Two years ago, Gov. Terry Branstad announced that he wants 70 percent of Iowa’s workforce to have education or training beyond high school by 2025. Since then, he and state legislators have taken a series of steps to meet that goal.

Most recently, an alliance of government, business and industry leaders was formed (via a Branstad executive order in August) and charged with developing a statewide plan to meet the state’s new objective. And as part of that plan, which is due next fall, Iowa’s new Future Ready Alliance must develop new metrics to track the state’s progress.

Across the country, more emphasis is being placed on increasing postsecondary participation and attainment. According to the Lumina Foundation, at least 28 states — including four in the Midwest — now have set specific goals to meet by 2025.

Minnesota’s SF 5, passed in 2015, says 70 percent of the state’s 25- to 44-year-olds should have postsecondary degrees or certificates by 2025. Illinois’ goal is to have 60 percent of its 25- to 64-year-olds with college degrees, while Indiana’s objective is to have a higher-education attainment rate of 60 percent among its adult population.

These targets are being set because more work in the future will require education and job training beyond high school. Many of these jobs will not require four-year degrees, and in Iowa, one focus has been on preparing its young people and workforce for success in “middle skill” jobs — for example, carpenters, machinists, surgical technologists or truck drivers.

“There is no corner or any other part of the state that is not covered by one of our community colleges,” Rep. Mary Ann Hanusa says, “and we believe that they are perfectly suited and situated to fill that area between high school and a four-year degree.”

And this year, with passage of HF 2392, Iowa legislators made the first major revision of the state’s career-technical education system since 1989. In addition to setting new CTE standards (such as requiring individualized academic and career plans for students starting in the ninth grade), the law will increase student access to information about career opportunities and labor markets. It also will better align the state’s CTE programs with employers’ workforce needs.”
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