

Guided Pathways Statewide Initiatives 2025 - 2028

Guided Pathways Overview

Guided pathways is a national, research driven, whole-college redesign model championed by the Community College Research Center at Columbia Teachers College (CCRC) and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). This model is designed to help all students explore, choose, plan, and complete programs aligned with their career and education goals efficiently and affordably.

The Guided Pathways framework includes four pillars to help colleges organize and align their work and strategic plans. These four pillars are:

- I. Clarify the Path: Mapping pathways to student end goals
- II. Enter the Path: Helping students choose and enter a program pathway
- III. Stay on the Path: Keeping students on a path
- IV. Ensure Learning: Ensure that students are learning

Colleges implement guided pathways reforms to improve student completion rates, close achievement gaps, and increase enrollments in an increasingly competitive environment.

History of Guided Pathways in Iowa

2018 Planning Grant

The Iowa Department of Education (Department) was awarded a six-month planning grant “To Prepare for Guided Pathways Implementation in Iowa’s Community Colleges” in the fall of 2018. The Department facilitated this grant in partnership with HCM strategists (HCM) that finalized details for a three-year implementation grant and community college application process to be designated as either an emerging or implementing institution.

2019 - 2021 Implementation Grant

In December 2021, Iowa’s community colleges, in collaboration with the Department and HCM, completed a three-year guided pathways implementation grant funded by Ascendium Education Group (Ascendium). The grant provided training and support to colleges as they began the process of clarifying paths and restructuring how students would get onto these paths. As a result of that grant, the Department was able to show progress towards building in-state capacity to support statewide student reform efforts at Iowa’s community colleges.

2020 Student Success Consultant

The need for and creation of a community college student success consultant was identified through two sources. The first source was from the Developmental Education Work Group (DEWG) in their final report: Developmental Education: Recommendations to Improve Postsecondary Student Success. The second was to demonstrate that the Iowa Department of Education had capacity to continue leading Guided Pathways implementation efforts beyond the life of the grant. A student success consultant position was created and hired in 2020 to support community college student success initiatives, and as a means to demonstrate capacity in continuing the work of guided pathways implementation.

Current State of Guided Pathways

All 15 Iowa community colleges have incorporated initiatives related to the guided pathways framework into their institutional planning. Each college is at a different stage of scaling the work of the four guided pathways pillars, with most of the colleges having established components of the first three pillars for some of their student populations. The variance is evident through the results of scale of adoption assessments completed during the grant, webinar participation, information sharing at annual convenings, and technical assistance requested. All 15 colleges recently shared strengths and challenges related to guided pathways implementation at the annual convening, which helped to highlight areas where work still needs to be done within the guided pathways model, specifically regarding the fourth pillar of ensuring learning in order to close achievement gaps and increase success outcomes overall.

The Department supports the community colleges in their work to implement initiatives related to the guided pathways framework through statewide leadership, professional development, data and technical assistance. Professional development is currently provided through the Pathway Pillars in Practice webinar series and the annual convening. A guided pathways newsletter is in development, and additional opportunities will be identified in the future state of guided pathways. Technical assistance is provided on a continuous basis through presentations at state meetings and conferences, in addition to responding to individual college requests.

At the May 2024 Annual Guided Pathways Convening, a new guided pathways [data dashboard](#) published on the Iowa Outcomes website was introduced. This dashboard provides community colleges with over a decade of state and college-level data using KPIs related to nine early momentum metrics. These metrics are research-based leading indicators for community college improvement tied to guided pathways, and are first-year indicators for longer term success for students. While this data has been previously provided in excel spreadsheets, the dashboards will allow colleges to more easily see trends and benchmark against the state average in order to identify institutional priorities to increase student outcomes.

The Department formed a Guided Pathways Steering Committee composed of members from multiple community colleges representing both academic and student affairs administration, faculty and staff which convened for the first time in June 2024. The purpose of this committee is to inform statewide initiatives and priorities as found in this document in addition to other professional development already in place.

Future State of Guided Pathways

The Guided Pathways Steering Committee identified focus areas to inform statewide initiatives related to guided pathways implementation over the next three years that will build upon all existing efforts indicated in the current state of guided pathways section. These additional new focus areas will allow for expanded statewide support of guided pathways work and provide direction for college-level initiatives:

- Pathway Mapping
- Faculty Engagement
- Concurrent Enrollment

Initiatives by Focus Area:

1. **Enhancing Pathway Mapping:** A component of the first pillar to clarify paths is to provide visualizations or maps of the paths within a career and academic family. There are different versions of maps in what they include and how they look, but the goal is to provide visual resources for students that will assist with program selection, retention and completion. Maps can be modified to show how some student populations may get onto pathways, such as English language learners and students in need of remediation. Specific steps towards pathway mapping are:
 - a. Clearly define terms related to program mapping
 - b. Create an online program mapping toolkit with multiple models and resources (ie, career ladders and/or career trees)
 - c. Publish toolkit to Guided Pathways website for colleges to access
2. **Fostering Faculty Engagement:** Multiple colleges indicated challenges with incorporating faculty into the work of implementing pathways and/or supporting faculty in their work within all four pillars of pathways - specifically as it relates to the fourth pillar to ensure learning. Specific steps towards increasing faculty engagement are:
 - a. Develop and implement a faculty community of practice around the fourth pillar of guided pathways to ensure learning.
 - b. Provide faculty training workshops and resources for differing faculty departments and modalities (CTE, A&S, Health, distance learning, concurrent enrollment, adjunct, etc.).
3. **Strengthening Concurrent Enrollment:** Concurrent enrollment students account for a large percentage of community college enrollment. The guided pathway pillars were initially implemented with traditional college students in mind, and the majority of colleges have a priority of adapting pathways to meet the specific needs of concurrent students. Specific steps towards aligning concurrent enrollment with guided pathways are:
 - a. Create a reference guide and offer training workshops for applying CCRC's Dual Enrollment Playbook or DEEP model to assist colleges with outreach, alignment, advising and support.
 - b. Provide leadership and guidance between community colleges and school districts to establish an advising process to align student enrollment with academic pathways.
 - c. Provide guidance to community colleges and school districts so they can leverage concurrent enrollment data patterns to increase concurrent enrollment opportunities for all students.