



# A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth



# From the Illinois Board of Higher Education

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To the People of Illinois:

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), whose mission is to create and sustain a world-class educational system in Illinois that allows students from all communities and backgrounds to reach their full potential and achieve their dreams, respectfully submits the IBHE higher education Strategic Plan – **A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth.**

IBHE's work has begun to shine a light on the reality that not all Illinois residents have the same opportunities to thrive and significant gaps exist that disproportionately leave behind Black, Latinx, adult and rural learners.

Weeks before the initial planned launch of the strategic planning process, the COVID-19 pandemic changed our lives and the ways we all engage with the higher education system. In addition to the pandemic, 2020 was a year of reckoning as the realities of racism and injustice caused massive displays of protest and civil unrest. That reckoning caused colleges and universities, both public and private organizations, to recommit to the work of equity.

This strategic plan was also developed in a time where changes in the nature of work are accelerating and innovative disrupters to traditional postsecondary education are growing. Under the leadership of Governor JB Pritzker and the General Assembly, Illinois is reinvesting in higher education despite long-term economic uncertainty.

These realities informed our process and sharpened our focus on ways that we can create more fair and future-ready educational experiences that benefit individual learners and the entire state of Illinois. This challenge is our opportunity. To unlock the economic and social progress Illinois needs to thrive we must be equipped to meet these learners where they are.

Higher education institutions have shown that they have the power to take on the world's problems, offer paths towards transformative change, and create better futures for individuals, families, and communities across Illinois. Our vision of a thriving Illinois is one with an inclusive economy with broad prosperity and equitable paths to opportunity for all, especially those facing the greatest barriers. Now is the time to realize this vision through educational paths that drive toward equity, sustainability, and growth.

The 25 strategies outlined in this plan are designed to accomplish these three goals:

- Equity: Close the equity gaps for students who have historically been left behind
- Sustainability: Build a stronger financial future for individuals and institutions
- Growth: Increase talent and innovation to drive economic growth

Higher education has always been a path to a better future, for individuals, communities, and the entire state of Illinois. The challenge of the next decade is to focus on creating broad paths to a prosperous future for every learner, leader, and community that we engage. We can do this with a commitment to a higher education ecosystem that reinforces equity, sustainability, and growth. That's the vision of a thriving Illinois.



John Atkinson

Chair

Illinois Board of Higher Education



Ginger Ostro

Executive Director

Illinois Board of Higher Education

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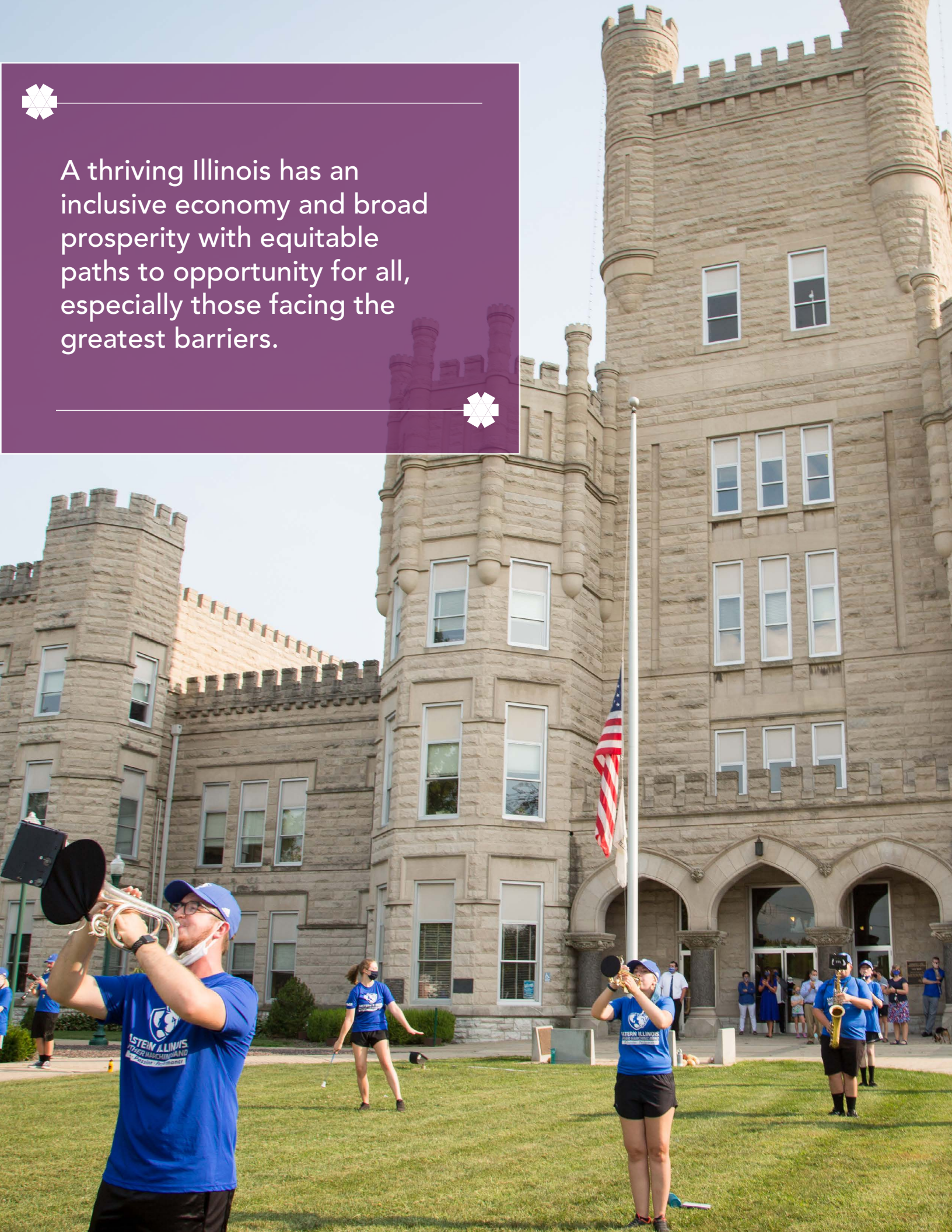


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A thriving Illinois has an inclusive economy and broad prosperity with equitable paths to opportunity for all, especially those facing the greatest barriers.



# Introduction

## *A Thriving Illinois*



### **A Thriving Illinois**

Over the past century, Illinois' world-class higher education system has changed millions of lives and made our state an economic powerhouse. Our higher education institutions support students to become the next generation of thinkers, leaders and researchers who contribute to communities, culture, service and democratic society. Employers, too, value and hire graduates who are adept at critical thinking, solving complex problems, working on diverse teams, and who are civically engaged.

Higher education institutions also serve as the cultural and social anchor of their communities, often offering access to theater, art, music, lectures, sports. Institutional clinics and medical facilities lead world-renowned research and care, serving those close to home and those from far away. Faculty across our colleges and universities engage in teaching, scholarship and research that create new knowledge, pushes the bounds of innovation and artistry and advances technologies.

Our universities are leaders in fundamental, basic and applied research, whether it is in areas as diverse as high energy physics that involves collaboration among public universities and national laboratories, the impact of severe weather on agriculture or best practices for trauma-informed teaching. The societal benefits of the research enterprise are now being recognized in the worldwide effort to combat COVID-19. Universities contributed through epidemiological modeling, development of the rapid saliva test, invention of emergency ventilators, new treatments, and the development of vaccines, as well as providing health care through hospitals and clinics.

Our community colleges prepare students for careers in every industry in the state, lead the country in preparing students for transfer into four-year institutions, and connect directly with Illinois' K-12 system to promote the seamless transition into higher education. Community colleges are intimately connected to their local employers, reaching 9,500 employers across the state and providing career instruction in over 4,000 programs that position students to earn a living wage, to advance in their careers and to meet the local workforce needs of their communities.

Higher education institutions have shown that they have the power to take on the world's problems, offer paths towards transformative change, and create better futures for individuals, families, and communities that make Illinois **thrive**.

**A thriving Illinois has an inclusive economy and broad prosperity with equitable paths to opportunity for all, especially those facing the greatest barriers.**

**Higher education institutions have shown that they have the power to take on the world's problems, offer paths towards transformative change, and create better futures for individuals, families, and communities that make Illinois thrive.**

# Introduction

## *A Thriving Illinois*

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To sustain a thriving state, we must create a more equitable reality. For too long, African American, Latinx, low-income students, rural students, and working adults have been left behind. Together, we must change that.

Illinois has the diverse human capital base to drive economic growth and a higher education system to ensure the diverse workforce has the tools necessary to lead our growing economy. **Educational equity and economic growth are inseparable.**

Now is the time to realize this vision of a thriving collective future for individuals, families and communities across Illinois through educational paths to drive toward **equity, sustainability and growth.**



### ILLINOIS' HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

12  
public  
universities

48  
community  
colleges

100+  
independent  
institutions

40+  
out-of-state  
institutions  
with Illinois  
presence

250+  
postsecondary  
schools

#### Illinois' higher education system includes:

- 12 public universities
- 39 community college districts with 48 community colleges
- Over 100 independent institutions
- Over 40 out-of-state institutions with a presence in Illinois
- Over 250 postsecondary schools that offer short-term training

# Introduction

## Three Goals: Equity, Sustainability & Growth



### 3 Goals: Equity, Sustainability & Growth

The strategies outlined in this plan are designed to close equity gaps, create educational paths that are financially sustainable for students and higher education institutions, and foster economic and institutional growth for a thriving Illinois.

#### EQUITY

Close the equity gaps for students who have been left behind.

#### SUSTAINABILITY

Build a stronger financial future for individuals and institutions.

#### GROWTH

Increase talent and innovation to drive economic growth.



#### EQUITY

It's time to close the equity gaps that have left too many students behind.

Illinois' population is becoming more and more diverse, and the labor market increasingly demands post-high school education and ongoing training for all but entry-level jobs. This means the Illinois higher education system must do much better in serving students of color, low-income students, rural students and working adults.

Data shows equity gaps throughout the educational path for too many students. We have untapped potential in the adults who haven't yet received a postsecondary degree/credential.

We need a higher education ecosystem in Illinois focused on meeting the needs and supporting the success of historically underserved and underrepresented students. Today there

is no "typical" higher education student and no single path that serves all students. We need broad paths and specific strategies to progress for all regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, geography, or age—for high school graduates and adult learners—so all can contribute to and benefit from economic growth. ***It is both a moral imperative and an economic imperative.***

It is long past time for our educational system to recognize and address these needs and be accountable for closing equity gaps.

*To thrive, this plan calls on us to close equity gaps that disproportionately impact African American, Latinx and other students of color, low-income students, working adults, and students from rural communities.*

# Introduction

## Three Goals: Equity, Sustainability & Growth

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### SUSTAINABILITY

Illinois needs educational paths that are financially sustainable for students and for higher education institutions to meet our vision of a thriving Illinois. **If we believe in the power of higher education to transform lives and create a better future, we must invest more and invest through an equitable, stable, and sufficient funding system.** We want higher education to be affordable for students and families. We need a higher education system that is financially ready for the future. One with equitable, reliable investments to serve our students and our state.

Until the recent investments by Governor JB Pritzker and the General Assembly, Illinois' long history of underfunding higher education has made many students reasonably hesitant to commit to our public colleges and universities, while others have shouldered massive individual debts to make up for funding failures and insufficient state and federal student financial aid. These uncertainties not only lost Illinois valuable intellectual and economic capital in those students who never returned, but the local economies that have grown around our colleges and universities also suffered.

As student and workforce needs have changed, the state funding system simply has not kept up. It is time to build a stronger financial future for individuals and institutions of higher learning. That will build a stronger financial future for Illinois.

*To thrive, this plan calls for reliable, equitable and sufficient state investments through a new higher education funding system.*



### GROWTH

Talent, research, and innovation drive our economy. Illinois cannot thrive without a future-ready workforce plus the institutional research and innovation that are crucial to driving economic growth. **To get there, we need a strong, nimble, and innovative higher education system, including career education, inclusive talent development, innovation and job creation for tomorrow.** Institutional contributions to idea generation, innovation, invention, economic engagement and community development are essential for the Illinois to thrive.

The pandemic has also shown us how quickly the nature of work can evolve. Even before the virus, we have long known that the future of work looks very different from the past. More people change jobs mid-career and have many employers throughout their working lives. Our more fluid career trajectories call for nimble educational models that can meet student needs beyond traditional two- and four-year models that come directly after high school.

To grow our state, our higher education institutions must lead the way in educating and preparing people for the future of work so that students can navigate at all stages of their careers. Regional higher education and employer partnerships are essential to preparing



# Introduction

## Three Goals: Equity, Sustainability & Growth



the workforce for the growth areas outlined in the state's economic development plan. These partnerships can build upon the state's community colleges that continue to be the economic engines of their local communities.

Higher education-led innovation can also drive inclusive economic growth. Investments in efforts like the [Discovery Partners Institute](#) and the [Illinois Innovation Network](#) reach across the state and anchor more than enterprise—they can also support a more inclusive economy.

We must align our higher education strategies with our economic development plans and our understanding about the future of work to build more robust, more diverse talent pipelines and to support research and innovation that create new enterprises. Together higher education strengthens Illinois communities.

*To thrive, this plan calls for an increase in diverse talent pipelines prepared for the future of work, engagement of employers and industry leaders, and innovation toward inclusive economic growth and development.*

Higher education has always been a path to a better future, for individuals, communities, and the entire state of Illinois. The challenge of the next decade is to focus on creating broad, sustainable, and equitable paths to a prosperous future for every learner, leader, and community that we engage. We can do this with a commitment to a higher education ecosystem that reinforces equity, sustainability, and growth. **That's the picture of a thriving Illinois.**



The challenge of the next decade is to focus on creating broad, sustainable, and equitable paths to a prosperous future for every learner, leader, and community that we engage.





Higher education institutions are among the most important economic engines both locally and in the State of Illinois. Collectively, higher education:

**Educates** nearly **775,000** students annually

**Employs** approximately **165,000** people across the state

**Serves every county in the state** with extension offices and other outreach activities

Trains most of the **doctors, dentists, social workers, nurses, other healthcare workers**, as well as many other essential workers in the state

Represents more than **\$50 billion** annual impact on the state's economy



# Strategic Planning Process Overview

## *A Plan Developed for the Future but Grounded in the Present*



### **A Plan Developed for the Future but Grounded in the Present**

The Illinois Board of Higher Education planned to launch the strategic planning process in early 2020 with a focus on equity.

However, the planning process was put on hold as the state, and the world, focused on health and safety. Institutions pivoted quickly to remote learning to keep students on track and to new operating models to keep employees safe. Later that spring, the world was shocked by the killing of African Americans George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery.

We decided we had waited long enough to begin the strategic planning process that would elevate the role and outline the steps for higher education to close equity gaps and bring us closer to a truly thriving Illinois. We launched the strategic planning process in Fall of 2020. While strategic planning was underway, in the Spring of 2021, we were shocked by the killing of women of Asian descent in Atlanta. This added even more urgency to our work.

Now, as we prepared to release *A Thriving Illinois*, major changes to higher education policy were proposed by President Biden and are being contemplated at the federal level, including two years of free community college, subsidized tuition at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) for families making under \$125,000; grants to MSIs to build capacity and to prepare graduate students for careers in health; expanding funding for future teachers, special education teachers, and teachers seeking additional certifications. The President's proposals also call for universal preschool for 3- and 4- year-olds and investments in the early childhood workforce.

Each of these proposals, if adopted, would mean fundamental changes to higher education. While the strategic plan could not have anticipated these federal changes, the strategies outlined here are closely aligned with the federal goals and mean Illinois will be well positioned to be a national leader.

**The impact of *A Thriving Illinois* will be felt not just in higher education but throughout the state, as students of color, low-income students, and other historically underserved students have access to new opportunities that will enable them—and our state—to thrive.**

We decided we had waited long enough to begin the strategic planning process that would elevate the role and outline the steps for higher education to close equity gaps and bring us closer to a truly thriving Illinois.

# Strategic Planning Process Overview

## *A Plan Built on Community Engagement*

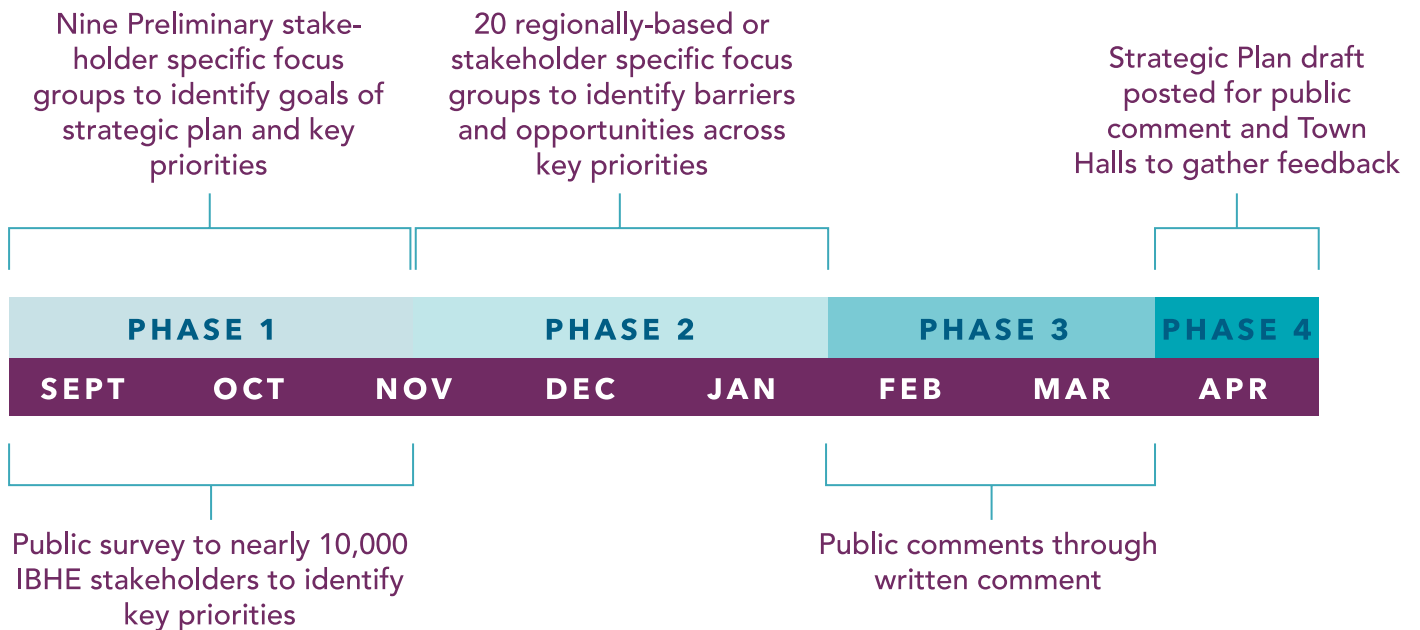
### A Plan Built on Community Engagement

The strategic planning process was grounded in community engagement. We began with a series of early focus groups to answer the questions of why a higher education strategic plan is important and what it should accomplish. From there, a survey of a broad group of stakeholders, including educators and staff throughout the P20 system, students, business leaders, community organizations, and others, received nearly 10,000 responses identifying priorities for the strategic plan to address.

As the Board outlined three goals built on this input, additional focus groups involving 170 people were held regionally and for specific stakeholder groups to identify opportunities and barriers to achieving the goals. Then, the Board convened a 37-person Advisory Committee to shepherd the strategy-development process, engaging nine Design Work Groups of 200 stakeholders, including Board members of the IBHE, ICCB, ISAC, institution trustees, presidents, faculty, staff, community organizations, advocates, philanthropy, and other experts, to develop detailed recommendations.

Draft documents were posted on the IBHE [Strategic Planning website](#) and open for public comment. Two virtual Town Halls were held to receive public comment on the draft plan. Throughout the process, the Board held five meetings to discuss progress on the Strategic Plan and accepted public comment at each.

Additional information on the engagement process is included in the Appendix.



# Strategic Planning Process Overview

## Core Principles



### Core Principles

#### Students are our priority.

We exist to serve students—at whatever age and stage—and provide them with an excellent, well-rounded education and supports that meet their needs, give them access to careers and enhanced upward mobility, and foster their civic engagement and leadership potential.

#### Equity drives our system.

We make equity-driven decisions, elevating the voices of those who have been underserved, and actively identify and remove systemic barriers that have prevented students of color, first generation college students, low-income students, adult learners, rural students, and others from accessing and succeeding in higher education. Access and affordability are embedded in our definition of equity.

#### Higher education is a public good that enriches life.

We depend on higher education to preserve, expand, and transmit knowledge, offer solutions to society's challenges, serve as a civic partner, and enrich life. Research at our institutions expands understanding and drives innovation and economic development. Learning is enhanced when students participate in research and hands-on experiences. Liberal arts and humanities ensure we support the whole student and better understand the human condition. Institutions are vibrant anchors of communities.

#### Our diverse institutions work in concert.

We seamlessly serve the educational and workforce needs of our life-long learners across the state's institutions. We value the diversity of our institutions and programs including public and private, research and regional, four-year and two-year institutions, and credential and certificate programs. We will operate as an aligned and articulated system to meet student and state needs.

#### We reinforce the P-20 education continuum.

We are connected to all parts of the education system, reinforcing relationships so that students have a seamless educational experience independent of where they enter or transfer. We embrace our role in developing the educator workforce.

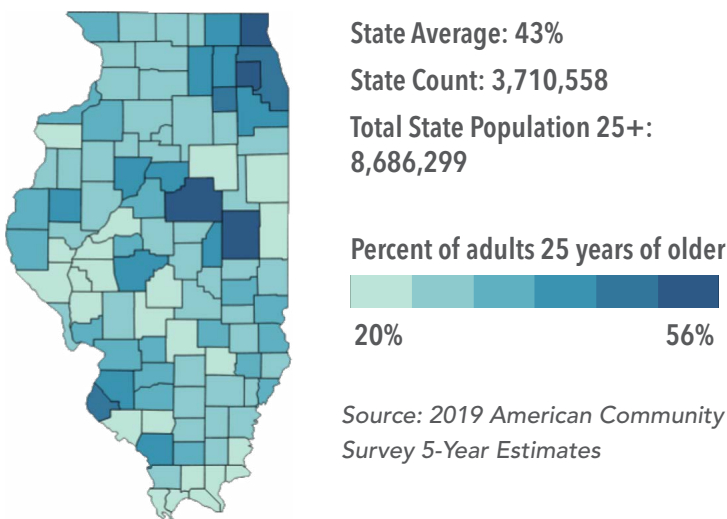
#### Talent, research, and innovation drive our economy.

We see a strong, nimble, and innovative higher education system, including career education, as essential for the state's talent development, innovation, job creation, and economic growth.

### Postsecondary Attainment in Illinois

Postsecondary education is key to ensuring individuals, families, and communities across Illinois can thrive. Individuals who hold a postsecondary credential have higher earnings, greater social mobility, improved health, and other positive life outcomes than their peers with less education.

#### 2019 ASSOCIATE'S DEGREES OR HIGHER



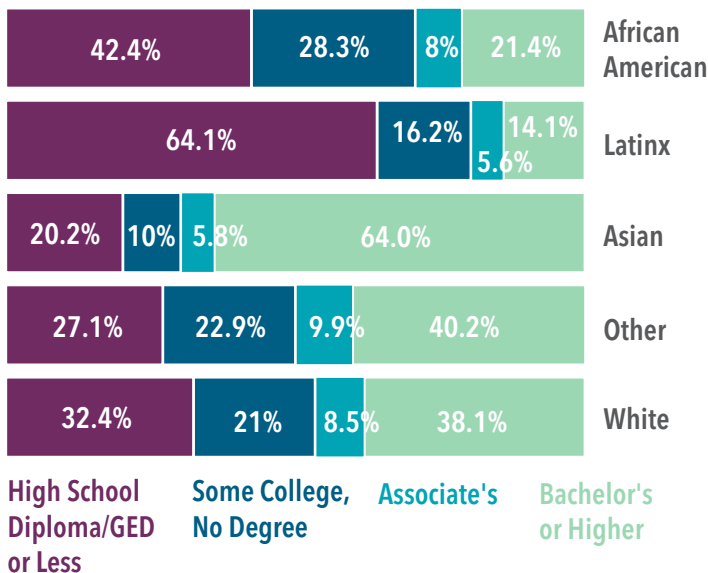
Ten years ago, Illinois adopted the **60 by 25 goal**: that 60% of adults would have a postsecondary degree or credential by the year 2025 to meet projected workforce needs. Today, the percentage of jobs requiring postsecondary education is even higher. In 2009, approximately 38% of adults in Illinois had an associate's degree or higher. In 2019, over 43% do. As the map shows, postsecondary attainment varies widely across the state, from a low of 21% of adults to a high of 57% of adults having an associate's degree or higher.

While this data only reflects degree attainment, credentials are also considered in the 60% target. According to the [Lumina Foundation](#), Illinois' attainment is at 55% when certificates and short-term credentials are included.

**The disparities in attainment outcomes are stark when we disaggregate by race/ethnicity.** While 47% of white adults have a post-secondary degree, only 29% of African Americans and 20% of Latinx adults do. For Bachelor's degrees, Illinois has the 11th largest gap of any state in attainment between African American and white adults and the 7th largest gap between Latinx and whites.

Equally significant are the percent of adults with some college, but no degree. That represents 324,000 African American, 195,000 Latinx, and 1.2

#### EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN ILLINOIS (AGE 25+) BY RACE/ETHNICITY



# Data Analysis

## Postsecondary Attainment

million white adults who started college but never earned a degree.<sup>1</sup> And it is worth noting the very large percentage, especially of Latinx adults, who have only a high school diploma, GED or less.

**The challenge becomes even more clear as we look at the demographic projections out to 2050.** The percent of the state's population that is white is projected to decline by 17.5%, while the Latinx population is projected to grow by over 60%, and the African American population is projected to stay relatively steady.

**Illinois is also facing a projected decline in the number of high school graduates due to demographic shifts.** According to recently released demographic projections by [WICHE in Knocking at the College Door](#), the number of Illinois high school graduates each year is projected to decline, most precipitously starting in 2026, from just over 148,000 in 2025 to approximately 115,000 in 2037.<sup>2</sup>

**We must address these disparate attainment rates and demographic shifts. It cannot be done by focusing on high school students alone, although better serving high school graduates is essential. We must re-engage adults in higher education and ensure their success.**



There are 324,000 African American, 195,000 Latinx, and 1.2 million white adults who started college but never received a degree.



<sup>1</sup> Because the data only shows postsecondary degree, we cannot tell what percent of these may have attained a credential rather than a degree.

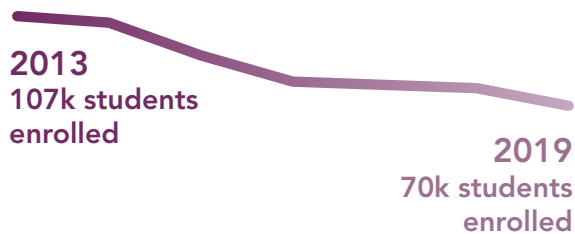
<sup>2</sup> A projected growth in Latinx high school graduates through 2025 helps to moderate the overall decline in high school graduates. The near-term declines are primarily being driven by the reduction in the number of white high school graduates. When we reach 2026, the number of Latinx graduates begins to rapidly decline and contributes to the larger overall declines.

The annual number of African American high school graduates declines slightly between now and 2025. However, beginning in 2026, the declines begin to get larger, as well.

Asians and those in the two or more races category will continue to incrementally grow, but neither group is large enough to offset the losses among the other groups.

### Equity Gaps Facing African American Students

Enrollment has dropped **34%** for African Americans.



Enrollment has dropped 34% for African Americans. Undergraduate enrollment in all sectors of higher education has declined by 19.4% between 2013 and 2019. Enrollment for white students has dropped by 25.9% overall, while it has dropped disproportionately for African Americans, even before the impact of COVID-19. In 2019 there were just over 70,000 African Americans enrolled in Illinois colleges and universities, down from 107,000 in 2013. And the proportion of the student population that is African American has declined every year from 14.7% to 12.2%, even though the percent of the state population that is African American has stayed steady.<sup>3</sup>

**African American first-year students are placed in developmental education at higher rates than white students.** At public universities, 15% of African Americans are placed in non-credit developmental education compared to 5% of whites, while in community colleges, 65% of African Americans and 40% of white students are. There is even a gap in the number of credit hours African American and white students accumulate when placed in math developmental education at public universities, with African American full-time freshmen accumulating only 8.4 credit hours in the first semester, while white students accumulate 10.6 on average. One would expect full-time students to accumulate at least 12 credit hours in a term, and 15 hours to stay on track to graduate in four years.

**Even earlier in their education career, African Americans have less access to Advanced Placement (AP) and Dual Credit early college experiences.** As a result, they miss out on the opportunity to earn credits or get exposure to college-level work. African Americans made up 15% of the high school graduating class in 2018. Yet, of the seniors enrolled in dual credit, only 9% are African American, while 65% are white. A similar pattern holds for AP.

Public universities retained 85% of white freshmen, but only 66% of African American freshmen. Non-profit private universities retained 82% of white freshmen while retaining only 63% of African American freshmen.

3 Data is also disaggregated by gender on the [IBHE website](#).



# Data Analysis

## Equity Gaps: African American Students



### Public universities are less likely to retain and advance African American students.<sup>4</sup>

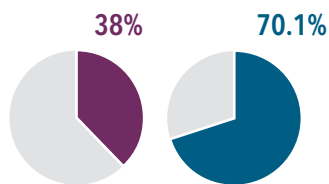
Public universities retained 85% of white students, but only 66% of African American first-time freshmen and advanced in class status (e.g. accumulated enough credits to move from freshman to sophomore status) 70% of white students and 33% of African American students.

**The experience of transfer students is better, but significant gaps remain.** Public universities retained 74% of African American transfer students, while retaining 85% of whites and advanced 70% of whites, while advancing only 56% of African Americans.

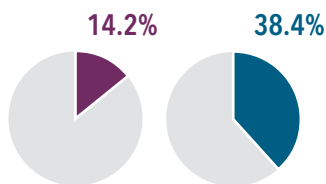
**Non-Profit private universities have retention and advancement gaps.** Non-profit private universities retained 82% of white freshmen while retaining only 63% of African Americans. Similarly, these institutions advanced 75% of white freshmen and 46% of African Americans. For transfer students, non-profit private institutions retained 77% of white students and 59% of African Americans, while advancing 65% of white and 45% of African American students.

### 2019 GRADUATION RATES

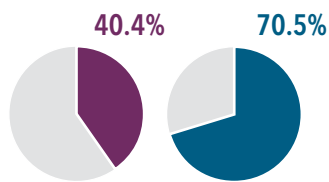
African American  
White



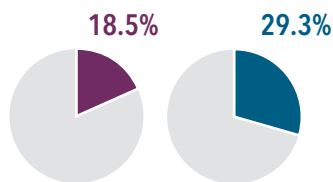
Public Universities



Community Colleges



Non-Profit Institutions



For Profit Institutions

### All this leads to dramatic and persistent gaps in the rates institutions graduate students.

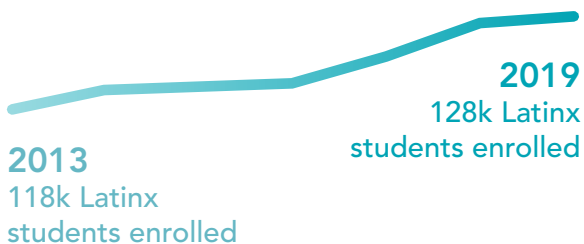
As we look at the percent of first-time, full time students who complete their degrees within 150% of expected time (e.g. 6 years for a bachelor's degree) at the same institution they started, we see significant and persistent gaps in the rates at which institutions in all sectors graduate white compared to African Americans students.

**IPEDS Graduation Rates at 150% of Normal Time for students who first enrolled full time.** The percent of full-time undergraduate students varies by sector: 88.4% for Public Universities; 35.4% for Community Colleges; 91.3% for NFP Private Colleges; and 41.1% for For-Profit Private Colleges.

### Equity Gaps Facing Latinx Students

**Enrollment for Latinx undergraduates has increased.** Enrollment for Latinx undergraduate students has increased by over 8% between 2013 and 2019. With the declines in enrollment for white and African American students, Latinx students are increasing as a proportion of undergraduate enrollment.

Enrollment has increased by over 8% for Latinx students.



**Latinx students are more likely to be placed in developmental education.** Public universities place 12% of Latinx freshman in developmental education, while placing only 5% of white students. For community colleges the rates are 58% of Latinx and 40% of whites. And the gaps continue in credits gained in the first semester. For students placed in developmental math, as one example, Latinx students accumulated only 8.7 credits, while white students accumulated 10.6 on average in the first semester, compared to a needed 12-15 credit hours to stay on track for timely graduation.

**Latinx students have less access to dual credit but proportional access to AP coursework in high school.** Latinx students were 24% of the high school graduates, but only 18% of those enrolled in dual credit courses were Latinx high school seniors. However, of high school seniors enrolled in AP, 25% were Latinx.

**Gaps persist in public university retention and advancement of Latinx freshmen.** Public universities retain 85% of white full-time freshmen but only 76% of their Latinx peers. Similarly, nearly 70% of white freshmen will be advanced, while only 53% of Latinx will.

**However, public universities retain Latinx and white transfer students at nearly the same rates.** Over 83% of Latinx transfer students are retained, while 85% of white transfer students are. Gaps in advancement rates are evident, with just over 64% of Latinx transfer students advancing to the next class status, while 70% of white students do.

Public universities retained 85% of white full-time freshmen but only 76% of their Latinx peers. Non-profit private institutions retained 82% of white and 78% of Latinx freshmen.

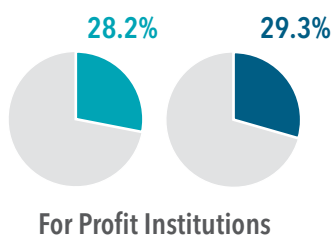
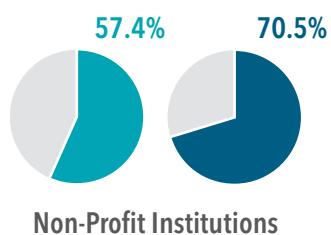
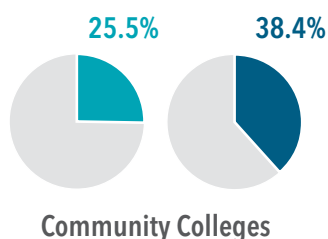
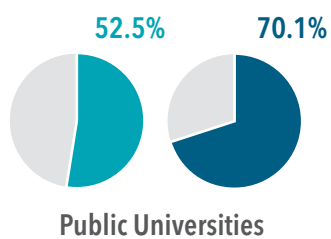
# Data Analysis

## Equity Gaps: Latinx Students



### 2019 GRADUATION RATES

Latinx  
White



**Gaps exist in non-profit private university retention and advancement rates.** Non-profit private institutions retained 82% of white and 78% of Latinx freshmen, while advancing 74% of white and 65% of Latinx freshmen. For transfer students, these institutions retained 77% of white students and 76% of Latinx students. Private institutions advanced 65% of white transfer students and 61% of Latinx students.

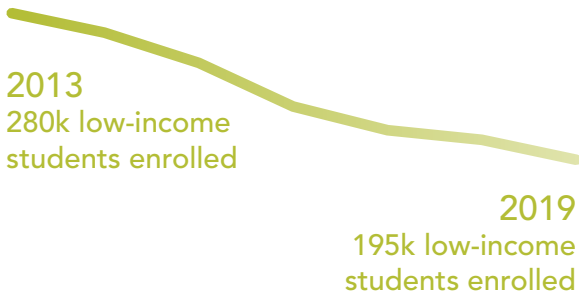
**Institution completion gaps persist over time.** As the charts illustrate, there are gaps in the rates at which institutions complete white and Latinx freshmen. These gaps have persisted over time.

*Based on 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 IPEDS Graduation Rates at 150% of Normal Time for students who first enrolled full time. The percent of full-time undergraduate students varies by sector: 88.4% for Public Universities; 35.4% for Community Colleges; 91.3% for NFP Private Colleges; and 41.1% for For-Profit Private Colleges.*



### Equity Gaps Facing Low-Income Students

Enrollment has decreased by **33%** for low-income students.



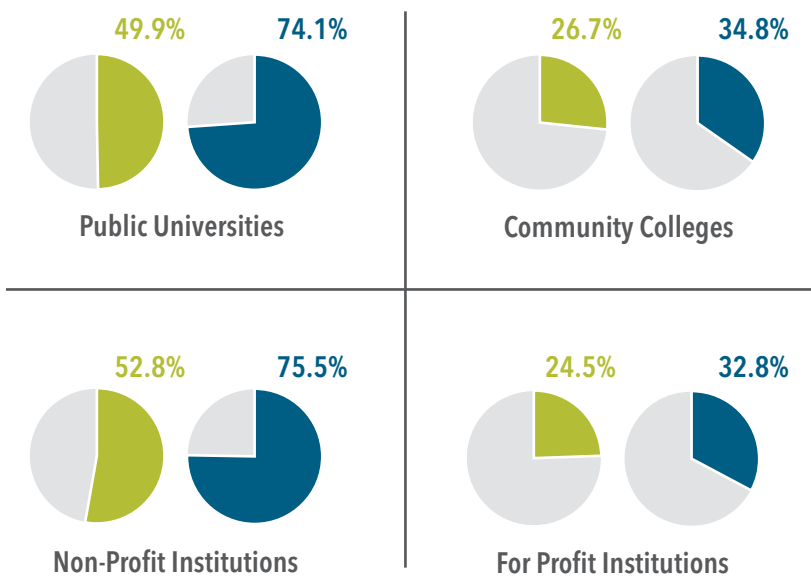
**The same patterns of inequity exist for low-income students.** About half of the students in the K-12 system come from low-income families, yet low-income students are less likely to go to college: only 53% of low-income Illinois high school graduates go to college within 6 months of graduating, while 74% of non-low-income students do. Between 2013 and 2019, Illinois enrolled over 85,000 fewer low-income undergraduate students, a 32.7% decrease, compared to a 14.9% decrease for non-low-income students.

**Low-income students are less likely to have had access to AP and Dual Credit and more likely to be placed in developmental education.** Of recent high school graduates, 41% are from low-income families. However, only 30% of those enrolled in either AP or dual credit were low-income. Low-income students were placed in developmental education at higher rates, with 15% at public universities compared to 5% of non-low-income students, 59% percent compared to 42% at community colleges, 10% compared to 3% at not-for-profit private institutions, and 11.5% compared to 7% at for-profit institutions.

**Low-income students are less likely to have had access to AP and Dual Credit and more likely to**

### 2019 GRADUATION RATES

Pell  
Non-Pell



**Institutions are less successful in serving low-income students, with fewer being retained and advanced in their programs.** As the chart on the next page shows, there is a 10 percentage-point gap in the rate public universities retain low-income and non-low-income students, a nearly 14 percentage point gap at not-for-profit private colleges, and a smaller gap, but much lower retention overall, for for-profit colleges.

Rates of advancement are much lower and the gaps much wider with public universities advancing 71% of non-low-income students and 49% of low-income and the not-for-profit private institutions showing rates of 73% compared to 54% for low-income students.

Based on 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 IPEDS Graduation Rates at 150% of Normal Time for students who first enrolled full time.

# Data Analysis

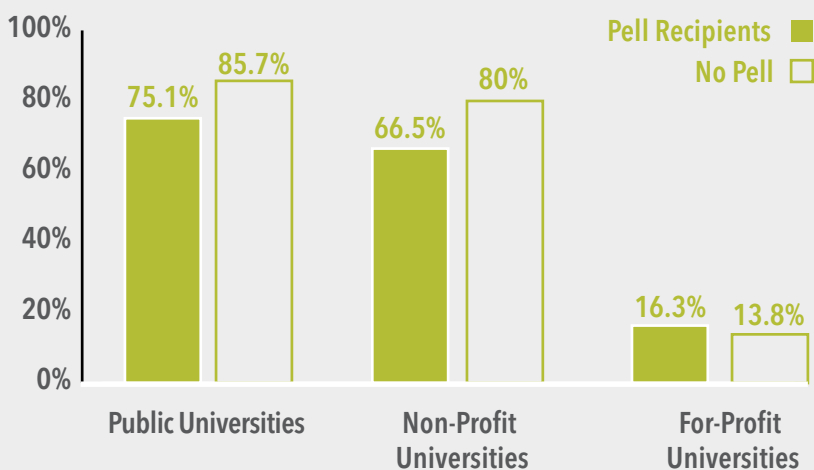
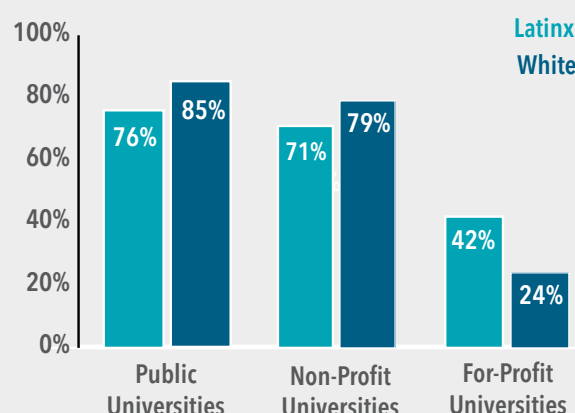
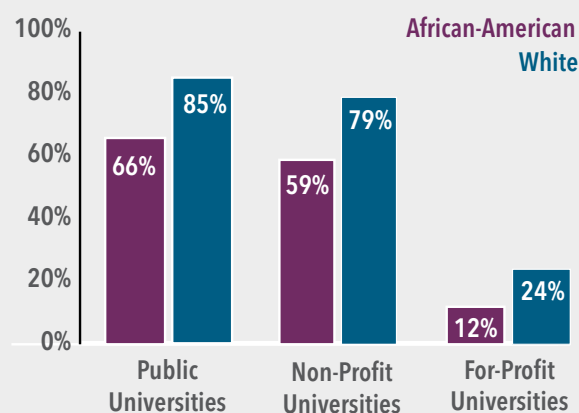
## Equity Gaps: Low-income Students

The results are better for transfer students, with the overall retention rate higher and **gaps smaller**: two percentage points at public universities, but still eight percentage points at non-profit private colleges.

**Not surprisingly, completion rate gaps between low-income and non-low-income students are stark.** Further, as we now know, low-income students were disproportionately – and dramatically – impacted by COVID-19, suggesting that without additional intervention, we will see further decreases in enrollment and completion.

### RETENTION RATE GAPS SUMMARIZED

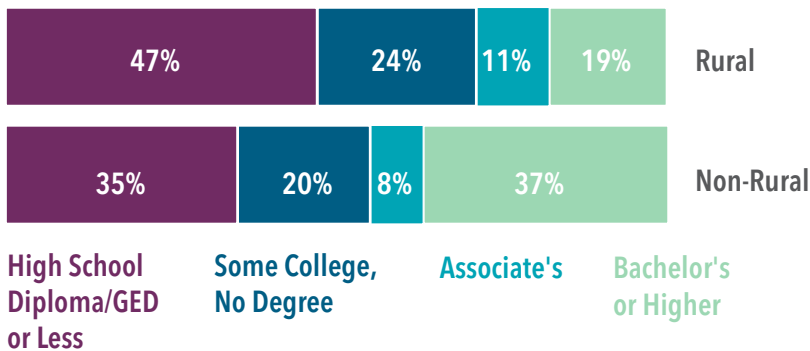
Return rates for full-time freshmen.



Institutions are less successful in serving African-American, Latinx and low-income students, with fewer being retained and advanced in their programs.

### Equity Gaps Facing Students from Rural Communities

#### EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN ILLINOIS (AGE 25+) BY RURALITY



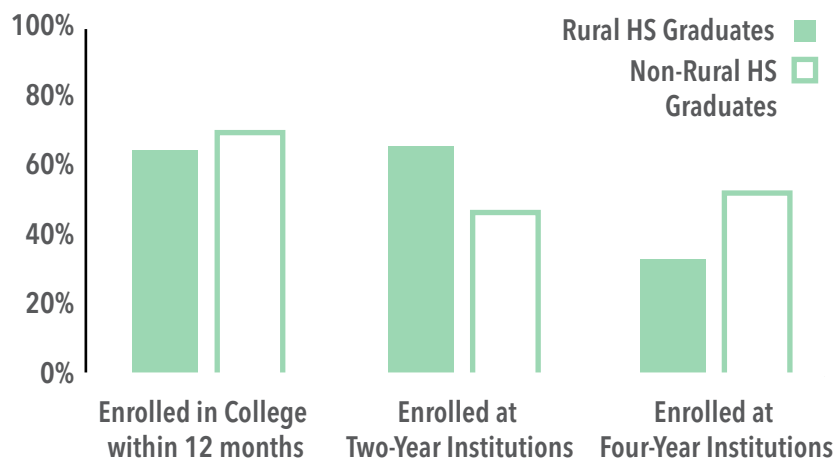
Rural counties generally have smaller proportions of their working-age population with an associate degree or higher, as illustrated in the [interactive maps](#) on the IBHE website. Conversely, rural counties have higher proportions with a high school diploma or less and slightly higher proportions with some college, but no degree.

**Rural students have greater access to dual credit, but significantly**

**lower proportions have access to AP compared to students in non-rural high schools.** Sixteen percent of rural students (based on high school location) had access to dual credit programs, while only 10% of non-rural students did. However, only 7% of rural students had access to AP programs, while 27% of non-rural students did.

**Rural high school students are less likely to go to college right after high school, and when they do, they are more likely to go to community colleges.** The average college enrollment rate within 12-months of graduation for rural high schools was 65.0%, compared to 70.2% for high schools located in non-rural areas. For those that do enroll, 66% will go to a community college, compared to 47% of students from non-rural areas. The rate of enrollment at four-year institutions was lower among students from rural high schools (34% to 53%).

#### ENROLLMENT DATA FOR RURAL VS NON-RURAL STUDENTS



While rural students are underrepresented among freshmen at Illinois public universities, institutions retain rural and non-rural freshmen at same rates. In fall of 2019-20, rural students represented approximately 7% of the freshmen at public universities and about 14% of transfer students. Institutions retained just under 80% of rural and non-rural freshmen and advanced rural freshmen at a greater rate than urban. However, rural transfer students are retained and advanced at lower rates than their non-rural counterparts.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The analysis in this section comes from data collected by IBHE. There are too few cohorts of data to report at this time on completion comparing rural and non-rural students.

# Data Analysis

## Funding for Higher Education



### Funding for Higher Education:

For years, Illinois has dramatically underfunded its higher education system. Since Fiscal Year 2002, higher education appropriations declined significantly in absolute terms. After accounting for inflation and new unfunded mandates, the buying power in Fiscal Year 2021 is just 55.5% of what it was in Fiscal Year 2002.

During the budget impasse, universities and community colleges received just 30% of Fiscal Year 2015 funding in Fiscal Year 2016, a cut of \$1.2 billion to higher education.

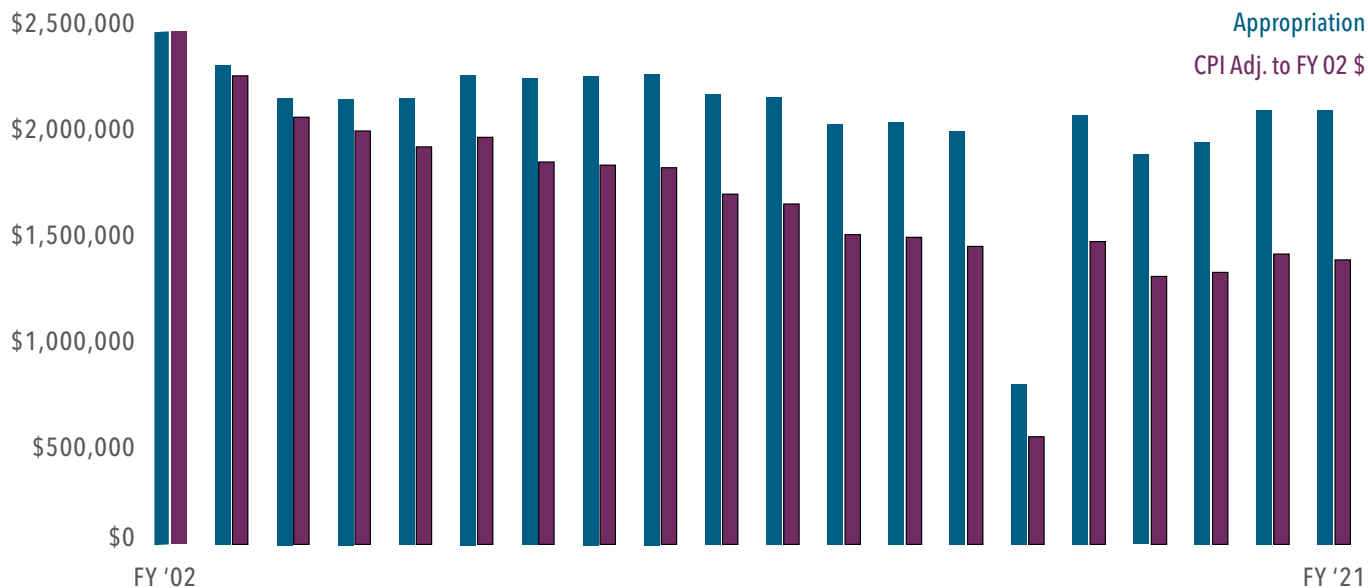
**As state appropriations for institutions declined, tuition increased.** In FY 2002, state funds on average covered 72% of public university costs vs. 28% from tuition and fees. **In FY 2020, the situation has flipped, with the state covering 35.6% vs. 64.4% from tuition and fees.**

The impact for community colleges has been similar but shifts the burden to tuition and property taxes. In FY 2002, state appropriations on average covered 27.4% of costs, tuition and fees covered 30.6%, and property taxes the remaining 42%. In FY 2019, **state appropriations had declined to 14.4% of community college costs, with tuition and fees covering 40.4%, and property taxes 45.2%.**

**The state has begun to make a turnaround, with Governor Pritzker's** Fiscal Year 2020 budget representing the largest percent increase in higher education funding since 1990, and that funding level being maintained despite the fiscal challenges brought on by the pandemic.

The buying power of Fiscal Year 2021 appropriations is just 55.5% of what it was in Fiscal Year 2002.

**HIGHER EDUCATION OPERATIONS APPROPRIATIONS**  
Adjusted for Mandates & Inflation (CPI-U)



# Strategies for a Thriving Illinois

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## Strategies Drive Toward Equity, Sustainability & Growth

Based on the data laid out above, the results of the survey and focus group findings, the IBHE has set a **vision of a higher education ecosystem that ensures individuals, families, and communities across the state can thrive.**

The following strategies are organized according to our interconnected goals for a thriving Illinois: that we have equity, sustainability and growth.



Close the equity gaps for students who have been left behind.



Build a stronger financial future for individuals and institutions.



Increase talent and innovation to drive economic growth.





## EQUITY

### Close the equity gaps for students who have been left behind.

Data shows equity gaps throughout the educational path for too many students. We need a higher education system in Illinois designed to meet the needs and lead to the success of historically underserved and underrepresented students, with particular attention paid to Black, Latinx, Low-Income, rural, and working adult student groups, so that all students can thrive.<sup>6</sup>

This Plan's Equity Strategies were formed with the following in mind:

- **Today's higher education system serves students throughout their lives and careers.** We must support a higher education system that serves all students of different ages and at various points in their careers, who need to re-skill, up-skill or change career paths.
- **We have done much to smooth the path from high school to college and career but more still needs to be done.** Too many students face barriers in getting to and through higher education. The data shows significant equity gaps in access to early college experience, placement in developmental education, rates of retention, advancement and completion, and career outcomes.
- **Tighter alignment and transfer supports will help students navigate multiple on/off ramps through higher education.** Today there is no "typical" higher education student and no single path that serves all students. Illinois leads the nation in bachelor's degree completions among community college transfer students (53.8%), yet students face challenges in ensuring academic credits transfer; that paths are clear for degree completion; and that courses and services are available at times and in ways that are responsive to their needs.
- **We have untapped potential in the adults who haven't yet received a postsecondary degree/credential.** It is both an equity imperative and an economic imperative that the higher education system works to bring back working adults as students, while recognizing and valuing their unique family, work, and community experiences and needs.
- **We must rebuild our systems for a post-pandemic world.** We must take the lessons learned through the pandemic to build a stronger system that is more agile, supports students, and is prepared for the future of learning.

<sup>6</sup> The strategies outlined were designed with recognition of equity gaps for many more groups, including Black, Latinx, Asian American, Low-Income, first-generation, rural, working adult students, students leaving foster care, students with disabilities, immigrants, undocumented students, justice-involved students, indigenous students, LGBTQ students, and veteran students, recognizing the intersectionality of these identities.

# Strategies for a Thriving Illinois *Equity*

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The recommended strategies outlined here incorporate data-driven and best practices that help to address the persistent equity gaps in higher education and lay the framework for an aligned higher education system that serves students independent of the path they take.

They generally focus on the non-financial supports required to close equity gaps and create a thriving Illinois. Financial strategies are covered in the Sustainability section of the report.



We need a higher education system in Illinois designed to meet the needs and lead to the success of historically underserved and underrepresented students, with particular attention paid to Black, Latinx, Low-Income, rural, and working adult students, so that all students can thrive.





## Equity Strategies:

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### 1 Support the ongoing learning renewal of students and systemic implementation of evidence-informed student support practices.

The pandemic disproportionately impacted students from low-income families and families of color, exacerbating the factors that place students at risk of not enrolling, continuing, and completing higher education. It is critical to provide differentiated academic and social and emotional support that students need to ensure they return to their pre-pandemic learning trajectory. While these strategies are essential to address pandemic-related educational impact, they should be implemented as systemic solutions that will address equity gaps for the long-run.

- **Leverage resources developed by the Illinois P-20 Council** to support social/emotional well-being and learning renewal. These high impact practices were identified to help the education system best direct federal funds provided through relief packages.
- **Scale summer bridge programs** that support students' academic and social-emotional transition to college and help them succeed.<sup>7</sup>
- **Extend learning opportunities to mitigate learning loss and accelerate time to degree**, such as offering targeted summer courses to full-time students who have earned less than 30 credit hours in their prior academic year.<sup>8</sup>
- **Provide proactive and comprehensive advising**, first-year experience, experiential learning, professional support for students with disabilities, along with wrap-around supports.
- **High-impact practices**, including service learning, learning communities, research with faculty, writing-intensive courses, and internship and field experiences, with a specific lens on serving [underrepresented minority students](#), contribute to the success of student learning and retention.<sup>9</sup>
- **Support for meeting students' basic needs**, including housing, food security, mental health/wellness services, and child care, among others.
- Reformed financial policies, including policies on financial holds, financial literacy, emergency financial assistance.

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7 Summer bridge programs, including, for example [UIC's Summer College](#) and [LARES](#) program for Latinx students, have been shown to increase retention and graduation rates.

8 To bring such programs to scale would require additional resources, like extending MAP to summer term.

9 The [Summer Research Opportunities Program](#) at the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign provides a summer program for undergraduate students from groups underrepresented in graduate study to conduct research with faculty and explore careers in research.

- Professional development to provide all faculty and staff the skills to [support students with disabilities](#) or students coming from under-resourced communities, as well as professional development for trustees to better understand student needs.

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## 2 Establish and implement institution-level equity plans, practices to close access, progression, completion and attainment gaps.

Sharing best practices across the state will help strengthen each institution's individual work. Equity plans should outline each institution's specific steps to close equity gaps in access, progression, and timely completion, including solutions in Equity Strategy 1:

- **Review and revision of existing policies and practices that exacerbate equity gaps.** Review should include funding models, financial aid, admissions, placement tests, remedial programs or structured pathways.
- **Practices of interrogating disaggregated data at multiple levels to understand the points of intervention and whether solutions are working.** This should include early indicators and other predictive analytics tools that can help inform interventions to change a student's graduation trajectory.<sup>10</sup> Such predictive analytics tools should be coupled with other information (e.g. non-cognitive student need surveys) to ensure students receive appropriate services.
- **Equity impact analysis** for a structured approach to ensuring decisions are made only after analysis of impact on underserved or minoritized groups.
- **Campus climate surveys with action based on findings** to improve the experience of historically underserved or underrepresented students.
- **Professional development designed to achieve equity**, including cultural competency training with a trauma-informed lens and a focus on intersectionality.

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## 3 Implement equitable talent management to increase and retain faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees of color.

There are significant gaps in representation of faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees of color in higher education. Several strategies have been shown to be effective.

- [Training on faculty hiring practices to avoid issues of microaggression](#) that can occur in job interviews and review of CVs.
- **Appointing a faculty diversity recruitment liaison in search committees.**

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<sup>10</sup> As one example, the University of Illinois-Chicago developed early indicators that predict whether a first-year student is likely to graduate within 6 years. These indicators include academic and financial metrics in the first two semesters.

- **Cluster hiring programs**, a research-based approach that fosters faculty retention and diversity, means institutions bring on faculty of color in a cohort to provide shared experiences and support.
- **Pipeline programs** can be expanded to identify promising scholars from diverse backgrounds to support their development as graduate students and post-doctoral fellows.<sup>11</sup>

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## 4 Attract working adults through outreach and supports specifically for them.

As the economy evolves, many adults will need to upskill with additional credentials or will need to complete a college degree. Illinois needs an active effort to re-engage and support adults, particularly adults of color as they continue their postsecondary path.

- **Re-engage adults who dropped out or stopped out** due to barriers such as advising errors, life circumstances, transfer release, pandemic related challenges, financial holds, etc.<sup>12</sup>
- **Provide wrap around student services for adults**, including the resources and counseling necessary—when and how students need them—to navigate the higher education ecosystem.
- **Pursue financial strategies to mitigate barriers to enrollment** such as debt forgiveness, adult-oriented scholarship programs, etc. (Also see strategies in the Sustainability section).
- **Adopt teaching and learning methodologies and practices most appropriate for adult students** and professional development opportunities to deliver quality learning.

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## 5 Consider implementation of a direct admissions program.

Under a direct admissions program, students are automatically notified of admission to all participating four- and two-year institutions for which they meet the admissions criteria. This means students would not have to search for which college they want to attend but would be able to choose from institutions that they have already been accepted to. Illinois has already adopted the Common App single application for all public universities and should explore a complementary direct admissions policy to simplify the college search and admissions process.<sup>13</sup>

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11 The state's Diversifying Faculty in Illinois (DFI) program is one example.

12 Consider programs such as the [Tennessee Reconnect](#) and [Minnesota Reconnect](#) models.

13 [Research](#) on a direct admissions program coupled with a common application found an 88% increase in applications, a 6.2% increase in the college-going rate, and a 3% decrease in students enrolling in out-of-state schools.

## 6 Expand equitable access, support, and success in rigorous and strategic early college coursework.

Access to high-quality early college opportunities, gives students the opportunity to earn college credit while in high school and strengthen their path to degree completion with structured student support. However, as the data above shows, students of color and students from rural communities have inequitable access to early college programs.

- **Build capacity to support Black, Latinx, and rural students' access to early college through flexible, online, and other delivery options**
- **Consider financial support to institutions to offer dual credit/enrollment courses.**
- **Expand graduate-level learning opportunities** that ensure Illinois high school teachers earn the credentials to teach dual credit coursework in their high schools.<sup>14</sup> Four-year institutions could design graduate-level certificates/programs to provide educators with coursework leading to an endorsement in dual credit instruction on the Illinois State Board of Education Professional Educator License. Additionally, IBHE, ISBE and Colleges of Education should convene to determine if the Master's in Teaching could be revised to include a pathway for the required 18 credit hours within a discipline for dual credit credentialing (e.g., as done in WI, MN, and IN).

### Postsecondary Workforce Readiness Act (PWR) Establishes Paths to College and Career

The 2016 PWR Act laid the foundation for four student-centered strategies to help high school students prepare for college and careers. The Postsecondary and Career Expectations (PaCE) framework outlines what students should know and do from middle school through 12th grade to prepare for college and careers. The competency-based high school pilots allow districts to focus on student mastery of skills and knowledge, removing the constraints of "seat time." Transitional math and English, a key strategy to developmental education reform, provides high school students a path college readiness before high school graduation and to bypass a placement test for entry into college coursework. School districts can award College and Career Pathway Endorsements on diplomas to indicate a student is ready for postsecondary education or a career.

## 7 Provide technical assistance to support implementation of developmental education reform.

Reforms are underway as a result of the SJR 41 Task Force, PA 101-0654, the adoption of placement recommendations by the Illinois community college system, and other related legislation. Such efforts should include evidence-based models that allow for expeditious placement into credit-bearing coursework.

14 Examine appropriate mechanisms for scaling these efforts (e.g., the Midwestern Higher Education Compact's Graduate Quest program, etc.).

## 8 Expand the role of college access and support models to positively impact college-going and completion rates.

Near-peer mentoring, transitional coaching, and other support models, like the ISACorps, have been shown to minimize summer melt, and improve matriculation, retention, and completion outcomes.<sup>15</sup>



These recommended equity strategies incorporate data-driven and best practices that help to address the persistent equity gaps in higher education and lay the framework for an aligned higher education system that serves students independent of the path they take.



<sup>15</sup> Programs such as [NEIU's Projecto Pa'Lante](#) or [One Million Degrees](#) for community college students are examples.

# Strategies for a Thriving Illinois Sustainability

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## SUSTAINABILITY

### Build a Stronger Financial Future for Individuals & Institutions

tuition has increased, creating an increasingly untenable financial burden on individuals. As student and workforce needs have changed, the state funding system simply has not kept up.

To date, funding for higher education in Illinois has not been connected to state's goals for student success and the system of public and private institutions that supports them. For decades, public universities have been funded through an "across-the-board" approach, where all institutions receive the same percentage decrease or increase of funding from the prior year; and, while community colleges receive state funding by formula, it has been underfunded for years.

Neither approach acknowledges the changing needs of our students and our economy nor accounts for the socio-economic status of students, their family circumstances, or financial capacity to pay tuition. **Furthermore, both university and community college funding approaches have exacerbated inequities** and have led to an increase in the amount of debt students and families take on.

Affordability is one of the biggest barriers to higher education access and success, especially for low-income students, students of color, working adults, rural students, and many others who are underserved by the higher education system.

**For years, Illinois has dramatically underfunded its higher education system. As state appropriations for institutions have declined,**



Affordability is one of the biggest barriers to higher education access and success, especially for low-income students, students of color, working adults, rural students, and many others who are underserved by the higher education system.





## Existing Financial Aid Programs Are No Longer Enough

Illinois has a strong state-funded need-based grant program, the Monetary Award Program (MAP), providing support for low-income students who apply via the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid.

However, over time, the state appropriation for MAP has not kept up with rising tuition and fees, creating a gap in purchasing power. In Fiscal Year 2002, MAP covered 100% of average tuition and fees at Illinois public universities and community colleges. However, by Fiscal Year 2020, MAP awards dropped to 34% of average tuition and fees at universities and 36% community colleges, even after an additional \$86M infusion to MAP between Fiscal Year 2018 and Fiscal Year 2020.

Because MAP is awarded to eligible students on a first-come, first-served basis, students who complete their FAFSA later in the year are at risk of missing out on a grant. In Fiscal Year 2020, funds were insufficient to grant MAP awards to an estimated 53,000 eligible students, most of whom were potential community college students.<sup>16</sup>

Even with federal and state financial aid, many low-income students are unable to afford college. In Fiscal Year 2020, the estimated total cost of attendance (tuition and fees plus living expenses) for an in-state student at a four-year public university in Illinois was just under \$30,000.

- A low-income student who receives the maximum MAP grant, Pell grant, Federal Work Study, and Direct Federal Student loans, without additional scholarships, loans, wages, or family resources, would be **\$12,000 short** in being able to pay for the full cost of attendance at a public university.
- Community college students not living with their parents face average total costs of attendance of just under \$17,000, for which the maximum MAP, Pell, and Direct Student Loans still leave the students **short by over \$3,000**.

As a result of the high costs and a lack of good information about college costs and student financial aid,<sup>17</sup> many students turn to additional expensive private loans to fill the financial gaps between available financial aid and college costs.

<sup>16</sup> It is estimated that this number will be less than 23,000 when FY21 ends because fewer low-income students are completing the FAFSA. Late-applying students are more likely to be independent, have limited resources for college, and plan to go to a community college compared to students who receive a grant.

<sup>17</sup> The report of the Chicago State University Equity Working Group for Black Student Access and Success [Action Plan](#) calls for reaching students, parents, and families to expand their financial aid awareness; requiring comprehensive, evidence-based and culturally-relevant financial literacy education for every student to prepare them for post-high school success; and building trust surrounding financial aid and FAFSA applications.

Recent legislation and federal changes will also simplify the FAFSA process and increase transparency beginning in 2023, but without deliberate strategies to increase student and family financial literacy, students and families still may not be able to access and use all the public resources available to them.

## Illinois Needs a New Higher Education Funding Policy Centered on Equity

The strategies outlined here work together to ensure Illinois' system of higher education is affordable, equitable, and supports students. We focus on ensuring students have access to financial assistance, minimizing reliance on private debt; managing the operating costs of higher education through shared administrative services; and rebuilding and reinvesting in the state's system of funding higher education to ensure it is equitable, stable, and sufficient so that underinvestment no longer holds Illinois back from thriving.



## Sustainability Strategies:

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### 1 Invest in public higher education through an equitable, stable, and sufficient funding system that meets all the principles laid out below.

An equitable, sufficient, and stable funding system would:

- **Provide equitable funding so that students can receive the best educational experience and succeed at whichever institution they attend.** Illinois needs a funding system for higher education that supports equitable access, progression, and timely completion and accounts for the robust student support services (counseling, advising, wellness, bridge, mental health and child care supports, to name a few) that help students get to and through completion. Students should have equitable access to institutions, and institutions should have resources necessary to provide students the supports that enable them to succeed. Inequitable resources available to community colleges resulting from over-reliance on property taxes must also be recognized and addressed.
- **Support a thriving postsecondary system that enriches the state and its residents.** Illinois depends on higher education to preserve, expand, and transmit knowledge, offer solutions to society's challenges, serve as a civic partner, produce well-educated residents, and enrich life. Research at our institutions expands our understanding of the social and physical world, enhances the health and well-being of our residents, and drives innovation and economic development in our communities. Educating students in the humanities and liberal arts support the whole student and ensures that the leaders of the future better understand the human condition. Institutions are vibrant anchors of communities. In short, the postsecondary system enables students to better build knowledge, create wealth, and be civically engaged. Illinois' higher education funding system should support these values and goals.
- **Fund institutions sufficiently to achieve student, institutional, and state goals.** Illinois must provide sufficient (i.e. adequate or full) funding necessary to achieve the state goals set out in the higher education Strategic Plan, for each institution to fulfill

its mission, and to support students in achieving their goals. For the higher education system to deliver on these expectations, we must ensure that institutions are funded to do so.

- **Ensure affordability for all students.** The funding system should ensure that students can start and complete college and access a career of their choice without excessive student debt. This means tuition must be affordable. To do so the funding system must recognize the interrelationship among federal student aid, state funding for public universities and community colleges, state need-based (MAP grants) and other student aid, tuition, local property taxes, and capital appropriations. Our funding system should ensure that college is affordable for the most vulnerable students in the state.
- **Recognize institutional uniqueness.** A value of the state's higher education system is its diversity of colleges and universities, each with different missions, yet all working in concert to serve the state. This calls for a funding system that recognizes these different missions and accounts for variation in institutional portfolios that serve the state (e.g. returning adult students, first-generation students, graduate and professional training, health care provision, research, community engagement, etc).
- **Provide predictability, stability, and limited volatility.** Students and families need predictability to plan for college. Institutions need predictability and stability to build and maintain programs and services that effectively support students. Funding should not dramatically fluctuate from year to year and the funding pattern should provide plenty of time for short- and long-range planning.

## Colleges and Universities Essential in the Fight Against COVID-19

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic and since, Illinois colleges and universities have worked to support the learning, health, and well-being of students, campus communities, and the state. Institutions pivoted to remote learning and provided students with laptops, Internet access, and virtual advising and tutoring. They joined a state effort to make Wi-Fi accessible across their campuses, spreading connectivity to spaces like parking lots, often the only viable internet access point for students and communities. Institutions leveraged private funds and federal resources to provide emergency grants to help students with rent, food, child care, and other basic living needs. Faculty and staff reached out to students individually to ensure their well-being and connect them to campus and community resources for mental health supports and health care. Colleges and universities across Illinois donated PPE to community health care facilities, made campus spaces available for testing and quarantine, and manufactured testing supplies. Researchers built epidemiological models to project COVID-19 patterns and inform state policy. The University of Illinois designed and produced emergency ventilators and developed a rapid saliva test for COVID-19 that is used by colleges, universities and school districts across the state and country.

# Strategies for a Thriving Illinois Sustainability

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- **Include a “hold-harmless” provision.** In an environment where public institutions are insufficiently funded, the funding system should build toward sufficient funding without reducing current state appropriations to any institution.
- **Support accountability.** A *Thriving Illinois* includes a call for an accountability plan, with a set of measures to ensure that the state is making progress toward the goals of closing equity gaps, increasing attainment to meet the state’s talent needs, and improving access and affordability. The funding system should support accountability.
- **Support a collaborative higher education system.** Students are well served by having access to this rich higher education ecosystem that provides multiple ways to enter, transfer, and successfully exit the system throughout their career (and life). The funding system should reinforce the interconnectedness of the higher education system and support student success within and across institutions, especially as new, innovative networks, collaborations, partnerships, and consortia are developed.
- **Encourage partnerships outside higher education.** Partnerships are vital to a strong higher education ecosystem. The higher education system should seek to build partnerships, such as with businesses, non-profits, the philanthropic community, the federal government, and regional, national, and international collaborations that have a vested interest in a flourishing higher education system in Illinois. The goal is to reinforce support for this crucial public good in the state.
- **Articulate rationale for public support.** A transparent funding system should point the system toward meeting individual, institutional, and state goals. A funding system that fulfills the principles outlined above makes the case for public support.

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## 2 Invest an additional \$50M each year to reach \$1 billion in MAP funding over 10 years.

MAP is shown to be effective in helping low-income and minority students enroll in and complete college. Investing in MAP is smart policy. As the data above show, thousands of students do not receive MAP because the funding runs out.

Estimates suggest that an initial \$50M investment, if targeted to ensuring late-filing students have access to MAP, would both address the decades-long problem of MAP funds running out, which disproportionately impacts community college students, and would meet the goal of a student from a family with less than \$45,000 annual income being able to attend community college full-time free of tuition and fees using MAP and Pell grants.

***A \$50M additional annual investment in MAP is estimated to ensure that all students can continue to be served<sup>18</sup> and that a MAP grant will cover 50% of average tuition and fees in 10 years.***

## 3 Allow MAP grants to be used for year-round study.

MAP can only be used for fall and spring semester, while currently Pell can be used year-round. For many students, taking some courses over the summer can keep them on track to degree completion.<sup>19</sup>

## 4 Build programs to address challenges of “holds” on student accounts.

The practice of institutions placing a “hold” on a student account because of an outstanding balance has significant equity implications. Illinois students should not be locked out of completing a degree due to small outstanding balances.

However, there is a tension between the institutional need to collect revenue owed and the impact on students, who, unable to re-enroll, drop out. A hold could also mean the student in the future cannot access a transcript to enroll elsewhere (thus losing credits) or secure employment.<sup>20</sup> These significant consequences can result even if balances are relatively small or the student is close to graduation.

**Innovative debt forgiveness programs exist**, like Chicago State University’s [Finish Strong](#) or City Colleges of Chicago’s [Fresh Start](#), that help students get back on track to completing their degree. Another idea is to create a clearinghouse so that students attempting to attend a different school could have their transcript released as a result of the institutions connecting through the clearinghouse and making a financial agreement.

## 5 Work with the Office of the Treasurer to provide low-cost loans to low-income students to cover total cost of attendance.

The data cited above shows the large gap between tuition and fees and the full cost of attending college for students who depend on MAP and Pell.

**The Treasurer’s Office is developing loan products for students to cover the costs above MAP, Pell, and Federal Direct Student Loans** to avoid students relying on high-cost private loans to cover these additional costs. Agencies should work closely with the Treasurer to ensure students in need of additional financial resources are connected to this program.

## 6 Implement creative options for building family savings through Illinois’ 529 savings plans.

<sup>19</sup> Recent data also shows that summer programs targeted to students who do not complete 30 credit hours in their first year helps keep them on track to graduation.

<sup>20</sup> A [report](#) by IthakaS+R consulting analyzes the extent of the “stranded credit” problem. They also estimate that in Illinois, over 275,000 students have nearly \$800M in outstanding debt to Illinois institutions, an average of \$2,900.

The Treasurer's Office provides robust college savings plans through the Bright Start and Bright Directions 529 programs. Research shows that simply the presence of such savings increases the likelihood of children attending college by three times and the likelihood of completing by four times.<sup>21</sup> The Treasurer's Office estimates that an \$8M - \$10M investment annually could fund the Children's Savings Program -- which provides \$50 in a 529 account to each Illinois child at birth (PA 101-0466).

**An endowment of \$100 million could fund the program sustainably.** Less would be needed if only low-income families were supported. Such an "early scholarship" program could grow into substantial funds for families for higher education by the child's high school graduation.

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## 7 Pilot and expand shared services to reduce institutional administrative costs.

Higher education institutions share many similar administrative functions and there are opportunities to shift routine functions to a statewide or regional centers to free up local staff for more strategic work or to invest savings in student-facing services.

- **Human resources** should be explored as a place to start since public universities are all already part of the State Universities Civil Service System, the state-administered benefit plans, and the State Universities Retirement System.
- **Shared IT services** are another promising area. The [South Metropolitan Higher Education Consortium](#) provides its 11 member institutions—public and private four-year institutions and community colleges—an opportunity to share costs related to major and expensive IT services, such a disaster recovery, compliance, and security audits. The services provided through these joint efforts are more robust than any individual institution could afford to secure alone.<sup>22</sup>

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21 Terri Friedline, William Elliott, Ilsung Nam. "Small-dollar children's saving accounts and children's college outcomes by race." *Children and Youth Services Review*. Vol. 35, No. 3, March 2013. Pages 548-559.

See also Elliott, W. & Rauscher, E. (2013). From disadvantaged students to college graduates: The role of CSAs (Chapter 4-Brief). In W. Elliott (Ed.), *Giving children a financial stake in college: Are CSAs a way to help maximize financial aid dollars?* (Biannual Report of the Assets and Education Field). Lawrence, KS: Assets and Education Initiative.

22 Additionally the "Mutual Aid" agreement covers support in the event of natural disasters, communicable disease outbreak, or the like. The member institutions step in to provide needed resources such as IT support, facility resources, classroom space, supplies or counseling and media support to the impacted institution.

## 8 Expand joint purchasing among institutions.

- **Procurement:** The [Illinois Public Higher Education Consortium \(IPHEC\)](#) serves public universities and community colleges across the state by providing joint procurement efforts. Currently, IPHEC procures \$400M of goods and services annually on behalf of public universities and community colleges. Still, there are tremendous opportunities to expand and reduce cost, particularly if upfront commitments and quantities can be secured and for highly consistent commodities. There are also ongoing saving opportunities available to Illinois higher education institutions through the [Midwest Higher Education Compact](#) for IT programs and services.
- **Student health insurance:** A statewide student health insurance pool/purchase should be considered. Each institution procures its own student health insurance plans. However, the student risk profile varies across the state, with some institutions serving a younger student body and others serving older adults. There is also variation in the health outcomes of the communities different institutions serve. As a result, students pay disparate rates for health insurance based on their institutional peers. A broader risk pool would both increase negotiating power and spread cost across the state.



Our strategies for sustainability focus on ensuring students have access to financial assistance, minimizing reliance on private debt; managing the operating costs of higher education through shared administrative services; and rebuilding and reinvesting in the state's system of funding higher education to ensure it is equitable, stable, and sufficient so that underinvestment no longer holds Illinois back from thriving.



# Strategies for a Thriving Illinois Growth

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GROWTH

## Increase Talent & Innovation To Drive Economic Growth

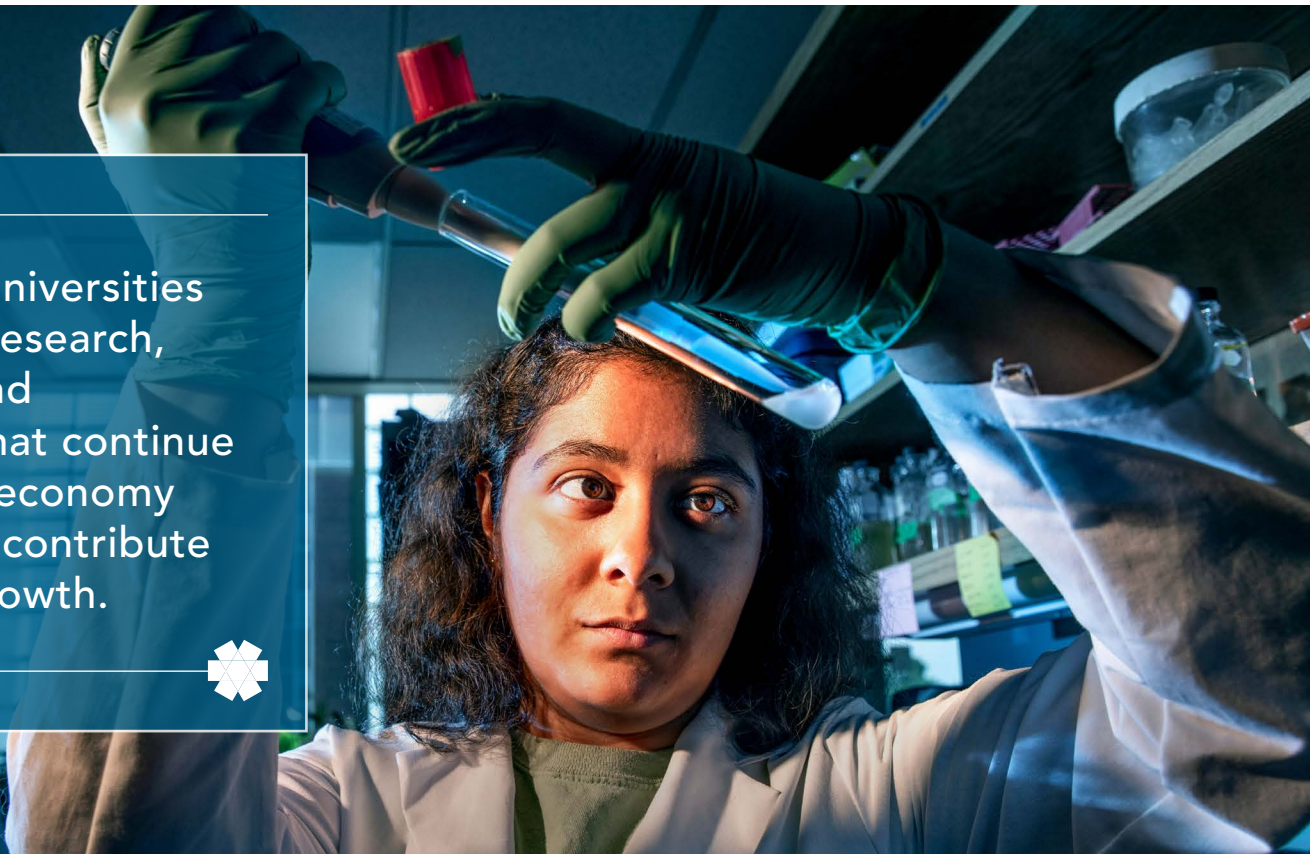
We are in an era of rapid change in the nature of work and the future of learning. The skills and knowledge that students need to be successful are evolving with an increasing focus on connecting ideas, solving problems, and building relationships. The nature of work and the entire economy are changing as technology, automation, and ubiquitous access to information alter how and

where people do their jobs. Life-long learning is essential as people need to continuously develop skills, gain knowledge and prepare for multiple career changes over their lifetimes. The higher education system must provide future-ready learning opportunities that meet student needs for flexibility and portability while allowing students to build upon their learning over time and across settings.

The Governor's economic development plan, [A Plan to Revitalize the Illinois Economy and Build the Workforce of the Future](#), recognizes that equity and growth are inseparable and that Illinois must reduce equity gaps for economically-disadvantaged communities to create a thriving inclusive economy for all. That plan highlights specific growth and focus industries within various regions across the state. Regional higher education and employer partnerships are essential to preparing the workforce in these growth areas. We also need statewide analysis to ensure that our higher education system and employer needs remain aligned.



Our state's universities are hubs of research, discovery, and innovation that continue to drive the economy forward and contribute to Illinois' growth.





**Higher education’s role in preparing the educators of the future, and particularly diverse educators, is fundamental to the state’s success. A well-qualified, diverse educator workforce is essential to ensuring that all children have a high-quality education that meets their needs.** Yet, there is a well-documented shortage of educators in Illinois across educational roles, sectors, levels, and regions. Illinois school districts reported 4,494 unfilled positions in the 2021 school year, an increase of 124% from 2017.<sup>23</sup>

To increase access to preparation programs, our higher education institutions should work together to make the acceptance of previous academic and relevant work experience consistent, seamless, and systematic, and to create options for rural, place-bound, and working adults that allow a student-centered choice between local and virtual coursework and completion.

**Our state’s universities are hubs of research, discovery, and innovation that continue to drive the economy forward and contribute to Illinois’ growth.** We must leverage the intellectual capital and investment in the higher education system to grow the economy across the state.

The strategies outlined below ensure our higher education system will continue to be the engine of developing talent, innovation, and inclusive economic growth for a thriving Illinois.

## Illinois Innovation Network

The Illinois Innovation Network (IIN) seeks to improve the state's economy through an inclusive approach to innovation, research, and education. Its 15 hubs include all the state’s public universities and many community colleges. Each hub has its own distinct concentrations, such as Chicago State University’s Center for Solutions to Urban Problems, with its emphasis on improving health outcomes in minority communities and equity in higher education. Eastern Illinois University and Lake Land College’s partnership will promote sustainability of critical social and natural system and an expansion of the Center for Energy and Resource Education. For more information, visit the [IIN website](#).

<sup>23</sup> While vacancies exist in all staffing areas, teaching positions consistently make up most vacancies with Special Education and Bilingual positions experiencing the highest vacancy rates. Shortages of early childhood educators mirror these trends. The intensity of the teacher shortage varies across the state but is most severe in rural areas in the Central, Southern, and Northwest regions. Furthermore, shortages also exist in administrative and student support roles.



## Growth Strategies:

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### 1 Leverage the Illinois Innovation Network (IIN) to strengthen regional focus, while connecting the state.

The IIN is a \$500 million state investment in university-based regional hubs to drive inclusive innovation, equitable workforce development and sustainable economic growth, in support of the state's inclusive economic development plans. The Discovery Partners Institute, a component of the IIN, is building a tech hub in Chicago, with a focus on supporting promising and diverse tech talent through its Talent Development Programs and research for industries vital to Illinois.

- **We must rally around the work of the IIN**, bringing in more partners, and spurring the economy in areas throughout the state, with our community college and four-year institutions as the foundation.
- 

### 2 Establish a statewide Business and Employer Advisory Council to the IBHE to invest and partner in the development of a diverse talent pipeline and to keep higher education abreast of evolving needs.

New knowledge, technologies, market demands, and social change create brand new jobs even as they refresh and reestablish how work is done. Insight from industry leaders will enable institutions to design programs in anticipation of these new jobs and careers and ways of working. Businesses can build diverse talent pipelines by supporting students in college and on their path to careers through apprenticeships,<sup>24</sup> scholarships, internships and other supports. The Council can lead to scaling of such efforts.

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### 3 Align the state's economic development and higher education strategies, ensuring both address historic inequities.

- **Support new and existing regional partnerships** among leaders in higher education, business and industry, and the P-20 system to meet economic and societal needs, ensuring alignment within each region and across the state. Build on community colleges' broad and deep relationships with the local employer community. Create opportunities for periodic industry-wide input.
- **Conduct annual supply and demand analysis** to identify areas of need to inform institutional and IBHE reports and approvals.

## 4 Encourage high school graduates to enroll in our higher education system and keep talent in Illinois.

Forty-seven percent of 2019 Illinois high school graduates who went to four-year institutions enrolled at out-of-state colleges and universities. Illinois has consistently ranked 49 out of 50 in the net migration of college freshmen.

AIM HIGH, a state-funded pilot hybrid need/merit aid program established by the General Assembly and first launched in FY20, was designed, in part, to stem outmigration. The [first-year program report](#) found that institutions implemented the program with a focus on equity<sup>25</sup>. The AIM HIGH pilot runs through October 1, 2024.

- **An evaluation of the AIM HIGH pilot**—including its impact on stemming outmigration—should be used to guide the decision whether it should continue.
- **The Direct Admissions program in conjunction with the Common App**, described in the Equity section, are additional tools to help retain high school graduates in Illinois.

### Common App Simplifies Illinois' College Application Process

Starting in Fall 2021, students can apply to all Illinois public universities and 35 private institutions in the state using a single online platform called the Common Application (Common App). Students enter their information one time and designate multiple colleges and universities to which they want to apply. Illinois is one of two states in the nation with all public universities participating in the Common App. Illinois public universities will now be even more accessible to Illinois students and out-of-state students seeking higher education here.

## 5 Establish a consortium of community colleges and universities to better serve the incumbent early childhood workforce.

Often the educators of our youngest children are the least credentialed in the educator workforce, despite the research that shows the importance of the earliest years on brain development.

- **The IBHE and ICCB will establish a consortium including all public universities and community colleges with early childhood programs to streamline, coordinate, and improve access to credentials and degree completion for the incumbent early childhood workforce.** If successful, the consortium could be expanded to serve other areas of educator preparation.
- Goals for enrollment, persistence, and completion within the Consortium will be established.

<sup>25</sup> In the first year, 7,400 students received AIM HIGH scholarships. Sixty-four percent of the scholarships went to students with family incomes below \$75,000, including 32% to those with incomes below \$30,000. Of the scholarships awarded, 17% went to Black students, 17% went to Latinx students, and 58% of the students receiving scholarships were Pell eligible.

- Students' Associate in Applied Science early childhood degree will be accepted in full at all four-year institutions in the consortium, including any credit for prior learning.
- Programs will be offered in formats, times, and locations to meet the needs of working adult students.
- Students will be able to access courses across institutions within a regional "hub" if they are not offered at their home institution.
- A standard method for awarding credit for prior learning will be developed.
- A full range of supports will be provided to keep students on track to completion.
- Admissions, financial arrangements, registration, and other services will be handled seamlessly across institutions without students having to navigate multiple institutions.
- Institutions will work with local school districts and early childhood employer partners to regularly determine demand.
- A broad advisory committee of employers and experts will be jointly convened by IBHE, ICCB, ISBE, Illinois Department of Human Services, and the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development to provide guidance on the operation of the consortium.

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## 6 Expand higher education models of teaching and learning that provide opportunity for students to succeed in the work of the future.

Components of future-ready learning include:

- **Use of effective online, hybrid, adaptive and self-paced learning models.** This includes flexible scheduling, flexible delivery methods of instruction, and accelerated learning opportunities. Technologies can be used to enhance the learner experience through immersive and simulation-based platforms, on-demand access to technology-enabled advising and student support services to supplement in-person services, and student-owned learner records. Equitable access to technology, including equipment and internet, must be provided so that all students can access these new models of learning.
- **Competency-based approaches and other models that offer a personalized path to completion and career.** With faculty guidance and other instructional supports, students can progress more quickly when they have concentrated time, spend additional time and effort on content that requires more practice to master, and demonstrate competence through well-designed performance assessments.
- **High-quality experiential and work-based learning opportunities, internships, and apprenticeships across a variety of sectors.** This ensures relevance between learning in the classroom and the rapidly changing skill and knowledge needs in the workplace across diverse sectors.

- **Shorter-term, industry-recognized credentials of value** that stack embedded within degree programs that provide learners supported on-ramps and off-ramps to employment and higher education.
- **Support for faculty, staff, and administrators within and across institutions.** Professional development is needed to support future-ready learning approaches, assess prior learning, create collaborative synergies, and more efficiently use resources for design and implementation. Training should be developed and extended that targets effective and culturally competent teaching and advising strategies in working with diverse groups of students, including students from under-resourced backgrounds, students with disabilities, adults and undocumented students.

## 7 Enhance access to educator preparation programs.

The educator shortage is a multifaceted issue. Solutions exist at each point in the educator pipeline, from recruitment to preparation, to induction and retention in the field (including wages). Access to educator preparation programs is one set of these solutions.<sup>26</sup>

- **Scale transfer pathways** to allow students to complete courses at a community college and transfer seamlessly to a university through 2+2 and 3+1, dual degree programs.
- **Work with the ISBE** on flexibilities in General Education licensure requirements.
- **Leverage technology tools** that allow candidates to practice skills in a virtual, simulated environment before entering a classroom with students; expanding fully online programs; and utilizing virtual (remote) supervision.
- **Create personalized paths and flexibility for individuals with work experience in education** using prior learning assessment, competency-informed approaches, residency and apprenticeship models, for post-baccalaureate certificate for licensure. Disseminate ISBE information on flexibilities and options currently available to preparation programs.

26 In 2019, ISBE data show there were a total of only 20 fully online options for educator preparation in Illinois across all licensure areas. In addition, a [2020 joint report](#) by the Illinois Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Community College Board outlined several opportunities for improving transfer related to the field of education.

## 8 Strengthen the statewide, coordinated transfer system to ensure students have seamless paths to build on previous academic learning and earn postsecondary credentials.

Students increasingly take courses at multiple institutions of higher education to earn their degrees. However, without careful attention and alignment, students can also accumulate credits that are not recognized at subsequent institutions, with the result that their time to and cost of degree is extended. The IBHE and ICCB, working in cooperation with transfer leaders across the state, identified ways to enhance transfer so that adults with some college but no degree can finish their degrees. In 2019-2020, the agencies also undertook a study of options for improving the state's transfer infrastructure.

- **Create a state communications campaign** to locate and target adults who hold substantial college credits about their options to finish up a degree or be awarded a degree for which they are already eligible.
- **Publicize and scale options for reverse transfer** so that individuals who transferred from a community college prior to completing the associate degree can receive the associate degree while working toward a bachelor's degree; leverage reverse transfer options in certain STEM fields where it may be more efficient for the student to transfer before completing their associate degree.
- **Evaluate impact of public universities offering associate degrees** for students who may have to drop out before completing a bachelor's degree. If students have completed a course of study equivalent to an Associate of Arts degree at the university, they could be awarded the degree, reducing the number of people who leave school with some college but no degree. Evaluation should focus on potential near- and long-term impacts on the higher education ecosystem.

### Transfer Infrastructure Leads the Nation in Results

Illinois is first in the nation in bachelor's degree completion among community college students, full- or part-time, who transfer to a four-year institution according to national data from 2017. Illinois data show that low-income, African American, and Latinx new transfer students persist at higher rates than their same-group peers who enroll as first-time freshmen at public universities. This success results from the state's transfer infrastructure, the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI), and a set of supporting policies, which provide a framework for the transfer of General Education and major coursework. Over 100 colleges and universities participate in the IAI, including all public institutions. Faculty and administrator panels routinely review the more than 9,000 courses in the IAI system to ensure transfer integrity. The IAI, institutional transfer agreements, the My Credits Transfer system, and alignment efforts by transfer coordinators constitute the robust set of supports for student transfer. This approach has served as a national model with other states, including California and Indiana, adopting policies similar to the IAI.

- **Develop strategies for maximizing transfer of degree-applicable courses** including math pathways and meta-majors.
- **Develop transfer options for students holding the Associate of Applied Science degree** and evaluate near-term and long-term impacts on the higher education ecosystem of establishing authority for community colleges to offer baccalaureate degree programs in specific fields.
- **Expand the use of 2+2, 3+1, and dual degree agreements** to ensure students have clear information about and coordinated advising for their academic journey
- **Launch a transfer guarantee initiative** that provides students with upfront information about their total cost, time to degree and full details about their transfer path.
- **Enhance student information and advising about transfer** in relation to high-demand majors, majors with specific licensure requirements, and institution-specific requirements for graduation at receiving institutions.
- **Provide stable funding for the Illinois Articulation Initiative, MyCredits Transfer, and Transferology.** These state systems ensure that students have supports for transfer in cases where they are taking courses but do not know to what institution they wish to transfer or which major they want to transfer.

## 9 Consider the role the Private Business and Vocational sector plays in meeting the state's workforce needs.

There are 250 Private Business and Vocational Schools (PBVS), offering short-term vocational training in a wide variety of fields, including some highly specialized areas such as violin-making. This sector serves an estimated 45,000-50,000 students annually. Yet, this sector is rarely included in conversations about State expectations and goals of higher education.



Illinois can achieve the vision of a higher education system that ensures individuals, families, and communities across the state can thrive. *A Thriving Illinois* outlines three ambitious but attainable goals of Equity, Sustainability and Growth to fulfill that vision. The multiple strategies outlined here require determined, on-going action by the state, higher education agencies, institutions, employers, community-based partners, and other stakeholders if we are to achieve the goals.

We know that implementing the strategies will happen over time. But we must begin with a deliberate plan of implementation. Here we outline some immediate next steps.

## Develop an Accountability System

If we are going to achieve the three goals laid out in this plan, we must hold ourselves accountable. Accountability should be a cycle of continuous improvement—by identifying where we have made progress and where not, we can take steps to get back on track. We believe that the work we have outlined in *A Thriving Illinois* is a shared enterprise, that by bringing people together we can share best practices and create learning communities. We see transparency as a key component because it leads to learning.

IBHE and ICCB will continue to report data disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, age group, income status, and geography for enrollment, retention, progression, completion, and attainment.

There are many other measures and metrics that should be reported to ensure we stay on track. As one of the first steps after the Board's adoption of this plan, IBHE and ICCB will convene a diverse group, including institutions of higher education and other stakeholders, to further develop the accountability system, and once it is developed, IBHE and ICCB will regularly update and report on progress.

## Launch Development of Institutional Equity Plans

A first step in closing equity gaps is for each institution to assess its current state and develop the Equity Plan outlined in earlier sections. Many institutions have already developed Equity Plans under the Illinois Equity in Attainment initiative of the Partnership for College Completion. IBHE and ICCB will build on and support that work underway.

## Convene a Business and Employer Advisory Council to IBHE

IBHE will begin right away to develop a charter and identify the leaders for the Council. This Council will help bring alignment between the state's economic development plans and the higher education efforts and ensure that institutions have an early understanding of changes in the nature of work with the lead-time needed to develop new programs. Focus will also be on how business can invest in students and build diverse talent pipelines. IBHE will also undertake the analysis of employer needs compared to degree/credential production in the first phase of implementation.



## Develop a Higher Education Funding System

*A Thriving Illinois* calls for new investment in public higher education through an equitable, stable, and sufficient funding system and outlines a set of principles. These principles were embodied in SB815, which passed the General Assembly on June 1, 2021, and calls for a Commission on Equitable Public University Funding to be convened by October 15, 2021. IBHE is given responsibility for administrative support and ensuring that the requirements of the legislation are met. IBHE will begin this work immediately.

## Reinforce Learning Renewal and Social-Emotional Supports

As students return to campuses after the worst of the pandemic, implementing the learning renewal and social-emotional supports with an equity lens as outlined in *A Thriving Illinois* is an urgent priority. Institutions and community partners with the support of IBHE, ICCB, and ISAC will use the federal relief funds to concentrate efforts in ensuring the state meets students' current needs and the system adapts these best practices for the future.

## Reengage Adults

IBHE and ICCB will begin efforts to identify the supports and programs adult learners need so that they can enroll for the first time or return to college to prepare for the next phase of their career, whether they were displaced during the pandemic, their careers are threatened because of the changing nature of work, or they just want to finish what they started.

## Respond to Early Childhood Educator Shortage

The urgency of addressing the educator shortage cannot be overstated. Of particular importance—and opportunity—is the need to help the incumbent early childhood workforce upskill to the associate and bachelor degrees required to best serve our earliest learners. The IBHE and ICCB will establish the Consortium developed through the strategic planning process and outlined in HB2878, which passed the General Assembly May 31, 2021. The Consortium, including all public universities and community colleges with early childhood programs, will streamline, coordinate, and improve access to credentials and degree completion for the incumbent early childhood workforce.

## Enhance Transfer Infrastructure

The state's transfer infrastructure is key to supporting the timely progression of students to completion of a postsecondary credential. Throughout *A Thriving Illinois*, strategies related to transfer are noted, including the pilot of a "transfer guarantee." The IBHE, ICCB, and institutional transfer leaders, working in partnership with other stakeholders such as the ISBE, will begin work on these strategies immediately.

## Develop Full Implementation Plan

The steps outlined here are only a few of the immediate next steps. Success in each of the strategies requires a detailed implementation plan. The higher education agencies, in partnership with stakeholders, will come together to develop the implementation plan.

# Acknowledgments

This plan could not have been developed without the thoughtful input and support of the many individuals who contributed.

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