Iowa State Board of Education

Executive Summary

October 15, 2026

Agenda Item: Rules – Adopted and Filed – Chapter 21 (amend)

State Board Priority: Goal 4

State Board Role/Authority: This rulemaking is adopted under the authority provided in Iowa Code section 256.139, as enacted by 2026 Iowa Acts, House File 2610.

Presenter(s): Thomas A. Mayes
General Counsel and Rules Coordinator

Attachment(s): One

Recommendation: It is recommended that the State Board of Education amend Chapter 21.

Background: This rulemaking implements 2026 Iowa Acts, House File 2610, by establishing a statewide common course numbering system and a statewide lower division general education framework for Iowa community colleges. This rulemaking establishes processes for identifying equivalent courses, assigning common course numbers, developing common course descriptions and learning outcomes through a faculty process, and implementing a common lower division general education framework. No changes are made in light of public comment. The adopted rules are identical to the noticed rules.

One public comment requests that this rulemaking be delayed until after the study of the general education framework and common course numbering system called for in Section 15 of House File 2610. The commenter raised concerns that the rules adopted by the State Board would not be coordinated with the educational opportunities offered by the three Regents universities.

The Department is taking no action in response to this comment. The State Board is required to adopt rules implementing both the general education framework and the common course numbering system, and that statutory requirement is not contingent on the completion or the results of the study described above. Additionally, the noticed rules address the commenter's concerns. The rules provide for Department-issued guides for both the lower division framework and the common course numbering system. Both guides will provide for criteria and timelines and will be developed in collaboration with the Regents institutions and Iowa's community colleges, and when issued the rules will be amended to add the "date certain" required by Iowa Code section 17A.6(5). No purpose would be served by delaying the present rulemaking.

One public comment requests clarification that not all career-and-technical-education coursework needs to be included in the common course numbering system. The commenter asserted that including all career-and-technical-education coursework in the common course numbering system would "create significant operational challenges and could undermine the flexibility that is core to these programs." The commenter provided the example of career-and-technical-education course that is "intentionally designed" to meet a particular community college's local workforce need. After due consideration, no action will be taken as the plain language of the rules addresses the commenter's concerns. A community college's course, career-and-technical-education or otherwise, needs to be included in the common course numbering system only if it, in fact, common. A course offered by only one community college need not be included in the common course numbering framework (although nothing would prohibit that community college from voluntarily following the structural elements in subrule 21.4(7), paragraph a, in assigning a local course number).

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT[281]

Adopted and Filed

The State Board of Education hereby amends Chapter 21 "Community Colleges," Iowa Administrative Code.

Legal Authority for Rulemaking

This rulemaking is adopted under the authority provided in Iowa Code section 256.139, as amended by 2026 Iowa Acts, House File 2610.

State or Federal Law Implemented

This rulemaking implements, in whole or in part, Iowa Code section 256.139 as amended by 2026 Iowa Acts, House File 2610.

Purpose and Summary

This rulemaking implements portions of 2026 Iowa Acts, House File 2610, by establishing a statewide common course numbering system and a statewide lower division general education framework for Iowa community colleges. This rulemaking establishes processes for identifying equivalent courses, assigning common course numbers, developing common course descriptions and learning outcomes through a faculty process, and implementing a common lower division general education framework.

Public Comment and Changes to Rulemaking

Notice of Intended Action for this rulemaking was published in the Iowa Administrative Bulletin on September 2, 2026, as **ARC 0550D**.

A public hearing was held on September 22, 2026, at 8:00 a.m., in Room B50, Grimes State Office Building, with a video conference option available. No members of the public attended the hearing.

The Department received two written public comments, one from a community college president and one from the chief executive of an association representing Iowa's community colleges.

{explanation of changes from published Notice OR statement amendments are identical}

Adoption of Rulemaking

This rulemaking was adopted by the State Board of Education on October 15, 2026.

Fiscal Impact

This rulemaking has no fiscal impact to the state of Iowa.

Jobs Impact

After analysis and review of this rulemaking, no impact on jobs has been found.

Waivers

Any person who believes that the application of the discretionary provisions of this rulemaking would result in hardship or injustice to that person may petition the State Board for a waiver of the discretionary provisions, if any, pursuant to 7—Chapter 2504.

Review by Administrative Rules Review Committee

The Administrative Rules Review Committee, a bipartisan legislative committee which oversees rulemaking by executive branch agencies, may, on its own motion or on written request by any individual or group, review this rulemaking at its regular monthly meeting or at a special meeting. The Committee's meetings are open to the public, and interested persons may be heard as provided in Iowa Code section 17A.8(6).

Effective Date

This rulemaking will become effective on December 16, 2026.

The following rulemaking action is adopted:

ITEM 1. Rescind subrule 21.4(1) and adopt the following **new** subrule in lieu thereof:

21.4(1) *General education.* General education is intended to provide breadth of learning to the community college experience. General education imparts common knowledge, promotes intellectual inquiry, and stimulates the examination of different perspectives, thus enabling people to function effectively in a complex and changing world. General education courses are not intended to be developmental in nature. Each community college is responsible for local implementation, publication, and assessment of student learning of its general education courses while ensuring ongoing compliance with the statewide lower division general education framework.

a. Uniform framework. Effective July 1, 2027, all community colleges will implement the statewide lower division general education framework for associate of arts (AA) and associate of science (AS) awards pursuant to Iowa Code section 256.139 as enacted by 2026 Iowa Acts, House File 2610.

b. Core disciplinary categories. The statewide lower division general education framework shall be established by the department and consist of the following four core disciplinary categories: communications, humanities, social science, and mathematics and science. To ensure seamless systemwide transferability, the department will collaborate with community colleges and consult with the liaison advisory committee on transfer students and the board of regents on the administration of the framework. The department has final administrative authority over the inclusion and modification of these categories within the statewide lower division general education framework.

c. Credit allocation guidelines. The specific credit allocation and credit distribution rules in the core disciplinary categories identified in paragraph 21.4(1)*"b"* will be broadly aligned with

the transfer standards developed pursuant to the statutory articulation pathways authorized by Iowa Code section 262.9(31). The department shall coordinate with the community colleges and the board of regents to integrate these standards into the statewide lower division general education framework. The department-issued Iowa General Education Lower Division Framework Operational Guide will establish the administrative workflows necessary to submit, audit, and add courses, as well as the collaborative processes for updating credit allocations.

d. Statewide common course numbering integration. All courses approved to fulfill a distribution category requirement within the statewide lower division general education framework will follow the structural elements of paragraph 21.4(7)*"a."*

ITEM 2. Adopt the following **new** subrule 21.4(7):

21.4(7) *Statewide common course numbering system.* To ensure statewide transfer and alignment, all credit-bearing community college courses shall comply with requirements of the statewide common course numbering system pursuant to Iowa Code section 256.139 as enacted by 2026 Iowa Acts, House File 2610.

a. Structural elements. A common course entry within the centralized statewide common course numbering directory consists of the following standardized elements:

(1) Course prefix.

(2) Course number.

(3) Course name.

(4) Course credit hours.

(5) Course description.

(6) Course learning outcomes.

b. Central registry and system maintenance. The department will maintain a centralized statewide common course numbering directory. Procedural guidance, submission timelines and administrative workflows will be established within the Iowa Common Course Numbering Operational Guide.

c. Equivalent course identification. The department will maintain a centralized statewide common course numbering directory. New courses will be submitted by institutions for department approval prior to adoption by a community college.

d. Statewide integration. Standardized course identifiers from the statewide common course numbering system will be utilized universally across all community college course catalogs, registration systems, and official student transcripts.

e. Rule of construction. Individual community colleges retain the autonomy to include additional learning outcomes to fulfill unique regional or transfer needs, provided the course includes all common course outcomes.