

## **Future Ready Iowa**

Our state's biggest challenge is to achieve a goal of 70 percent of Iowa's workforce having education or training beyond high school by the year 2025. Right now, 58 percent does. Closing this skills gap means a future ready Iowa that prepares individuals for dynamic careers and lifelong learning, meets employer needs, grows family income and strengthens communities. Future Ready Iowa will help more Iowans attain the "new minimum" of high-quality education and training beyond high school by aligning education, workforce, and economic development resources.

The Future Ready Iowa Alliance recommends five action steps, including creating a Last-Dollar Scholarship to close the funding gap for students seeking up to an associate degree in a high-demand field at an Iowa community college or private university. Additionally, the Alliance recommends a Future Ready Iowa Grant to provide financial assistance to adults returning to finish a bachelor's degree, assuming half or more of the credits have been earned toward the major and it will lead to a high-demand job. Another recommendation would create the Iowa Employer Innovation Fund to strengthen private-public partnerships to provide financial support to students in local areas in high demand career fields. It would also provide opportunities to target resources toward high-demand careers specific to the local area.

The initiative addresses a need for better alignment and expansion of existing support for Iowans who are beginning college or career training or returning to complete a post-secondary credential. Of particular focus are new high school graduates who need better career guidance and adults who want to upskill or complete their education. Improving education outcomes for low-income Iowans or members of underrepresented minorities is crucial.

Future Ready Iowa looks to increase the number of high-quality work-based learning opportunities in high-demand careers for all students. To ensure equity in access to work-based learning in both rural and urban areas, the Alliance called for expanding pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship and internship programs. The Governor's STEM Advisory Council's STEM BEST (Businesses Engaging Students and Teachers) program could also be scaled statewide. Celebrating and focusing on career pathways in skilled trades is essential as part of increasing opportunities across the state.

Future Ready Iowa will leverage statewide grassroots efforts to engage business and industry leaders, sector boards, local workforce boards, STEM regions and other current and future regional collaboration. Achieving Future Ready Iowa's goal will take many partners working towards a shared vision. It will require schools and colleges highlighting high-demand, high-paying jobs for their students, local businesses and manufacturers offering internships, mentors and other training experiences, and community leaders working with students of every age to provide the opportunities Iowans need and deserve.

Learn more about Future Ready Iowa on [futurereadyiowa.gov](http://futurereadyiowa.gov), and receive updates on Twitter and Facebook @FutureReadyIowa.