

Scaling Career-Connected Dual Enrollment

How College and K-12 Partners Can Strengthen Pathways and Expand Opportunity

CASE STUDY ON STRATEGY 3: COLLEGE CTE PROGRAMS

A Head Start on College Programs Aligned to High-Opportunity Jobs at Eastern Iowa Community Colleges

For more than two decades, North Scott High School in Eldridge, Iowa, has worked with Eastern Iowa Community Colleges (EICC) to expand access to concurrent enrollment—Iowa’s term for dual enrollment. Under the leadership of former principal Shane Knoche, the school steadily expanded opportunities for students to take both baccalaureate transfer and career and technical education (CTE) college courses. By 2025, 95% of North Scott graduates had taken at least one EICC course while in high school.

North Scott pairs these college opportunities with career exploration beginning well before students enter concurrent enrollment. Students explore careers through middle school activities, career awareness programs, and high school CTE courses, and the development of individual career and academic plans help them connect their interests to potential careers and educational pathways. Concurrent enrollment courses provide an important dimension to students’ career exploration. Students may not know exactly what career they want to pursue, according to North Scott’s current principal, Andrew Lehn, but they are encouraged to explore early. “If they don’t know,” he explained, “they take a class in each area to learn what they want to do.”

When Lehn became principal in 2024, a new Regional Innovation Center (RIC) was just being completed. The project reflected years of planning by school and community leaders who wanted to expand CTE opportunities for students in one of Iowa’s largest school districts by area.

FAST FACTS:

Eastern Iowa Community Colleges

- A three-college district that partners with 26 high schools in eastern Iowa along the banks of the Mississippi
- Concurrent enrollment students make up 41% of the college’s total enrollment
- High school students have access to college CTE programs in high-demand fields through college Career Academies taught by college faculty at career advancement centers and other locations across its service area

North Scott already had a strong agricultural education program and one of the state's larger Future Farmers of America chapters. But district leaders also wanted to give students access to advanced technical fields such as diesel technology, emergency medical services, and healthcare—programs requiring specialized facilities, equipment, and instructors that are difficult for high schools to provide on their own.

Beginning in the 2025-26 school year, EICC began offering college coursework at the RIC in three EICC CTE programs: diesel technology, emergency medical technology, and certified nursing assistant. Though still under development, these offerings represent a move from career exploration to career preparation by giving North Scott students the opportunity to enroll in college CTE programs taught by college faculty.

From Career Exploration to Career Preparation in High School

The CTE programs EICC is developing at North Scott's RIC are a new example of a more established strategy the college uses across its service area. Through Career Academies based at career advancement centers and other locations, EICC enables high school students interested in agriculture, manufacturing, transportation, healthcare, public safety, and other fields to move from high school career exploration and CTE into college technical programs taught by college faculty through concurrent enrollment. Similar Career Academy models operate at community colleges throughout Iowa.

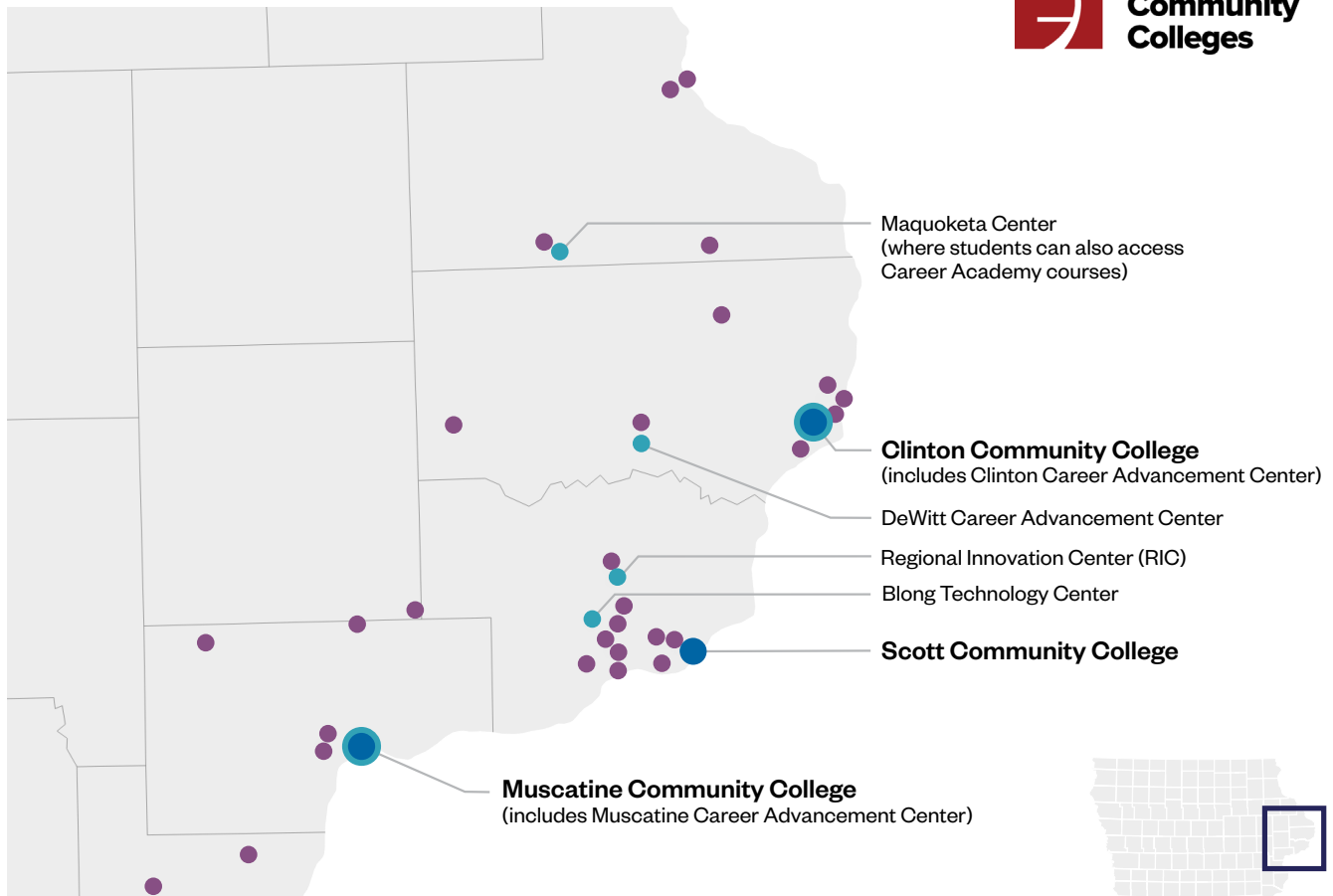
EICC's deans for manufacturing and trades and for health programs emphasized that postsecondary education and credentials are essential for career mobility in their fields. Manufacturing employers who participate in the college's advisory councils routinely mention to faculty that while a college occupational certificate or Industry Recognized Credential (IRC) earned in high school can help students get a decent entry-level job, the jobs that offer higher wages and advancement opportunities almost always require a technical diploma or associate degree. Career Academies respond to this reality by giving students an early start on postsecondary pathways that lead to long-term career opportunity, and many earn a credential by the time they complete an academy.

Offering Career Academy programs at career advancement centers and other locations across the college's six-county service area in eastern Iowa (see map), provides access to high-cost, high-demand technical programs and faculty without requiring every district to build and staff its own facilities.

Many of EICC's partner high schools cannot independently sustain high-cost technical programs, but EICC's Career Academy programs aggregate student demand across districts. As Nikki Gullion, dean of curriculum and concurrent enrollment at EICC, explained, "By working in partnership, we create instructional experiences led by EICC faculty in facilities that expand access for students across multiple communities." This collaborative model ensures that learners benefit from high-quality, college-level instruction in settings designed to serve a broader geographic community.

EICC Locations and High School Partners

● Main college campus ● College center ● High school



Key Features of the Career Academy Model

Programs Are Designed Around Workforce Demand

EICC's Career Academies are driven not only by student interest but also by regional workforce needs. EICC faculty and administrators use labor market data, employer advisory committees, and regional workforce partnerships to identify high-demand fields. Programs such as diesel technology, manufacturing, healthcare, and emergency services are offered because they align with strong labor market demand and provide opportunities for family-supporting wages.

Advising Begins Early and Continues Throughout the Pathway

EICC has invested heavily in helping students understand their options and navigate transitions. College advisors are assigned to high schools, where they work with school counselors to introduce students and families to Career Academy opportunities. Students visit career centers, participate in demonstrations, and learn about fields ranging from advanced manufacturing to healthcare. Parents are invited to sessions explaining academy pathways and college expectations.

Once students enter a pathway, EICC advisors work alongside school counselors to help them make decisions about schedules, transportation, career goals, and postsecondary plans. Lori Perez, a concurrent enrollment advisor who works closely with North Scott students, described her role as helping students “have a clear understanding of the expectations, commitments, and progression associated with the pathway.” Advisors also help students and families understand how Career Academy programs connect to further education and careers.

State Policy Supports Expansion and Sustainability

College and school leaders repeatedly pointed to Iowa’s Senior Year Plus and legislative focus on workforce development as major reasons Career Academies have expanded across the state. Career Academy programs are provided at no cost to students and families. School districts receive additional funding for concurrent enrollment participation, with higher funding weights for CTE courses. Career Academy Incentive Fund grants have also provided resources for facilities and equipment needed to launch career advancement centers.

These policies have helped make concurrent enrollment a common part of career preparation for Iowa students. Through established Career Academy programs, students have the opportunity to complete certificates and IRCs, or begin on a guided pathway toward a diploma or degrees after high school while working in their selected field.

Opening Opportunities No District Could Provide Alone

Offering college CTE programs to high school students through Career Academies requires extensive coordination among colleges and school districts. Transportation, scheduling, staffing, student recruitment, and communication become more complicated as partnerships extend across multiple communities.

EICC’s experience demonstrates the transformative potential of coordinated regional partnerships. By convening students from multiple high schools and situating college faculty and programs in facilities that bring high-demand workforce training closer to rural communities, the college is able to offer opportunities that individual districts could not feasibly deliver on their own. This regional model expands access to high-quality instruction, reduces the cost of early college participation, and gives students a meaningful head start on the postsecondary credentials increasingly required for family-supporting earnings and sustained career advancement.

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