are creating a consortium "...to serve the needs of the incumbent early childhood workforce and the employers of early childhood educators and to advance racial equity while meeting the needs of employers by streamlining, coordinating, and improving accessibility of degree completion...at Illinois institutions of higher education."

Finally, since conducting our earlier research in the Great Lakes states, we have seen considerable changes in leadership, including changes in state agency and political leadership. In several states, we learned of leadership changes that affected priorities in areas such as higher education funding; diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); and transfer and articulation, including CCB-degree authorization and growth of programming, such as occurred in [Missouri](#). Comparing our earlier interviews to recent conversations, we are seeing new leaders establish fresh priorities in states across the region.

Tim Harmon, Workforce Enterprise Services, Inc.

Continuing our findings on CCB degrees in the Great Lake states, the map shown in Figure 7 highlights which states authorize CCB degrees today, with five of Michigan's 31 community colleges, including tribal colleges, conferring a total of six bachelor of science (BS) degree programs. Fourteen of Ohio's 23 community colleges confer a total of 25 BAS or BSN degrees, which represents an impressive scale-up of CCB degrees to 61 percent of Ohio's community colleges since CCB degrees were first authorized in 2018. Indiana's Vincennes University, which is an associate-dominant institution despite its title, confers 15 bachelor's degree programs. While Indiana is not yet authorized to confer CCB degrees, one of our panelists will speak about activity to explore CCB degree conferral by Ivy Tech. Two community colleges in Missouri confer one bachelor's degree, each in a healthcare field, and most recently, the Minnesota College System (MCS) authorized Fond du Lac College, a tribal college affiliated with MCS, to confer a [bachelor's degree in education](#).

Our research in the Great Lakes states confirms leaders see CCB degrees as one of numerous approaches to expanding baccalaureate attainment. They see CCB degrees as part of a "suite" of policy solutions that are aligned with transfer, financial aid, and other policy reforms that have the potential to address inequities in bachelor's degree completion for historically marginalized populations. The Great Lakes states are exploring policies to make admission automatic and to streamline pathways so students can complete an associate degree and transition into baccalaureate education, whether through vertical transfer to universities or through bachelor's degrees conferred by community colleges. These policies do not exclude AAS degree programs as occurred in the past, and they also include the exploration of three-year bachelor's programs. As noted in Table 2, some of these policies emerged in our 2020 study, but many are new.

Figure 7. U.S. Map Highlighting the Status of CCB Degree Conferral in Seven Great Lakes States

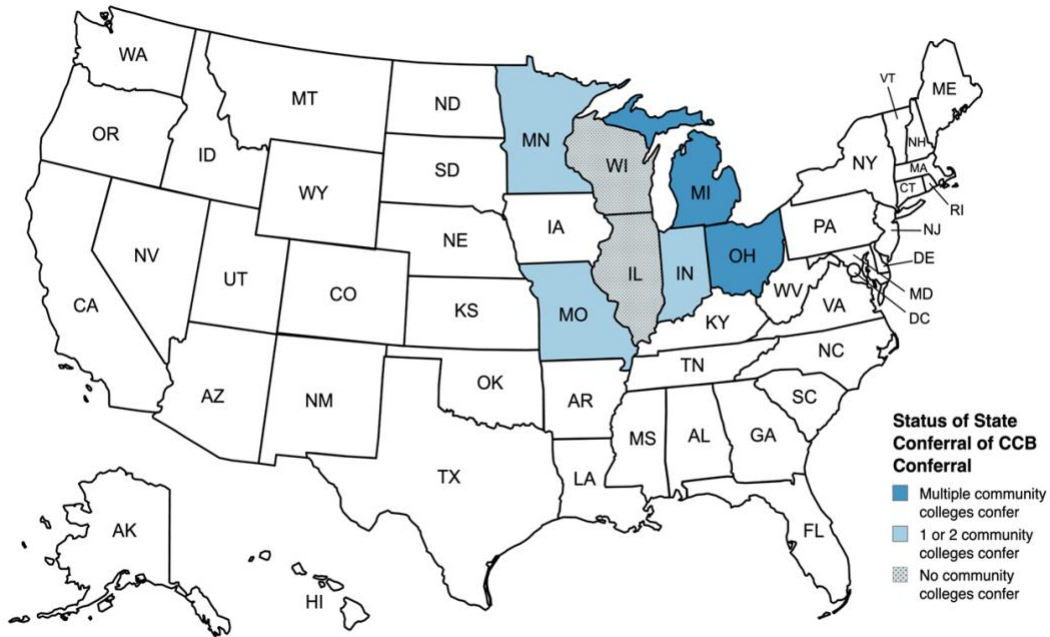


Table 2. Baccalaureate Attainment Policies and Initiatives Affecting Community College Students

2020:

- CCBs are one option to grow baccalaureate attainment
- CCBs address three dimensions of college access: academic, geographic, and financial
- CCBs address inequities by linking college access to bachelor's
- CCBs legislative restrictions and resistance from traditional baccalaureate-conferring institutions



2024:

- Varied interest and advocacy for CCB degrees across the Great Lakes states
- Support for new models, including CCB and transfer consortia (e.g., early childhood education in Illinois, nursing in Michigan & Wisconsin, manufacturing in Ohio)
- Numerous efforts to address student affordability and close equity gaps
- Persistent resistance from traditional baccalaureate institutions citing threats to transfer and on-going relationships

With specific focus on CCB policies, we found state leaders are acutely aware of addressing barriers to existing bachelor's degree attainment options, including addressing the need for greater academic, geographic, and financial access to the baccalaureate. Because of their historic commitment to being open access, as well as their often their short commuting distances for students from home to college, community colleges may provide greater access to bachelor's degree attainment for students who otherwise would not obtain a baccalaureate. Community colleges also tend to be more affordable than universities (public and private), making upper-division attendance possible for students otherwise closed out of baccalaureates due to the higher cost associated with university education. These features of

community colleges bode well for baccalaureate attainment, linking college access to completion for underserved students, assuming states support the legislative changes to authorize CCB degrees.

To learn more about the current state of CCB degrees in the U.S., read the new brief authored by CCBA and Bragg & Associates, [Watch Them Grow: The Evolution of Community College Baccalaureate Degrees in the United States](#).

Panel on Baccalaureate Attainment in the Great Lake States

Angela Kersenbrock, Community College Baccalaureate Association (CCBA)

The Community College Baccalaureate Association (CCBA) takes a comprehensive approach to improving baccalaureate attainment, meaning we encourage three plus one models, two plus two models, automatic admissions, and more. We know it takes a constellation of strategies to get all of our students across the finish line to baccalaureates and economic stability. Our panel today, which I am proud to moderate, offers varied perspectives on baccalaureate attainment in the Great Lake states.

Brian Durham, Illinois Community College Board (ICCB)

Increasing baccalaureate attainment in Illinois, a state with 48 community colleges, requires a constellation of strategies. So much has happened over the last few years, including an increase in dual credit programs. We're seeing greater partnerships between universities, including growth in university centers. Illinois does not offer CCBs, but we've focused our attention on a couple of related initiatives.

The [Illinois Articulation Initiative \(IAI\)](#) has been around since the 1990s and now reaches about 100 higher education institutions in the state. This faculty-driven process connects courses so that they transfer across institutions statewide. In the last several years we have enhanced IAI, including the ICCB board's decision to [pass policy](#) that allows community colleges to award credentials (not certificates) for milestones in completion of the general education core. This means students get recognition on their transcript for completing the general education core, and institutions get credit as well. We believe this helps students stay enrolled and complete the package that transfers. Also, Illinois [requires major courses to be transferable](#), so universities have to accept courses in a major. These changes help community college students complete associate degrees and transfer, and they appear to be working. Illinois was recently recognized as one of the top states for transfer completion in the U.S., according to a recent report from the [Aspen Institute](#), and we're very proud of that recognition.

Illinois also has several more initiatives in progress, including the General Assembly's discussion of [common course numbering](#). This initiative would focus IAI courses already vetted to help students and parents understand what courses are eligible to transfer. The state is also exploring direct admissions from high school to college, and considering direct admission from community college to university. The IBHE has received [funding from Lumina Foundation](#) to help advance this idea, including using an application aggregator common "app." Community colleges will be featured prominently to high school students considering college because students are not only admitted to universities but also to their local community college.

Jim Reed, Illinois Community College Trustees Association (ICCTA)

Higher education is guided by the [Thriving Illinois](#) strategic plan, and the ICCTA works closely with the Illinois President's Council and the local board of trustees and presidents of the state's 48 community colleges. With the support of the Joyce Foundation, we've received three years of financial support for [research](#) and development on the CCB. In this effort, we've worked closely with Tim Harmon and Debra Bragg, who have conducted research using Lightcast™ and supported the formation of an advisory committee to help the ICCTA develop our advocacy strategy.

During the current legislative session, we've introduced [legislation](#) on the CCB in the Illinois General Assembly. We've informed different constituencies and generated more interest, recognizing the CCB is a major lift for Illinois. To this end, we held a subject matter hearing that went well, but the legislature did

not pass the bill. Even so, we have made substantial progress, and we will be continuing our efforts in the veto session.

To bolster support moving forward, we solicited student voice by partnering with four community colleges to survey their graduating seniors. The questionnaire asked seniors whether they think CCB degrees should be offered at their community colleges and whether they would seek to attend these programs, if offered. We found overwhelming support from the respondents, and we're going to expand the survey to more colleges and take that data to policymakers to help advance this initiative.

Monica Hingst, Ivy Tech Community College

Operating as a single accredited institution, Ivy Tech is the only community college in Indiana. With 19 campuses enrolling approximately 194,000 students, Ivy Tech plays a major role in conversations about expanding baccalaureate degrees. Several big things are happening in the state, starting with transfer. Since 2013, the Indiana legislature has required that state colleges and universities develop the [Transfer Single Articulation Pathways](#) (TSAP) program, which allows students to fully transfer one of 20 associate degrees as the first two years of instruction toward a companion bachelor's degree. The 20 programs are based on curriculum agreed upon by all public institutions in Indiana.

Another effort that's growing rapidly is what we call our [Indiana College Core](#). The Indiana College Core is a certificate of 30 credits of general education courses that transfer as a block to any public institution. In the upcoming year, every high school in the state is required to offer the Indiana College Core to high school students before they graduate. As such, all students will be able to get their first 30 college credits completed during high school. In our role as the "Community College of Indiana," Ivy Tech is a huge provider of those courses, so transfer is critical for us.

Ivy Tech helps to increase baccalaureate attainment through statewide [Pre-Admissions Programs](#), similar to what Brian Durham described for Illinois. Every student in participating Indiana high schools receives a letter in September of their senior year explaining all the institutions to which they are pre-admitted based on the college's admissions criteria. Because Ivy Tech is an open access institution, at a minimum, every student gets a letter saying they've been admitted to Ivy Tech, as well as any participating institution in the state in which the student meets admissions criteria. We're eliminating transition barriers by letting every student know they are college material.

Ivy Tech has also created dashboards to help us understand supply and demand. We're using Lightcast™ data and aligning our programs to labor market gaps. The dashboards also help us partner with K-12 schools to shine a light on workforce needs. We now have public data that shows us college credit completion and FAFSA completion for every high school. We also have wage data for students five years after high school graduation, and we're sharing those results publicly, which is a game changer for how we think about college readiness.

Finally, speaking to the current state of CCB degrees in Indiana, Senate Bill 8, titled [Higher Education Matters](#), was introduced earlier in 2024 and calls for a study and recommendations on whether Ivy Tech should be authorized to award bachelor's degrees. The work to examine this question is beginning with the Indiana Commission for Higher Education now, and as part of this effort, we've contacted CCBA to help us look at potential benefits and pain points to offering CCB degrees.

Brandy Johnson, Michigan Community College Association (MCCA)

The Michigan Community College Association (MCCA) represents 31 two-year colleges, including 28 public community colleges and three tribal colleges, working with both presidents and trustees.

We're proud of our work on transfer in Michigan. First, we created a 30-credit block initiative, called the [Michigan Transfer Agreement](#), which builds out a series of pathways with full transfer of a degree from a community college to a four-year public or private university. Michigan has 10 academic disciplines wherein students who complete an associate degree have that whole degree transfer as a block, and we see this approach becoming standard practice, as opposed to transfer on a course-by-course basis.

We're now working on workforce and applied programs that award AAS degrees in fields such as healthcare and business. This process has been challenging because applied coursework isn't universally accepted by our universities, but we've begun to build these needed pathways. We have also [mapped out credit equivalencies](#) for industry-recognized credentials with a search engine that lets us see if certification in a field is accepted as credit by our colleges and universities.

Over the last five years, Michigan has also focused on college affordability policy, especially for community college students. By making community college functionally tuition free, we can build a college-going culture and grow college enrollment. It also reduces the burden students face in pursuing a bachelor's degree because we've reduced or eliminated debt in the first two years of college. During the pandemic, we created a tuition-free pathway to an associate degree, and we've followed up with [Michigan Reconnect](#), which is for individuals 25 and older. We have a temporary expansion of that program for individuals 21 and older.

Another new program that has big implications for baccalaureate attainment is the [Michigan Achievement Scholarship](#) for traditional-age students with a significant subsidy to pursue postsecondary education. The stipend is up to \$2,750 for community college students and \$5,500 for university students. A unique focus of this policy is transfer functionality, which means a high school student can use this scholarship for two to three years at the community college and then transfer to a four-year institution and secure that higher dollar amount.

We also have a new state agency called the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential ([LEAP](#)). LEAP doesn't have authority to change how colleges are governed, but for the first time, Michigan has an agency that focuses on higher education policy. Transfer is a priority for LEAP, with a goal to overcome barriers to credit acceptance and negotiations to transfer courses one by one. We've also asked LEAP to help us find ways to allow more students to get baccalaureate degrees on community college campuses. These could be conferred by four-year universities by using community college facilities and infrastructure. Particularly in rural communities, we need more options for community college students to earn bachelor's degrees.

Finally, Michigan has a narrow [CCB policy](#) that allows community colleges to confer degrees in four specialized fields: maritime technology, cement technology, culinary arts, and energy production technologies. For many years, community colleges tried to get the statute changed to add nursing, but universities fought this request. To move forward, community college leaders asked their four-year counterparts to consider a different model. As a result, leaders from two- and four-year institutions reached a compromise in which universities court community colleges to be their transfer partner. Beginning with nursing, the universities deliver coursework on community college campuses so nursing students can pursue an ADN-to-BSN transfer pathway with professors who taught their associate classes. Because local employers already hire community college nursing graduates, they're supportive of these students getting their BSN while working. To achieve this change, Michigan community colleges were awarded \$56 million, so this is a major investment in our state.

Donald McMaster, Alpena Community College

Alpena Community College is located in a rural area of Michigan on Lake Huron at the 45th parallel. It's two and a half hours to the nearest university, but despite our remote location, we've been at the top for college completion the last three years. We do a lot of dual enrollment and middle college high school, and we also offer several unique occupational programs. Brandy Johnson described the situation in Michigan with the first four CCB programs approved in 2013, but she may have understated the extent of the challenges to community colleges in attempting to award the BSN. Community colleges are very decentralized in Michigan, and they capture millage in tax districts. To oppose the CCB in nursing, the universities essentially said that if community colleges wanted a BSN, they would have to be a university, thereby foregoing their millage. That was the poison pill for some colleges, but some local employers were urging us to prepare BSNs to attain magnet status for their hospitals. When the pandemic hit, we wanted to be more responsive to our communities, so we reached a compromise between universities and community colleges that involves [partnerships](#) to confer the BSN. At Alpena Community College, we now have 12 to 15 students in the BSN program from University of Michigan for students who live in our

community, allowing them to take classes offered on our campus by the University of Michigan-Flint. Because enrollment concerns in both community colleges and public universities are real across Michigan, our campuses are hungry to serve more students. So, while the environment has been challenging as others have noted in this webinar, we've found a way forward in nursing through this consortium partnership.

Rick Woodfield, Ohio Association of Community College (OACC)

Ohio has had a lot of success with CCB degrees over the last few years. Our first degrees were approved in 2018, so we're still relatively new at this, but we're expanding these degrees to a lot of institutions and different programs. From the start, our movement has been industry focused, working with employers around the state where workforce needs are unmet. We have a lot of private and public universities with branch campuses where community colleges are co-located, which contributes to the need to bring in employers to make sure the voice of business and industry are being heard by our legislature. North Central State College was an early adopter of these manufacturing partnerships, and we now have bachelor's programs in addiction services and are starting an aerospace technician program. Significant to today's conversation, we've also started nursing programs, which Dr. Spiers will talk about.

Cynthia Spiers, Rhodes State College

Rhodes State College started working on a BSN program by gathering data from the Ohio Nursing Association, the local and regional healthcare industry, and students. We gathered a lot of data because we anticipated resistance, and that's what we got. When the College submitted our first proposal to the state, we were denied because it wasn't an applied degree as stated in the law. In 2019, we started putting together a new BSN proposal and hired a lobbyist to help us advocate for legislative change. We held meetings with influential state policymakers and elected state officials who live in our region, 10 regional hospital CEOs, and nursing administrators. A representative from the healthcare industry provided testimony at the Capital, and we championed a letter-writing campaign urging lawmakers to pass revised legislation. The new state legislation was passed, and three community colleges were in the first wave of approvals for the BSN completion program, authorized by the Chancellor of the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE).

Rhodes State had also submitted a proposal to offer the pre-licensure nursing program, as all courses were the same and it too met both state and accreditation requirements. Unfortunately, the pre-licensure was denied by the Chancellor. We were not giving up; we went back to the legislature to again revise the law and enable approval from ODHE for our pre-licensure nursing program. The President of the Ohio Senate convened more collaborative meetings with hospital CEOs, the Chancellor, our academic team, and me. After much advocacy and deliberation, the law was changed to include "all" nursing programs, and our pre-licensure nursing program was approved to move forward into the accreditation process.

Looking back, what made a difference were our relationships with legislators, helping them understand why these programs will meet a critical workforce need. When objections were lodged, such as when the Chancellor said universities already offer these programs, we provided data to show that regional university graduates didn't stay in the area. To achieve magnet status, local hospitals have to retain baccalaureate nurses, and they came to understand that community college BSN programs prepare graduates who live and work locally.

We also recognize accreditation is important. We addressed the accreditation requirements in our proposals for our regional accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC); the Ohio Board of Nursing (OBN); and the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing ([ACEN](#)). Our RN to BSN completion program was approved by both ODHE and HLC, which included a site visit. Our first cohort of RN to BSN students will finish in summer 2024, and we are submitting our application to ACEN. The pre-licensure BSN self-study will be submitted to OBN, followed by an application to ACEN for approval. Our pre-licensure nursing program was also approved by the ODHE and HLC, and our self-study is being submitted to OBN and, once approved, to ACEN. Our pre-licensure program is structured using a three-year accelerated format, including summers. It's not fewer credits or semesters than our regular nursing program; it's a contiguous semester format conducted in collaboration with local hospitals. We're opening

applications to RNs already working in our local hospitals and students who live in the College's service district. We believe this hyper-local focus is what tipped the scale in our favor, and we encourage others to use a similar strategy to succeed in getting new CCB degrees.

Kelly Gray, North Central State College

Building relationships and knowing your data is critical to securing support for CCB degrees, as noted by Cynthia Spiers. This isn't about winning; it's about serving the best interest of students in our communities. Community college students have the opportunity to transfer to get a bachelor's degree in nursing in Ohio, but many four-year nursing graduates do not return to work in our communities. We've studied where our nursing graduates live and where they get jobs after completing their BSNs, and we found we had a big hole in our region as far as employment. We needed to prepare BSNs locally and keep them employed as nurses in our region.

At North Central State College, we started our first community college BAS in mechanical engineering technology in 2019. We targeted 25 percent of our associate graduates for this bachelor's degree. We've met that target, and we're graduating our 60th mechanical engineering technology student this spring. We set a similar target for our BSN program, and we hope to graduate our first BSN graduates this summer. Our program is very important to students from rural communities with limited four-year university experience. These students know our college will support them, and this makes a big difference. They're willing to attempt the unknown because they have the support they need to succeed.

We are also talking about affordability in Ohio. Local donors give funds for scholarships for students who complete our bachelor's degrees, including learners beyond traditional college age. These programs prepare diverse students who become practitioners who reflect the diversity of the residents of our communities. We are proud of how representative our nursing graduates are, and we've also documented positive healthcare outcomes. University Hospitals and Ohi Health Systems support our BSN programs because their hospitals value our diverse nursing graduates. To have two of the state's major hospital systems seeking our nursing graduates is an enormous accomplishment.

I want to close by encouraging our Michigan colleagues to continue to pursue the BSN. I understand the compromise you made for your BSN programs and your students, but don't be afraid to look at your data more deeply and advocate for change. You may find a BSN program offered by your community college will fill a gap that's not being fully addressed but essential to meeting community needs.

Angela Kersenbrock, CCBA

This virtual convening has been a master class in baccalaureate attainment. You've covered the waterfront, from listening to student voice, as was mentioned by Jim Reed, to Cynthia Spiers' advice to partner with legislators and industry to secure their support for new CCB degree programs, to Brandy Johnson's recommendation to get to know the players in the statehouse to craft partnerships that produce additional models enabling community college students to secure baccalaureates locally. Getting trustees and other local leaders behind this movement, including policymakers and lobbyists, is good advice for CCB development in other parts of the country as well.

We want to end by recognizing our speakers and thanking everyone who attended today's webinar. Thank you to the Joyce Foundation for its financial and collegial support of our work. We're grateful to Emily Goldman, our Joyce Foundation program officer, who spent today with us. We thank you for seeing the value in our work and for supporting the research and development efforts of CCBA and Bragg & Associates. Without partners, none of this work would be possible.

Thank you!
