

State Opportunity Index



IOWA

STATE SUMMARY
2025

Iowa at a glance

THE STATE OPPORTUNITY INDEX combines research-backed strategies for improving education-to-career outcomes with benchmarking measures to track progress for all 50 states, giving policymakers and institutions a framework for strengthening the link between education and opportunity.

For each state, the Index reports the percentage of students who experience a positive return on investment and summarizes progress in five key areas for improving success beyond completion: Clear Outcomes, Quality Coaching, Affordability, Work-Based Learning, and Employer Alignment. States are grouped into four categories: Leading (at the forefront, demonstrating strong progress); Advanced (substantial progress); Developing (early stages of improvement); and Foundational (just beginning their journey).

Positive ROI

65%



**State
Opportunity
Index**

strada

Learn more at strada.org/state-opportunity-index

References for "unavailable" refer to states in which there was insufficient data to assign a rating at this time.
In cases where the margin of error crosses a category threshold, states are given a combined category.

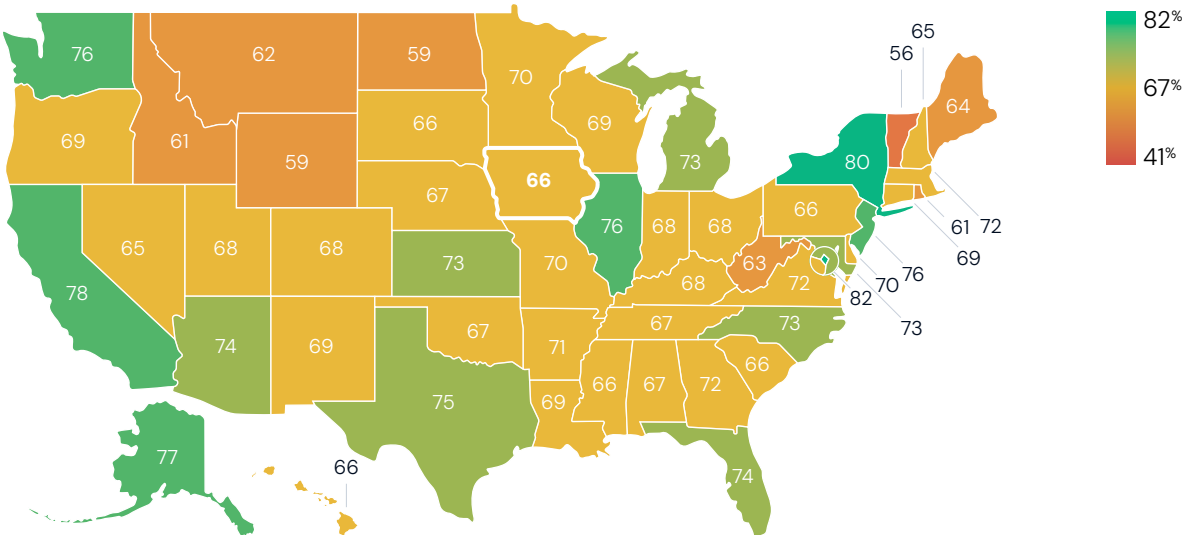
Positive ROI

Iowa

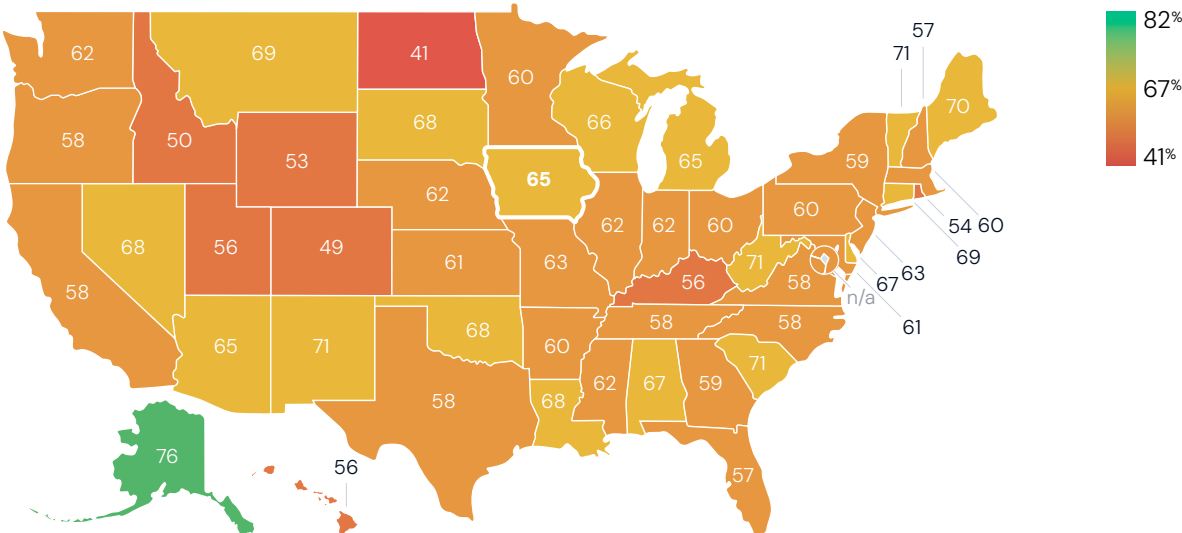
The positive ROI value for each state represents the estimated percentage of public college graduates whose earnings premium over high school graduates is enough to repay their total cost of a degree within 10 years.

	Iowa	U.S.
Overall	65%	70%
Bachelor's	66%	73%
Associate	65%	60%

Percentage of graduates with positive 10-year ROI by state – bachelor's degrees



Percentage of graduates with positive 10-year ROI by state – associate degrees





Everyone should have access to accurate information on employment outcomes that can help them make informed decisions about education after high school. The Clear Outcomes measure is based on 10 critical elements that contribute to the capacity of state education-to-employment data systems to strengthen the connection between education and opportunity.

COLLECT

State data system elements	State description	Rating
1 Includes learner-level and program characteristic data for nondegree and noncredit postsecondary education and training programs	Iowa collects enrollment and credential outcome data for multiple nondegree and noncredit postsecondary education and training programs, including: (i) college-issued, for-credit nondegree credentials; (ii) college-issued, noncredit nondegree credentials; (iii) WIOA-eligible training providers; (iv) occupational licensure; and (v) other third-party credentials, including industry certifications and apprenticeships. The state reports on employment outcomes for noncredit and nondegree programs through the Iowa Student Outcomes portal .	LEADING
2 Examines earnings by occupation, pay rate, and work location	Iowa collects work location on a voluntary basis but does not collect occupation or pay rate.	ADVANCED

INTEGRATE

State data system elements	State description	Rating
3 Integrates and delivers information on learner's earnings and employment after postsecondary education and training completion, and over time	Iowa provides an interactive reporting tool and publicly downloadable employment and earnings data for (i) public four-year institutions ; and (ii) community colleges . Downloadable community college-to-employment data are available disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender. While not meeting the criteria for this element, Iowa is in the process of integrating private four-year institutions to the U.S. Census Bureau's Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) project.	ADVANCED
4 Integrates and delivers information on learner's earnings and employment after high school completion and over time	Iowa's SLDS is in the process of integrating employment outcome data for high school graduates.	DEVELOPING
5 Partners with national and multi-state initiatives to assess education-to-opportunity outcomes for graduates and non-graduates of postsecondary education and training programs who relocate or work outside the state	Iowa partners with PSEO (50–75% graduate coverage), Multi-State Data Collaborative, and State Wage Interchange System.	LEADING

CATEGORY KEY

Extent to which elements are present in state data infrastructure.

- **Leading**
Fully present
- **Advanced**
Partially present
- **Developing**
In development
- **Foundational**
Not in development



PROVIDE

State data system elements	State description	Rating
6 Provides comprehensive and timely open data files containing anonymized education-to-opportunity statistics that anyone can access, download, and otherwise use	Iowa publishes aggregate, downloadable education-to-opportunity data tables for (i) public four-year institutions ; (ii) community colleges ; and (iii) nondegree credentials .	LEADING
7 Publishes robust, timely, and easily understandable interactive resources informing education-to-opportunity decision-making by learners, families, and institutions	Iowa has dashboards containing education-to-employment outcomes for (i) public four-year institutions ; (ii) community colleges ; and (iii) nondegree credentials . Community college data include employment percentage, enrollment, completion, and mapping of programs of study to the employment industry. Nondegree credential data include mapping of programs of study to the employment industry, with disaggregation by race/ethnicity and gender.	LEADING
8 Gives researchers access to individual-level matched education-to-opportunity datasets	Iowa integrates and provides individual-level data as needed for specific, approved projects after requestors follow standard data request processes . Individual-level data are made available to evaluators or researchers to support data-driven decision-making. While not public, Iowa's SLDS maintains a research agenda to guide external data requests.	LEADING

(...) IMPACT

State data system elements	State description	Rating
9 Enables learners and earners to access and utilize their own verified data, unlocking opportunities for college and career advancement	While not a state-level initiative, Iowa State University is engaged in microcredential efforts, issuing badges via Accredible. Since Iowa collects enrollment and credential outcome data for multiple nondegree and noncredit postsecondary education and training programs, a strong foundation exists for building the necessary data infrastructure to facilitate learning mobility across the state.	FOUNDATIONAL
10 Designates a unit with responsibility and dedicated, full-time capacity for generating education-to-employment insights to inform state policymaking and resource allocation decision-making	Iowa's SLDS maintains ready access to integrated education-to-employment data. Leveraging these integrated data, the system publishes resources that report on postsecondary employment outcomes. There is clear evidence of sustainable funding, governance, and staffing as well as partnerships with higher education and workforce development agencies.	ADVANCED

CATEGORY KEY

Extent to which elements are present in state data infrastructure.



Leading
Fully present



Advanced
Partially present



Developing
In development



Foundational
Not in development



Quality Coaching

Iowa

FOUR-YEAR

DEVELOPING

TWO-YEAR

UNAVAILABLE

Everyone should have access to coaching that helps them reflect on their talents and interests, choose a career goal, chart a path, and navigate challenges. Graduates who receive such guidance are more likely to land a job that requires a degree and feel satisfied with their career trajectory. The Quality Coaching measure is based on the percentage of two-year students and four-year senior students who reported receiving personalized guidance, timely labor market information, and support to create a plan and overcome barriers.

Personalized guidance		Four-year	Two-year
Percentage of students at public institutions who report receiving personalized coaching or guidance to help select the education that will help prepare them for a successful career.		27% FND./DEV.	UNAVAILABLE
Timely labor market information		Four-year	Two-year
The average share of students at public institutions who receive timely labor market information, across the various types below, before enrolling or during their first year.		26% FND./DEV.	UNAVAILABLE
Education-to-career paths that might be a good fit for student's strengths and interests		29%	
Job opportunities that a particular education program could lead to		31%	
Potential earnings in different careers related to student's education program		21%	
Career outcomes of students from their own institution		23%	
Support		Four-year	Two-year
The average share of students at public institutions who receive at least some support in setting goals and in overcoming obstacles.		75% ADV./LEAD.	UNAVAILABLE
Setting education and career goals and developing a plan to achieve these goals		75%	
Identifying and overcoming barriers		75%	
CATEGORY KEY			
When the margin of error crosses a category threshold, states are given a combined category.			
Leading ≥75%		Advanced 50% to <75%	Developing 25% to <50%
			Foundational <25%
National results		Four-year	Two-year
Personalized guidance		34%	45%
Timely labor market information		21%	33%
Support		71%	74%



Affordability

Iowa

FOUR-YEAR

DEVELOPING

TWO-YEAR

ADVANCED

Quality post-high school programs should be within everyone's financial reach, allowing for equitable opportunities for success. The Affordability measure is based on how many hours a week the average student would need to work to cover the in-state net price (total cost of attendance minus any grants and scholarships), how many hours a student from a low-income family would need to work to cover their typical in-state net price, and the percentage of students that complete their degree on time – a critical factor in the cost of a degree.

Student hours of work needed	Four-year	Two-year		
Average student hours of work needed	FOUNDATIONAL 42 hours per week Average annual net price, four-year institutions: \$17,128	ADVANCED 18 hours per week Average annual net price, two-year institutions: \$9,639		
Low-income student hours of work needed	DEVELOPING 20 hours per week Average annual net price for low-income students, four-year institutions: \$10,438	ADVANCED 11 hours per week Average annual net price for low-income students, two-year institutions: \$7,540		
CATEGORY KEY	● Leading <10 hrs	● Advanced 10 to <20 hrs	● Developing 20 to <30 hrs	● Foundational ≥30 hrs

On-time completion rate		Four-year		
On-time completion rate	ADVANCED			
	52%			
CATEGORY KEY	Leading ≥65%	Advanced 50% to <65%	Developing 35% to <50%	Foundational <35%



Work-Based Learning

Iowa

FOUR-YEAR

ADVANCED

TWO-YEAR

UNAVAILABLE

All students should have access to quality work-based learning experiences, such as paid internships and apprenticeships, that are linked to higher earnings, greater job satisfaction, and lower underemployment. The Work-Based Learning measure is based on the percentage of two-year students and four-year senior students who reported participating in at least one of the following types of paid experiences: paid internship, paid apprenticeship, paid co-op, paid practicum, or paid undergraduate research experience.

Quality Work-Based Learning	Four-year	Two-year
Percentage of students at public institutions who participated in at least one of five types of quality paid work-based learning experiences	66% ADVANCED Paid internship participation: 61% Percentage of students who participated in at least one of the five types of experiences (paid or unpaid): 86%	UNAVAILABLE

CATEGORY KEY

When the margin of error crosses a category threshold, states are given a combined category.

Leading
≥75%

Advanced
50% to <75%

Developing
25% to <50%

Foundational
<25%

National results	Four-year	Two-year
Any quality paid work-based learning experience	43%	17%
Paid internship	37%	14%
Any work-based learning experience (paid or unpaid)	72%	33%



In addition to student self-reporting of apprenticeship participation, states have other sources of information on participation in registered apprenticeships via the U.S. Department of Labor. In Iowa, **0.56 percent** of the state labor force is made up of active apprentices, for a total of **9,541 apprentices**. Across the country, this number ranges from 0.9 percent (Hawaii) to 0.12 percent (Oklahoma). In countries with leading apprenticeship systems, such as Germany, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, and England, apprentices constitute about 2.5–3.0 percent of the labor force, so all states in the U.S. have substantial room for improvement.



Employer Alignment

Iowa

DEVELOPING

Students should have access to programs that lead to quality jobs and mobility, and employers should assess and advance individuals based on skills and experiences, not just degrees. The Employer Alignment measure is based on the percentage of terminal bachelor's degree holders aged 25–34 employed in a college-level job as well as the supply/demand ratio for a variety of high-demand, high-wage jobs in each state.

College-level employment

The percentage of bachelor's degree graduates who are employed in college-level positions

DEVELOPING

Supply/demand ratio

The overall ratio: the average of the entry-level supply/demand ratios for these nine opportunity occupational groups

DEVELOPING

Information technology and business

Data analytics

LEADING

Finance and accounting professionals

ADVANCED

Finance and accounting support

FOUNDATIONAL

Information and cybersecurity

LEADING

Software development and engineering

LEADING

Health care

Health care technicians and technologists

FOUNDATIONAL

Nursing

FOUNDATIONAL

Manufacturing and engineering

Engineering

LEADING

Manufacturing/Trades technicians and technologists

FOUNDATIONAL

CATEGORY KEY

● **Leading**
≥75%

● **Advanced**
60% to <75%

● **Developing**
50% to <60%

● **Foundational**
<50%