



# Industry-Recognized Credentials Seal Guidelines

## Introduction

House File (HF) 316, signed during the 2025 legislative session, requires the Iowa Department of Education (Department) to develop and make available a list of industry-recognized certifications (IRCs) aligned with Iowa's six career and technical education (CTE) content areas on the Department's website. It also requires the Department to develop and distribute to school districts a seal aligned to this list of IRCs to be affixed to high school transcripts or certificates.

The purpose of this guidance document is to provide school districts with information related to the IRC seal requirements. Specifically, the guidance includes general information about IRCs, eligibility requirements for the IRC seal, the process involved in awarding an IRC seal and answers to frequently asked questions.

## Industry-Recognized Credentials

### Importance of IRCs

An IRC is a certification that has been widely acknowledged as holding value within a specific industry or field. Recipients of such credentials have demonstrated that they possess the knowledge, skills and competencies required to perform specific tasks or roles within that industry. IRCs are awarded by certifying bodies, trade associations or professional organizations that have established standards for proficiency and knowledge within that domain.

By earning an IRC, individuals enhance their employability and professional credibility as well as their career advancements prospects. IRCs are developed in close collaboration with industry experts to ensure outcomes align with current and future job market needs. In aligning CTE coursework and programs with IRCs, districts effectively equip students with specific in-demand knowledge and skills employers are seeking. Alignment of IRCs to district CTE pathways also allows students to explore diverse career pathways while gaining exposure to different industries and acquiring real-world skills and experiences that may help shape their career trajectories.

Many IRCs are stackable, meaning they can be accumulated and built upon over time. Students earning entry-level credentials may pursue additional related credentials as they progress through programs. In addition, certain IRCs have established pathways for college credit or articulation agreements with higher education institutions.

### Characteristics of High-Quality IRCs

High-quality IRCs possess key characteristics that include:

- **Industry Recognition** – High-quality IRCs are respected and recognized within the industry. They carry a strong reputation and are valued by industry experts, professional associations and employers.
- **Relevance and Currency** – IRCs are relevant to the current and future needs of the industry. They should align with industry standards, practices and emerging trends. High quality IRCs undergo routine updates to ensure they remain current and reflective of the evolving needs of the industry.
- **Rigorous Standards and Assessment** – Processes are in place to ensure credentials have clear expectations for the knowledge, skills and competencies required in the industry. Assessment methods are reliable, valid and comprehensive, ensuring individuals earning the credential have demonstrated proficiency. IRCs and their governance structure are accountable to their stakeholders and maintain transparency in their processes.

- **Advancement and Stackable Opportunities** – IRCs provide a clear pathway for career advancement and further education. They offer additional opportunities to higher-level credentials (stackability) and academic programs, allowing individuals to continue their learning and advancement of knowledge and skills. IRCs are part of a structured framework that supports progression and portability across different organizations, regions and sectors.

## Approved IRC List

The Bureau of CTE and Postsecondary Readiness maintains a [list of state-approved IRCs](#) organized by CTE content area. Each spring, school districts or community colleges seeking to add an IRC for a secondary CTE course and/or program may submit a request to the Iowa Department of Education. Subsequently, this list is then updated for the next academic year. In order for IRCs to be added to the state-approved list, IRCs must meet all of the high-quality characteristics outlined above and have the support of at least five Iowa businesses.

## Annual Reporting of Students Earning IRCs

School districts must report to the Department the identity of students who attain IRCs on the state-approved list through [Student Reporting in Iowa \(SRI\)](#). School districts can report up to five IRCs per student ID. IRC data is used for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Postsecondary Readiness Index of the School Performance Profiles and for Perkins V accountability.

## IRC Seal

### Eligibility

For a school district to be able to recognize high school graduates who have attained an IRC prior to graduation with an IRC seal, the IRC must be aligned to the student's CTE program of study and the IRC must be on the state-approved list. In other words, a student must have earned the IRC after completion of a sequential course in a [state-approved CTE program of study](#) to be eligible. Students may meet the requirements at any time during their high school enrollment, but students cannot be awarded the seal until graduation.

### Process

The seals will be available as downloads from the Department's website before January 1 of each academic year. The school district can choose additional formats (e.g., certificate, medal, physical sticker) to award the seal, but the district must make separate arrangements with local vendors for these format options.

If a student meets the eligibility requirements listed above, the school district must do one of the following:

- Affix the appropriate seal (i.e., aligns to the student's CTE content area) to the student's high school transcript or
- Provide the student with a certificate to which the appropriate seal (i.e., aligns to the student's CTE content area) is affixed.

Additionally, the school district must determine how it will recognize students who earn IRCs locally. Some questions to ask include:

- How will you communicate information to all students and parents about the possibility of earning the IRC seal?
- What supports (e.g., classes, assessment administration) will you offer to students who want to earn the IRC seal?
- How will you recognize students who earn the seal (e.g., on the student's transcript, a certificate distributed during the graduation ceremony, etc.)?

## Frequently Asked Questions

**1. Where can I find more information about IRCs?**

More information about IRCs can be found at the Department's [Industry-Recognized Credentials webpage](#).

**2. What if a student graduates mid-year?**

All previously outlined requirements apply to both mid-year and end-of-year graduates. However, the school district should contact the Department to receive the electronic seal earlier than January 1. The school district will still need to report a student's IRC attainment in the Spring SRI collection.

**3. What if a student earns more than one IRC?**

If a student earns more than one IRC, particularly in a different CTE content area, the school district may note additional IRCs, and provide additional seals (i.e., seals for different content areas) if necessary, on a student's transcript or certificate.

**4. If a student earns a community college credential (e.g., certificate or diploma award or an associate's degree), are they eligible for an IRC seal?**

Community college credentials (e.g., certificate or diploma awards or associate's degrees) are not considered IRCs and thus, students are not eligible for an IRC seal if they earn a community college credential.

**5. May an IRC seal be awarded to seniors after they graduate if the results of an assessment administered during their final school year are not available at the time of graduation?**

Yes, if IRC assessment results are not available at the time of graduation, the school district may award the IRC seal after the student graduates if and when the student's assessment results demonstrate attainment of the IRC. The school district may recognize such students as IRC seal candidates at graduation but cannot include the official seal on the transcript until the school district obtains the results and they indicate that the student qualifies for the seal. When the IRC seal is awarded, a designation should be affixed to the student's transcript or a certificate.

**6. Are districts required to pay for IRC assessments?**

No. However, school districts may choose to help offset assessment costs for students. School districts only have to pay for an IRC assessment if it is a prerequisite or requirement for a course.

**7. Are districts required to pay for IRC seals?**

No. School districts do not have to pay for the digital version of IRC seal. If the district decides to award the seal as an alternative format (e.g., certificate, medal, physical sticker), then the costs to the vendor must be paid for by the school district.

**8. Can students earn an IRC seal if they earn the Iowa Seal of Biliteracy?**

Even though the Iowa Seal of Biliteracy is on the state-approved IRC list, school districts should not be affixing the IRC seal to a student's transcript or certificate because there is a separate seal for this type of recognition. For more information, see the [Biliteracy Seal webpage](#) or contact Stephanie Wager at 515-419-2876 or [stephanie.wager@iowa.gov](mailto:stephanie.wager@iowa.gov).

## Questions and Additional Information

If you have questions, contact Jodie Smith at 515-419-5190 or [jodie.smith@iowa.gov](mailto:jodie.smith@iowa.gov). For additional IRC information, visit the Department's [Industry-Recognized Credentials webpage](#).