
INTRODUCTION

THE EQUITY IMPERATIVE:

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

Over the past century, the state of Illinois has succeeded in building a world-class higher education system that has changed millions of lives and made our state an economic powerhouse. Today, the future of Illinois depends on our ability to build on that enviable record while addressing and correcting this system's historic shortcomings. We have a duty to meet the needs of every learner in search of a better future, and we cannot allow one more generation of students to face a constrained future because of race, ethnicity, gender, age or station in life.

We have no time to waste. 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. *That means the Illinois higher education system must do much better in serving students of color, low-income students, rural students, and working adults.* We also must expand our mission to engage the broad network of economic and private sector leaders that rely on our higher education system to prepare the workforce of tomorrow.

Our path is clear: We must bring true equity to Illinois' higher education system, to build a strong and level foundation for individual success, community development, and statewide economic growth.

To achieve our goals, this plan calls for institution-level equity plans and accountability measures to provide **equitable supports** for students who are African American, Latinx, or low-income, who live in rural communities, who are older, or who have disabilities. It is long past time for our educational system to recognize and address the needs of all our students, everywhere in Illinois. We can, and we must be a **learner-ready** system that closes equity gaps.

Our plan also includes strategies for more **equitable attainment**, to make sure that the benefits of post-secondary education extend through every community. By the year 2025, we expect that at least two-thirds of jobs in Illinois will require a postsecondary degree or credential, and that market demand is anticipated to keep growing. Illinois cannot succeed without a **future-ready** workforce that will drive economic growth. We must align our higher-education strategies with our economic development plans to build a more robust, more diverse talent pipeline that will support Illinois businesses and strengthen Illinois communities.

Finally, this plan acknowledges that we must address underlying **equitable affordability** and funding adequacy challenges. Affordability is not an end in itself, but the cost of higher education often forces students to choose between sacrificing valuable education and taking on unsustainable debt burden. We also must recognize that Illinois' long history of erratic funding of higher education has made many students hesitant to commit to our public colleges and universities, while others have shouldered massive individual debts to make up for our collective funding failures. So this plan calls for a system with **equitable, reliable investments** in our higher education system, to serve our students and our state.

All of us must understand that educational equity and Illinois' economic future are inseparable. With this strategic plan, the Illinois Board of Higher Education can forge a broad, equitable path toward a prosperous future that is accessible, attainable and affordable for all.

OVERVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ILLINOIS

A DIVERSE ARRAY OF INSTITUTIONS WORKING TO IMPROVE LIFE:

Higher education in Illinois is comprised of a diverse array of institutions. The higher education system includes 12 public universities, 48 community colleges, over 100 independent institutions, 48 out-of-state institutions with a presence in Illinois, as well as over 240 postsecondary schools that offer short-term training. Among these are the first private college in Illinois, McKendree University, founded in 1828; one of the earliest medical schools in the state, Rush University, chartered in 1837; Illinois' first public university, Illinois State University, founded in 1857; Illinois's land-grant university, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, established in 1862; and the first community college in the nation, Joliet Junior College, founded in 1901. The histories of our Illinois colleges and universities so often began with a small group of visionaries, driven by a mission to improve the lives of the residents of the state, and their children, through education and vocational training. The literal groundbreaking work of these early visionaries has led to a legacy of innumerable contributions of their faculty and graduates - the educators, scientists, leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, historians, scholars, and public servants who continue to impact their communities, the state, and our world today.

While each postsecondary institution is unique, collectively, our colleges and universities share common goals for supporting students in becoming critical thinkers, civically engaged, skillful leaders who seek learning and greater understanding of diverse perspectives, well-prepared for careers. Together, these higher education institutions also serve as the cultural and social anchor of their communities, providing important services and expertise to residents, schools, medical facilities, and non-profit organizations, to name a few.

Faculty across our colleges and universities engage in scholarship and research that create new knowledge, push the bounds of innovation and artistry, and advance technologies. The societal benefits of the research enterprise are, for example, currently evidenced in the worldwide effort to combat COVID-19. Illinois institutions contributed directly through epidemiological modeling, development of the rapid saliva test, new treatments, and the development of vaccines, as well as providing health care through hospitals and clinics.

In addition, higher education institutions are among the most important economic engines both locally and in the State of Illinois. A quick glance at some numbers underscores this point. 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; and
- Represents more than \$50 billion annual impact on the state's economy.

The Illinois higher education landscape also includes state agencies that provide strategic planning, policymaking, leadership, analysis, student support, as well as regulation and consumer protection functions. In 1957, state lawmakers created the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) to ensure that financial considerations did not prevent Illinois students from realizing their postsecondary educational goals. Subsequently, the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) was founded in 1961 to plan and coordinate Illinois' system of colleges and universities at a time when enrollments in postsecondary education were taking flight. In 1965, at the behest of the IBHE, the General Assembly created the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), a state agency dedicated specifically to the work of creating and coordinating a system of community colleges in every region of the state.

The IBHE, ICCB, and ISAC recognize the great strength of Illinois' higher education ecosystem is the diversity in size, academic offerings and institutional missions, service to historically underrepresented populations, and the wide geographic distribution of institutions throughout the state. Agency and institutional leaders work together to place students and their learning at the center of state efforts to support, align, and coordinate Illinois higher education.

One of the central roles of these agencies is to maintain a “Master Plan” for the higher education system. As current statute outlines, **IBHE in cooperation with ICCB shall**

- Analyze the present and future aims, needs, and requirements of higher education
- Prepare a “Master Plan” for development, expansion, integration, coordination, and efficient utilization of facilities, curricula, and standards in teaching, research and public service
- Include affordability and accessibility measures
- Give consideration to problems & attitudes of private junior colleges, colleges, and universities, other educational groups and institutions
- Formulate the “Master Plan”
- Prepare and submit legislation to effectuate the plan
- Engage in continuous study, analysis, and evaluation and make recommendations to amend the Plan as needed

It is to fulfill these responsibilities that we outline this Strategic Plan for higher education in Illinois.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW

A PLAN DEVELOPED FOR THE FUTURE BUT GROUNDED IN THE PRESENT

IBHE planned to launch the strategic planning process in early 2020 with a focus on equity.

Illinois had ended a long pattern of instability in higher education funding—including two years without a higher education budget at all. Governor JB Pritzker’s first budget included a 5% increase in funds for public universities and community colleges and a \$50 million increase for the state’s need-based aid program. The Governor’s fiscal year 2021 proposed budget, released in February 2020, included another 5% increase for the public universities and \$50 million for need-based aid. Despite the many fiscal challenges brought on by the COVID-19 global pandemic, Illinois has stayed the course in support for higher education.

But the strategic plan 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. We launched the strategic planning process in Fall of 2020. Then 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.

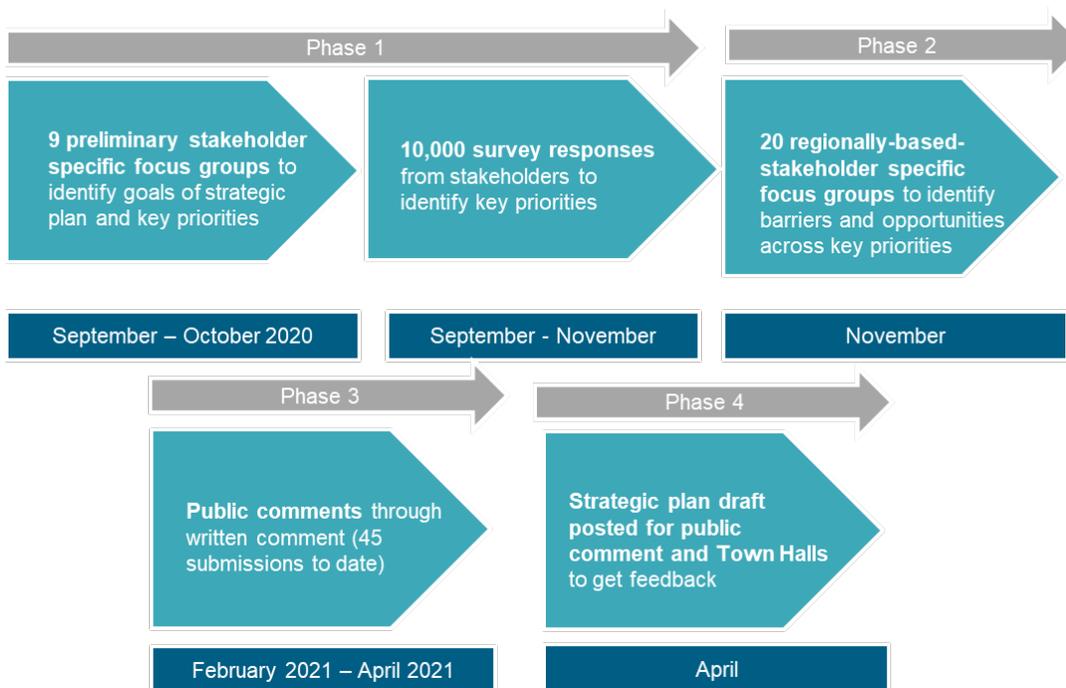
We know the results of the strategic plan will be felt not just in higher education but throughout the state as students of color, low-income students, and other historically underserved students have access to new opportunities that will enable them—and our state—to thrive.

We recognize that this Strategic Plan is being developed in a time where:

- **COVID-19 has shaped and will continue to reshape the educational experience.** It has made inequities more evident; yet, shown us we can be nimble. It means that teaching and learning has been more challenging but opened us to ways to be better. It means that student voice is more important than ever before so that we can respond to what students need in the current and future environment. We can be certain that even post-COVID, we won’t return to business-as-usual. We must take what we learned through the pandemic to strengthen the educational experience.
- **Racial injustice can no longer be ignored.** Higher education is examining its role as contributor to systemic racism while recognizing its place in providing opportunity and upward mobility. There is no doubt that higher education must be a powerful actor in dismantling systemic racism.
- **Changes in the nature of work are accelerating.** We already were in a time when the nature of work was changing. COVID-19 has accelerated and perhaps redirected the trajectory of that change. We also anticipate that the jobs of the future will continue to change rapidly. Illinois higher education must help drive and prepare people for this future.
- **Innovative disrupters to traditional postsecondary education are growing.** Corporate training, badges, micro-credentials, and other new models that pair with degree programs delivered in flexible formats have entered the postsecondary space to meet students’ current and life-long learning needs. Just as many industries have been disrupted by new models, higher education is poised for similar changes. We must create an environment for our higher education institutions to lead such innovation.
- **Budget challenges are exacerbated.** Illinois had just begun to reinvest in higher education after decades of disinvestment. Now long-term economic uncertainty abounds. While we must be cognizant of the state’s fiscal condition, we do not want to let it dim our vision but make our efforts more focused.

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 throughout the P20 system, business leaders, community organizations, and others, received nearly 10,000 responses identifying priorities for the plan to address. As the Board outlined the three goal areas 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, co-chaired by State Senator Pat McGuire, City Colleges Chancellor Juan Salgado, Chicago State University President Zaldwaynaka (“Z”) Scott, and 1871 CEO Betsy Ziegler. The Advisory Committee shepherded the strategy-development process, engaging 9 Design Work Groups of 200 stakeholders, including Board members of the IBHE, ICCB, ISAC, 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 5 meetings to discuss progress on the Strategic Plan and accepted public comment at each.



These various forms of engagement were designed to include a diverse representation of stakeholders and structured with an explicit awareness of the diversity, equity, and inclusion issues that affect the outcomes of IBHE stakeholders in Illinois. We conducted all the engagement and developed this Strategic Plan entirely virtually, which allowed for tremendous participation from people across the state. Additional information on the engagement process is included in the Appendix.



Stakeholder engagement through a public survey, regionally- based, as well as stakeholder-specific focus groups to inform the Advisory Committee’s development of the key goals. Written comments and town halls also provided further opportunities for stakeholder engagement.



Advisory Committee applies the Board’s vision and priorities to the planning process and develops high-leverage strategies to achieve each goal.



Design Work Groups charged with building out the Advisory Committee’s work. Identifies specific strategies; establishes measurable metrics that will be used to track progress and success; and identifies the key actors that should be involved to accomplish of each strategy

VISION AND CORE PRINCIPLES

VISION: ILLINOIS HAS A HIGHER EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM THAT ENSURES INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE STATE CAN THRIVE.

To fulfill this vision requires a higher education system that is equitable, accessible, nimble, innovative, and aligned. The Board also laid out Core Principles to uphold as goals were set and strategies developed. Each strategy has been evaluated to ensure that it aligns with the Core Principles.

CORE PRINCIPLES

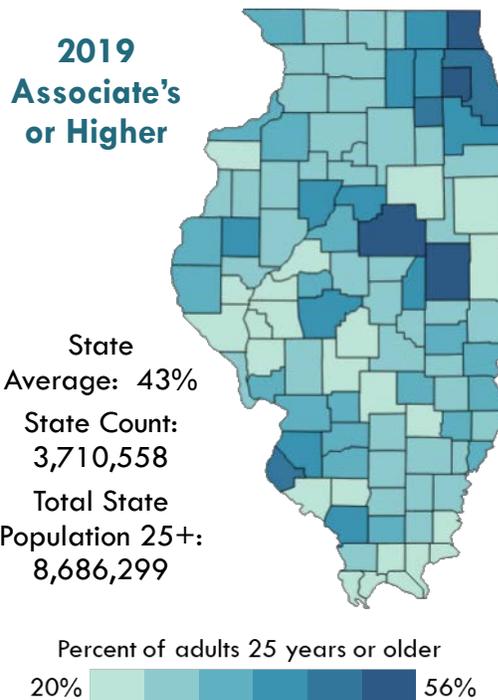
- **Students are our priority.** We exist to serve students – at whatever age and stage – and provide them with an excellent, well-rounded education and supports that meet their needs, gives them access to careers and enhanced upward mobility, and fosters their civic engagement and leadership potential.
- **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, create, 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.

DATA ANALYSIS

POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT IN ILLINOIS: THE 60 BY 25 GOAL

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, health, and other positive life outcomes than their peers with less education.

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. This was driven by estimates of educational requirements for future jobs. 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 below 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.



Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

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.

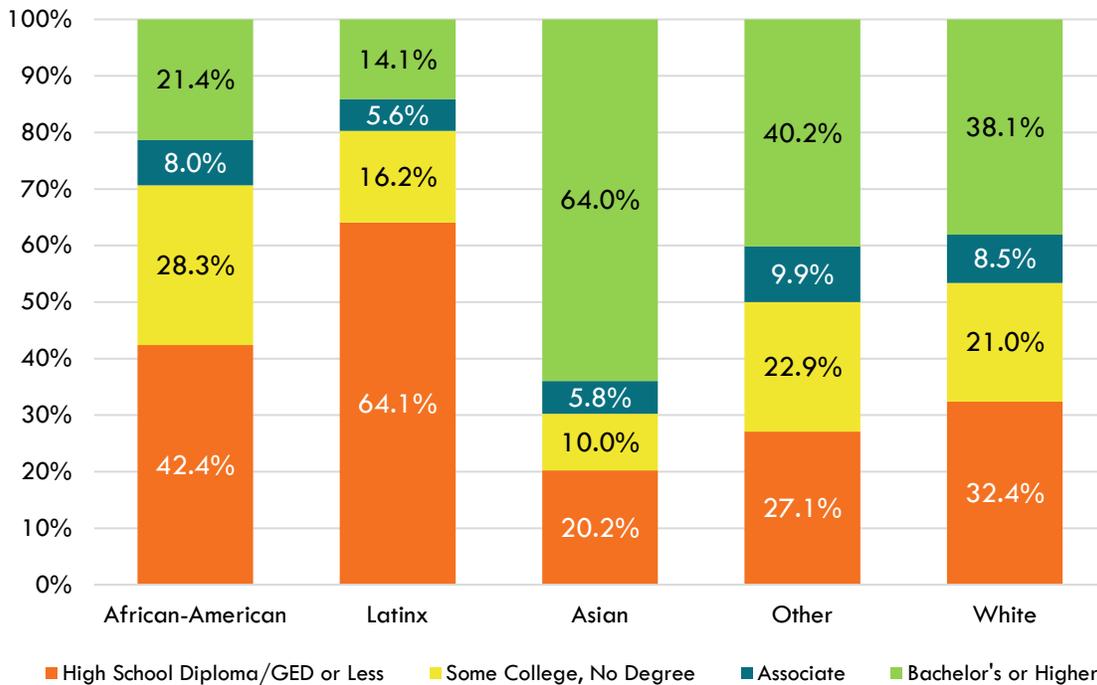
The disparities in attainment outcomes are stark when we disaggregate by race/ethnicity. While 47% of white adults have a post-secondary degree, only 29% of African Americans and 20% of Latinx adults do. When we look specifically at Bachelor’s degrees, Illinois has the 11th largest gap in attainment 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 million white adults who started college but never earned a degree.¹ And it is

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

worth noting the very large percentage, especially of Latinx adults who have only a high school diploma, GED or less.

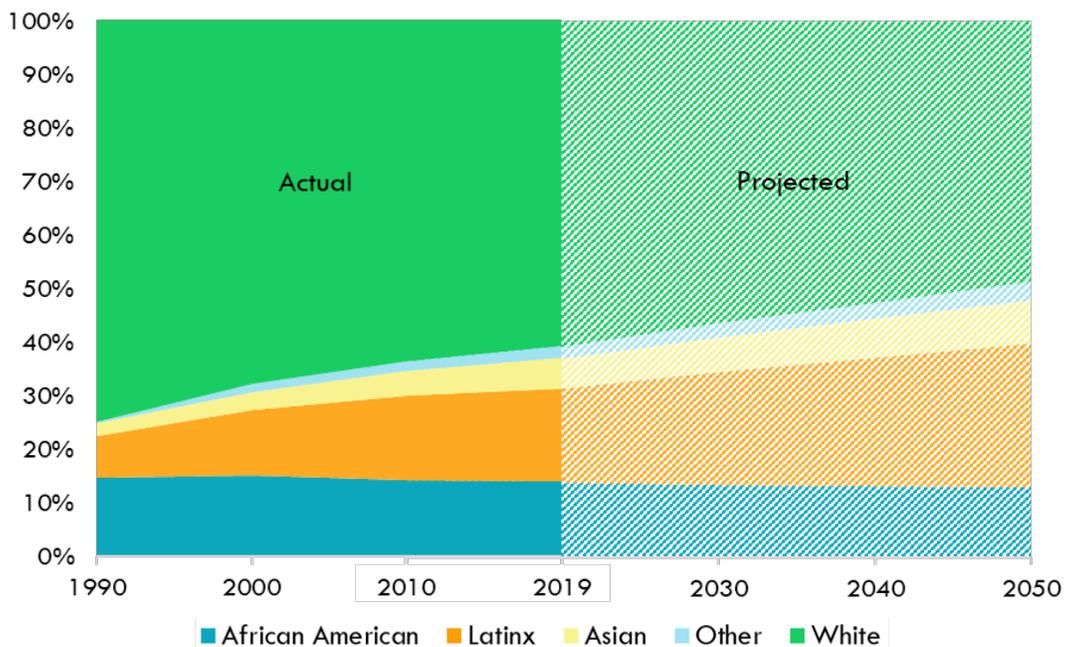
Educational Attainment in Illinois (Age 25+) by Race/Ethnicity



Source: 2018 American Community Survey IPUMS 5-Year Estimates

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 Actual and Projected Population Distribution

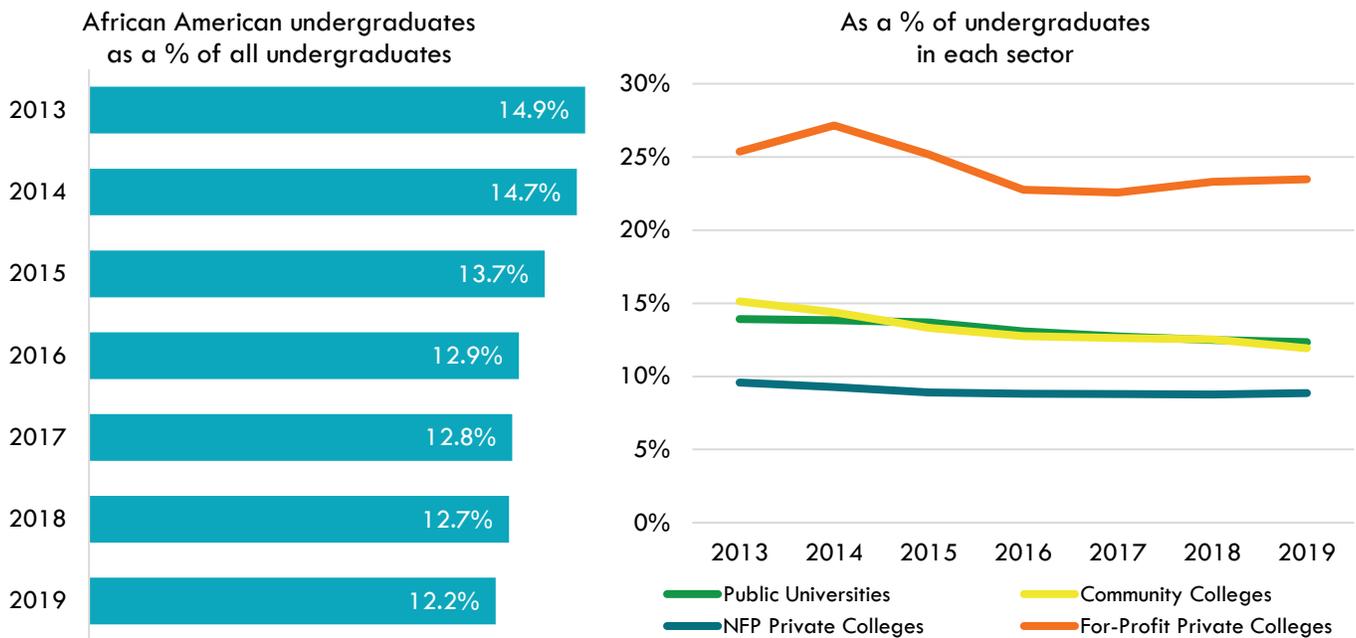


Source: National Equity Atlas and American Community Survey 2019 1-Year Estimates

We must understand how our higher education system is serving students of color and why we have ended up with these disparate attainment rates.

EQUITY GAPS FACING AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS²

Enrollment has dropped disproportionately 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 34% for African Americans. 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, even though the percent of the state population that is African American has stayed steady.

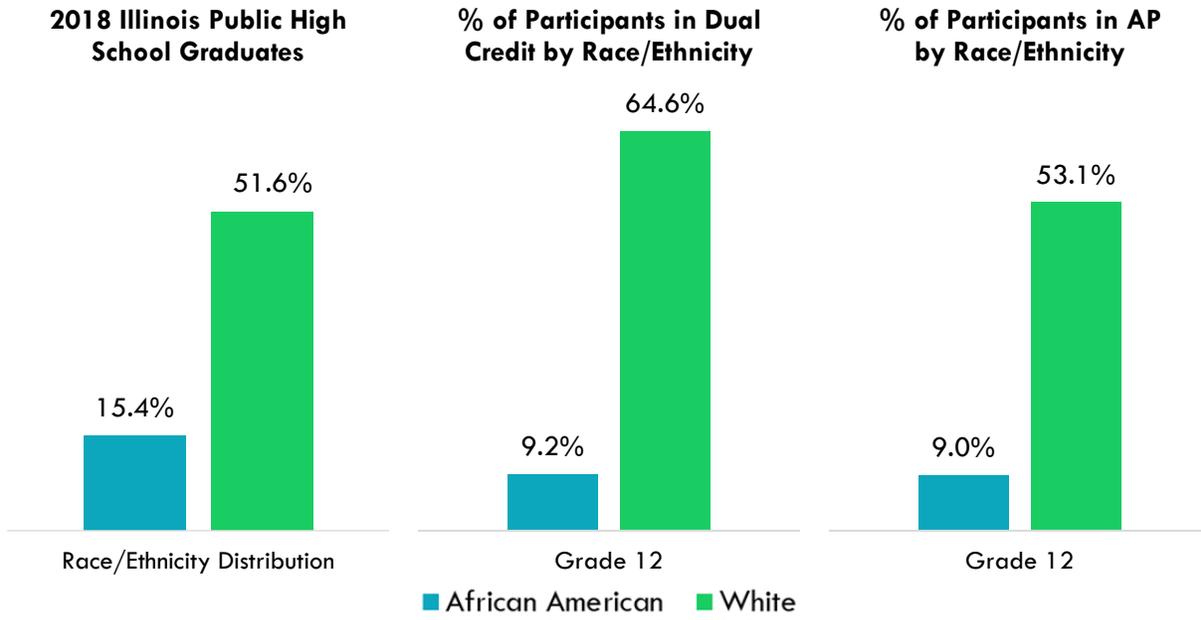


Source: IPEDS Fall Enrollment Survey from 2013 to 2019

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 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 placed in math developmental education accumulate 10.6. 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 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.

² Data is also disaggregated by gender on the [IBHE website](#).



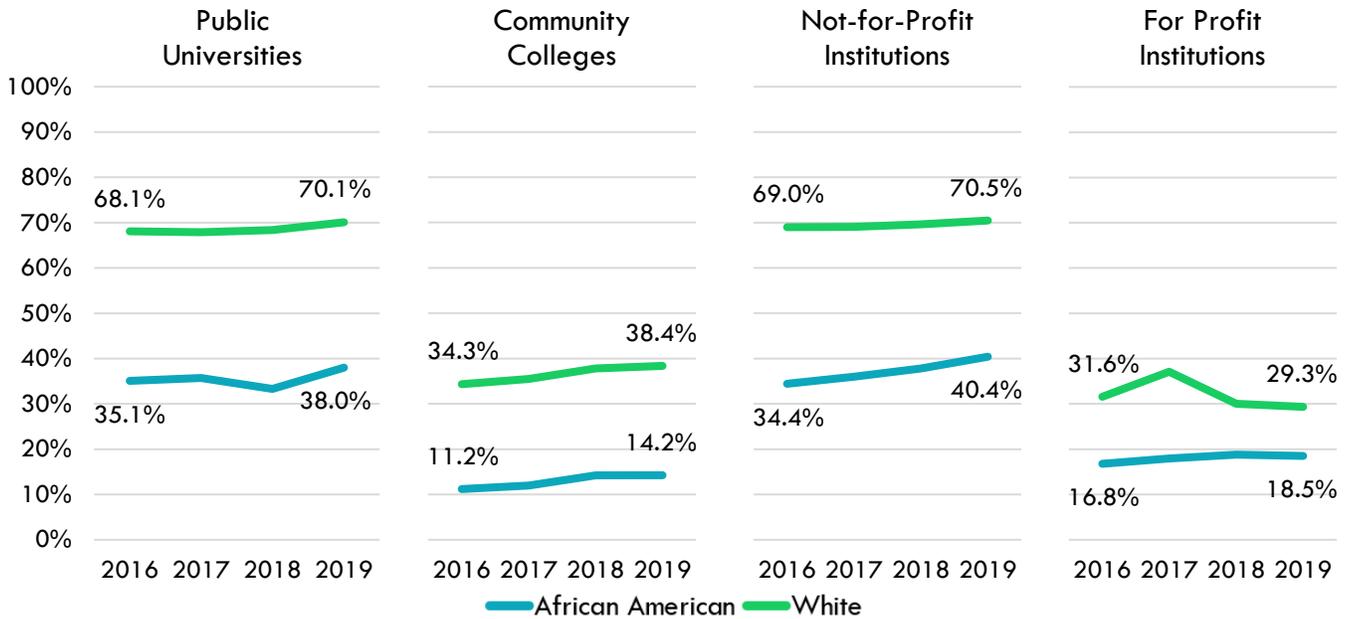
Source: ISBE Report Card 2019

Public universities are less likely to retain and advance African American students. Public universities retained from fall to fall 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 advance 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.

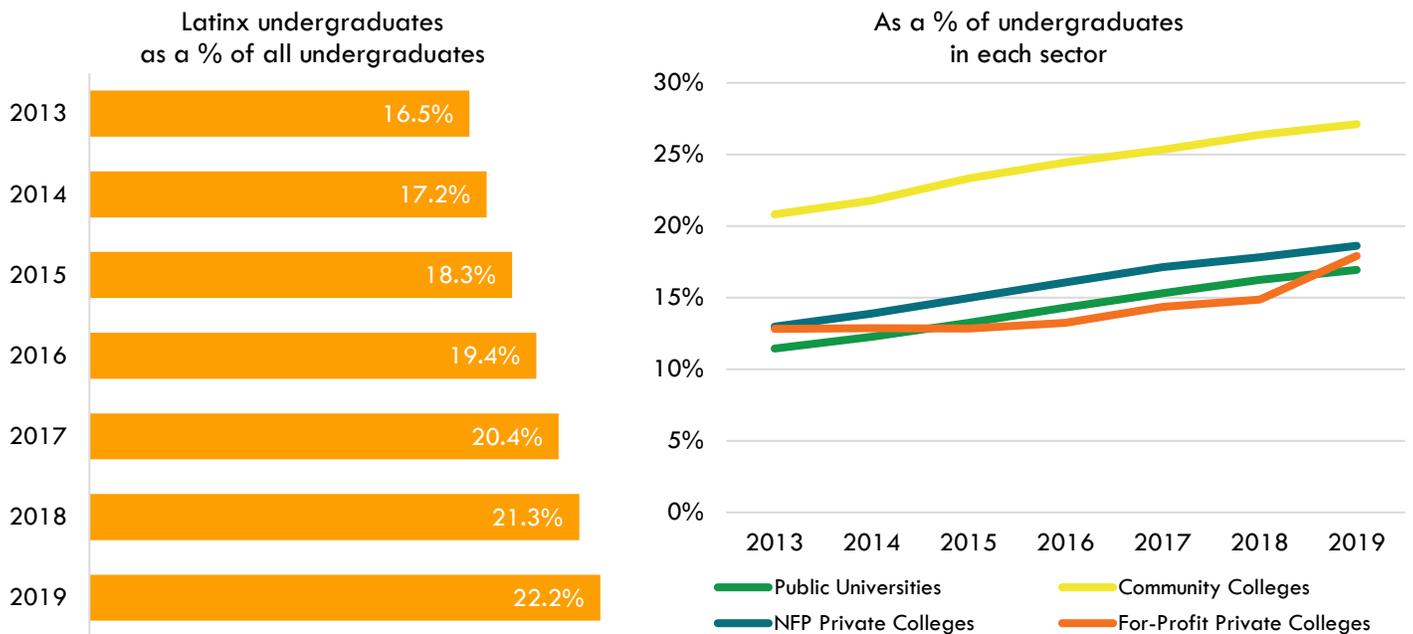
All this leads to dramatic and persistent gaps in the rates institutions graduate students. As we look at the percent of first-time, full time students who complete their degrees within 150% of expected time (e.g. 6 years for a bachelor’s degree) at the same institution they started, we see significant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



Based on 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 IPEDS Graduation Rates at 150% of Normal Time for students who first enrolled full time. The % 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. Given the declines in enrollment for white and African American students discussed above, it is not surprising that Latinx students are increasing as a proportion of undergraduate enrollment.

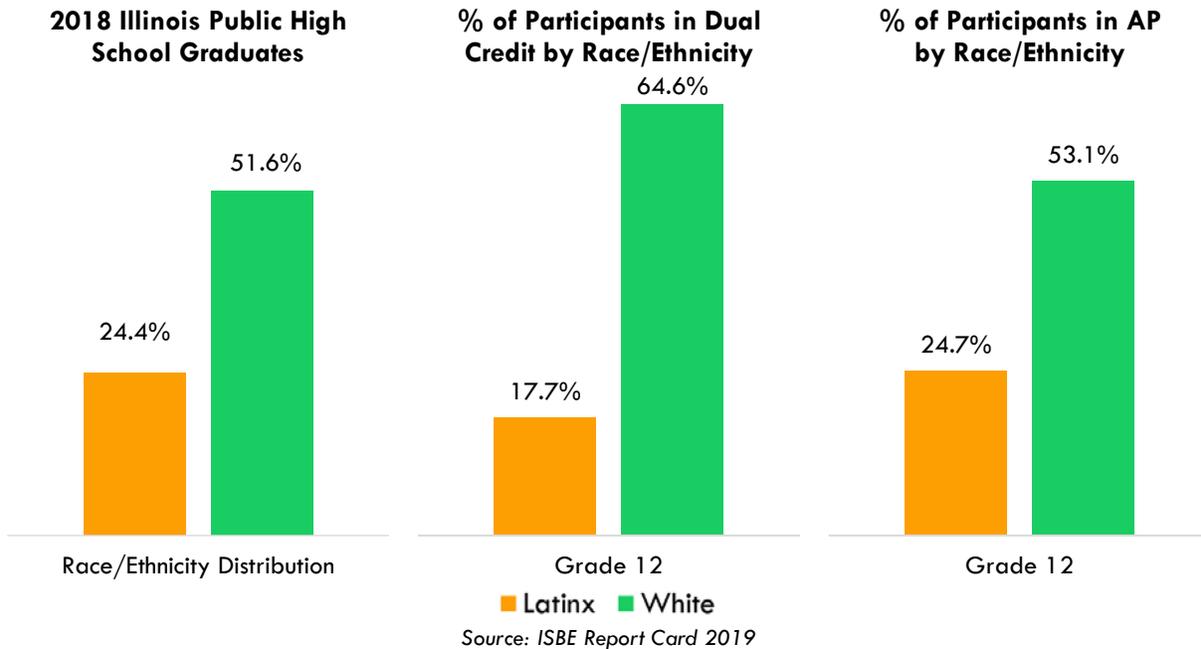


Source: IPEDS Fall Enrollment Survey from 2013 to 2019

Latinx students are also 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 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.

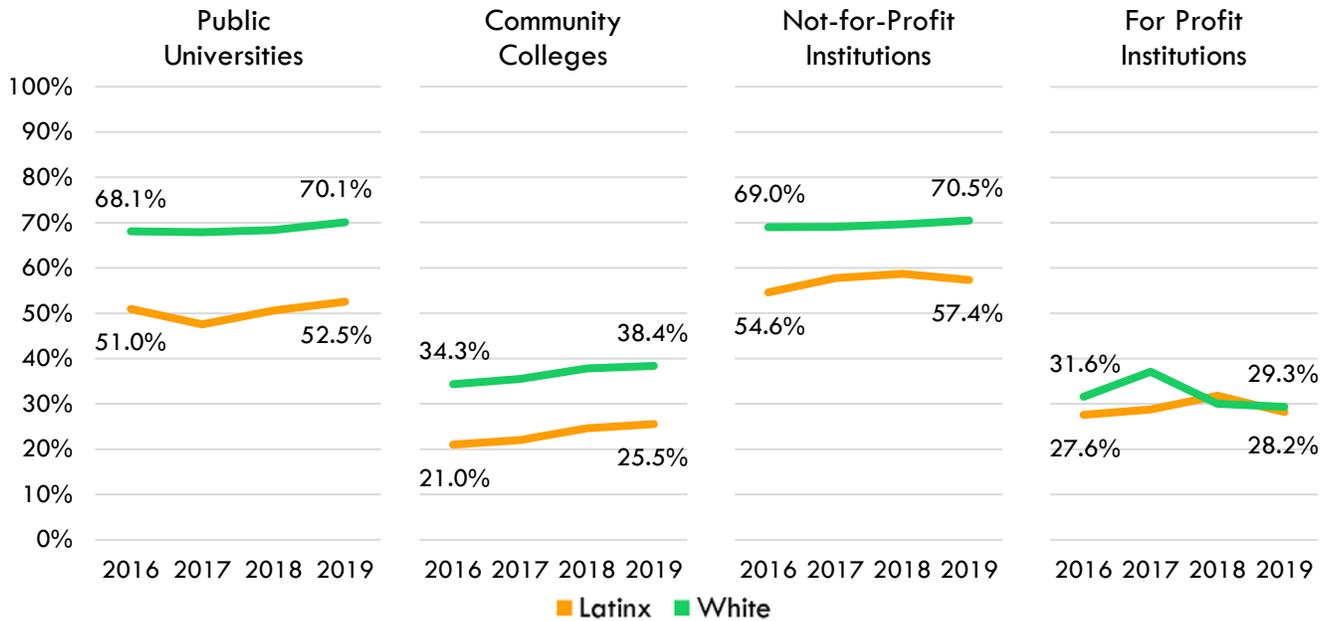


Gaps persist in public university retention and advancement of Latinx freshmen. Public universities retain 85% of white full-time freshmen but only 76% of their Latinx peers. Similarly, nearly 70% of white freshmen will be advanced, while only 53% of Latinx will.

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 student advancing to the next class status, while 70% of white students do.

Gaps exist at 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.

Still, institution completion gaps persist over time. As the charts below illustrate, there are gaps in the rates at which institutions complete white and Latinx freshmen and these gaps have persisted over time.

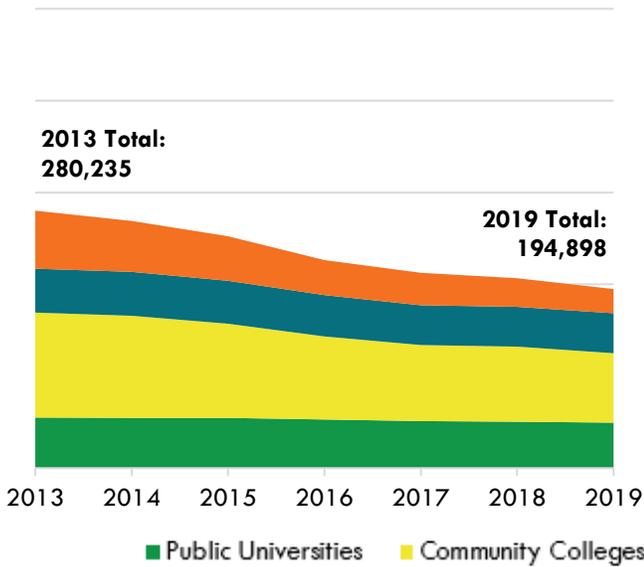


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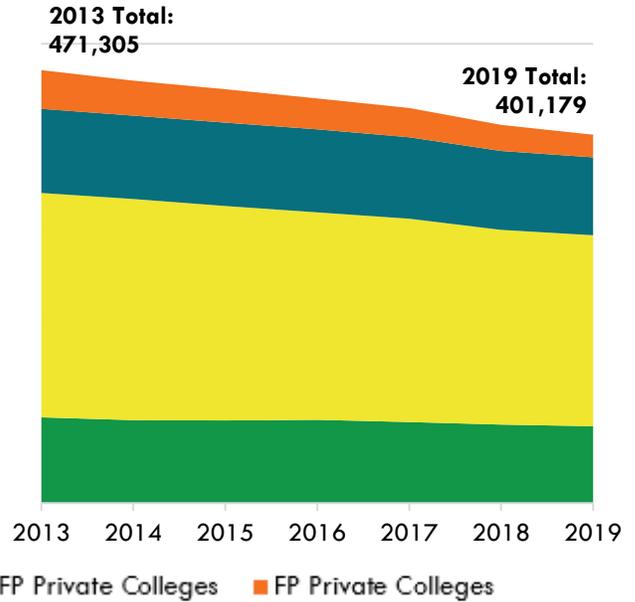
EQUITY GAPS FACING LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

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. Low-income students more often go to community college than non-low-income students. 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.

Undergraduate Low-Income (Pell) Students by Sector



Non-Pell Students by Sector

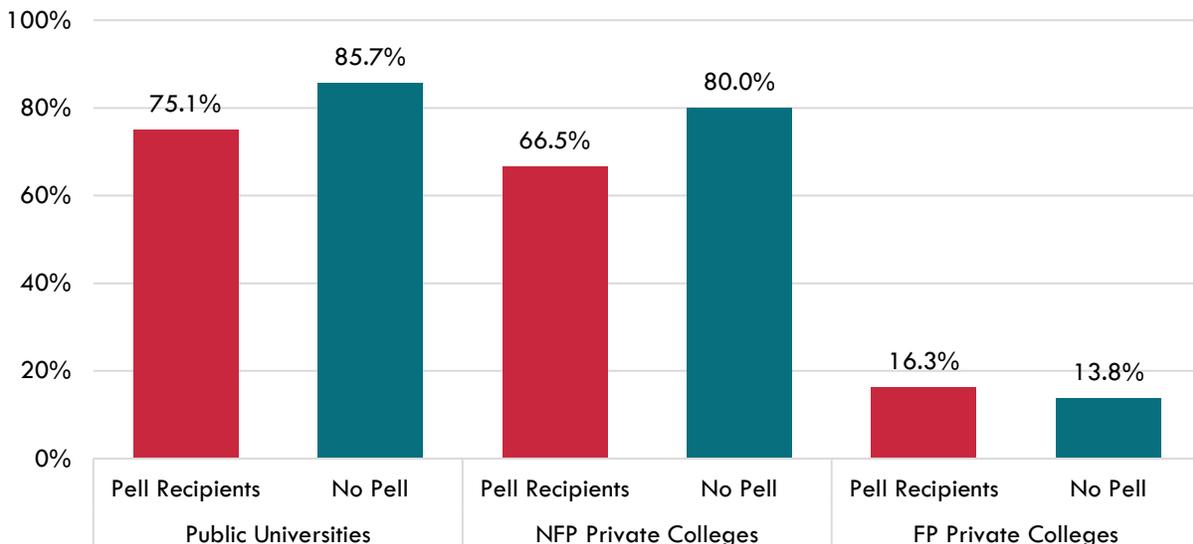


Source: 2013 to 2019 IPEDS Student Financial Aid Survey

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.

Institutions are less successful in serving low-income students, with fewer being retained and advanced in their programs. As the chart below 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.

Retention of Pell and Non-Pell Full-Time Freshmen by Institution Type

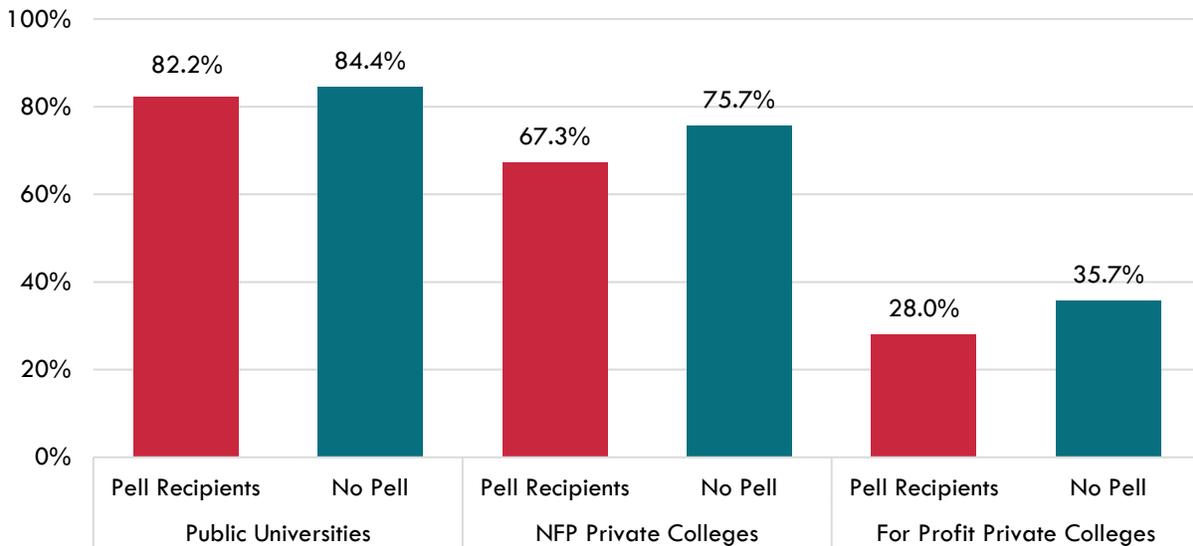


Source: IHEIS Fall Enrollment Collections from 2018-19 and 2019-20

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.

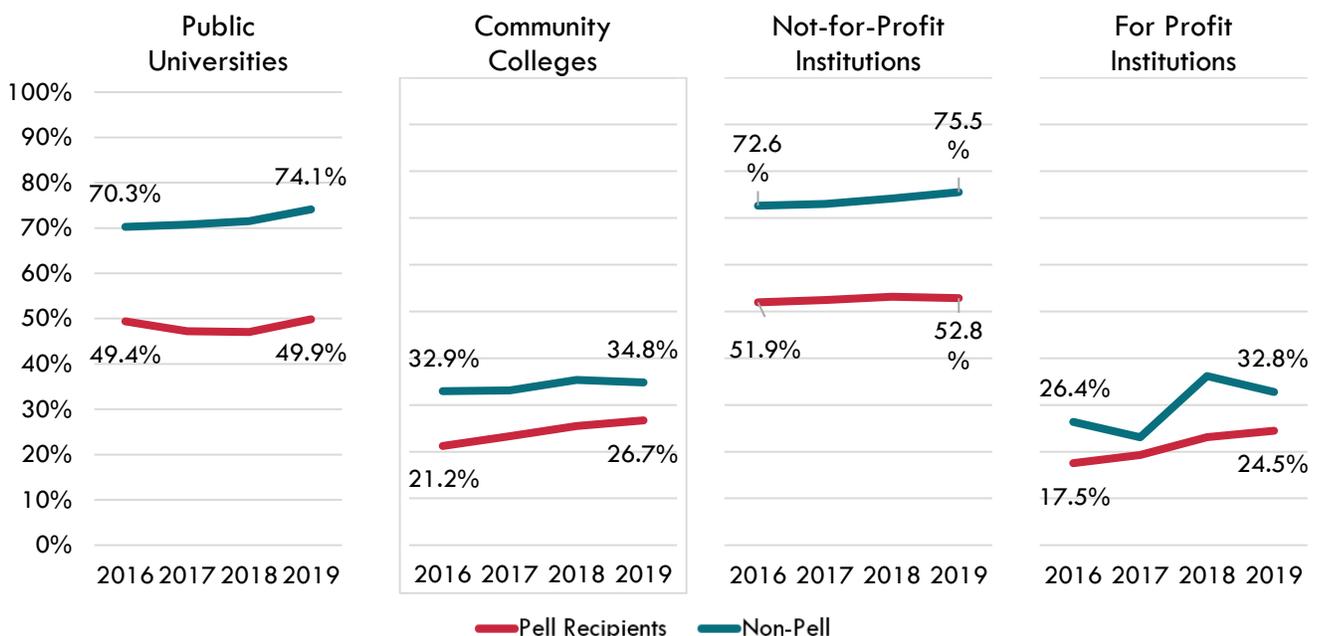
The results are better for transfer students, with the overall retention rate higher and gaps smaller: two percentage points at public universities, but still eight percentage points at non-profit private colleges

Retention of Pell and Non-Pell Transfer Students by Institution Type



Source: IHEIS Fall Enrollment Collections from 2018-19 and 2019-20

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 among this population.

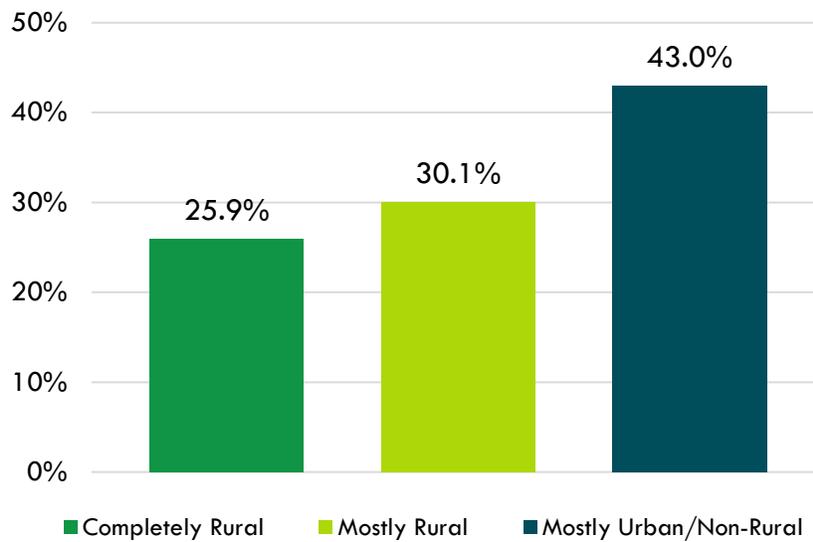


Based on 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 IPEDS Graduation Rates at 150% of Normal Time for students who first enrolled full time

EQUITY GAPS FACING STUDENTS FROM RURAL COMMUNITIES

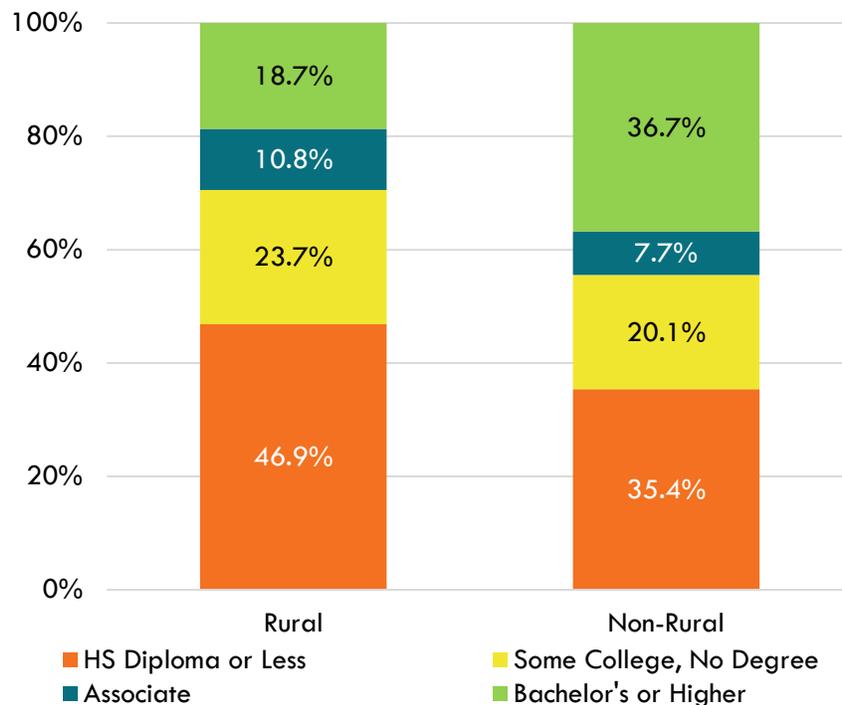
Rural counties generally have smaller proportions of their working-age population with an associate degree or higher, as illustrated in the interactive maps. Conversely, rural counties have higher proportions with a high school diploma or less and slightly higher proportions with some college, but no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

Percent of Adult Population in Illinois with an Associate Degree or Higher by Rurality



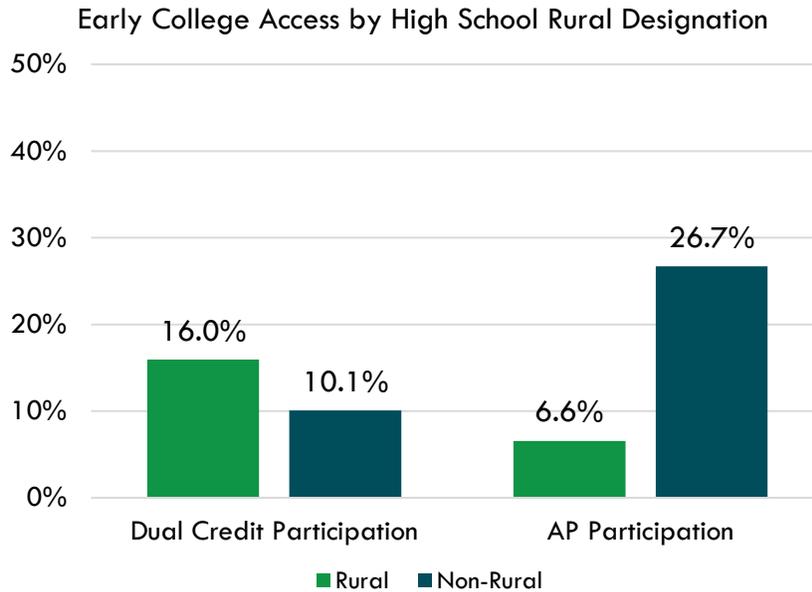
*Based on 2018 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

Educational Attainment in Illinois (Age 25+) by Rurality



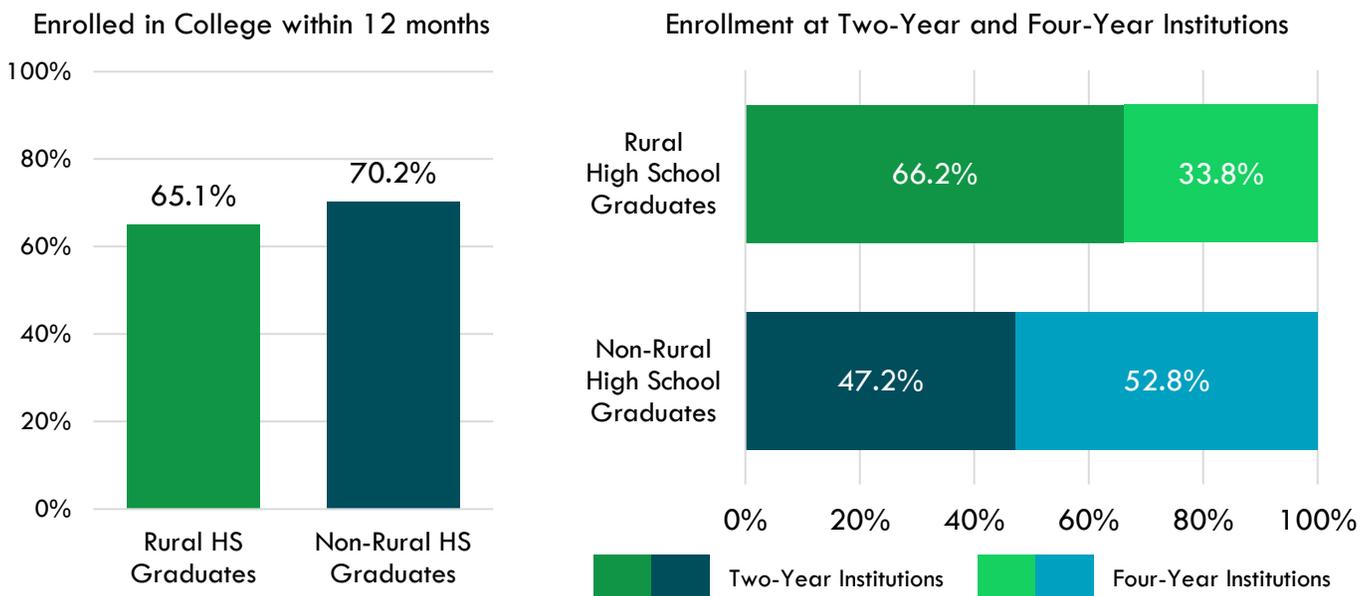
*Based on 2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

Rural students had greater access to dual credit, but significantly lower proportions had access to AP compared to students in non-rural high schools. Rural students (based on high school location) comprise 14.0% of all high school students in Illinois and graduation rates at rural high schools are marginally higher than rates at non-rural high schools (87.0% to 85.3%).



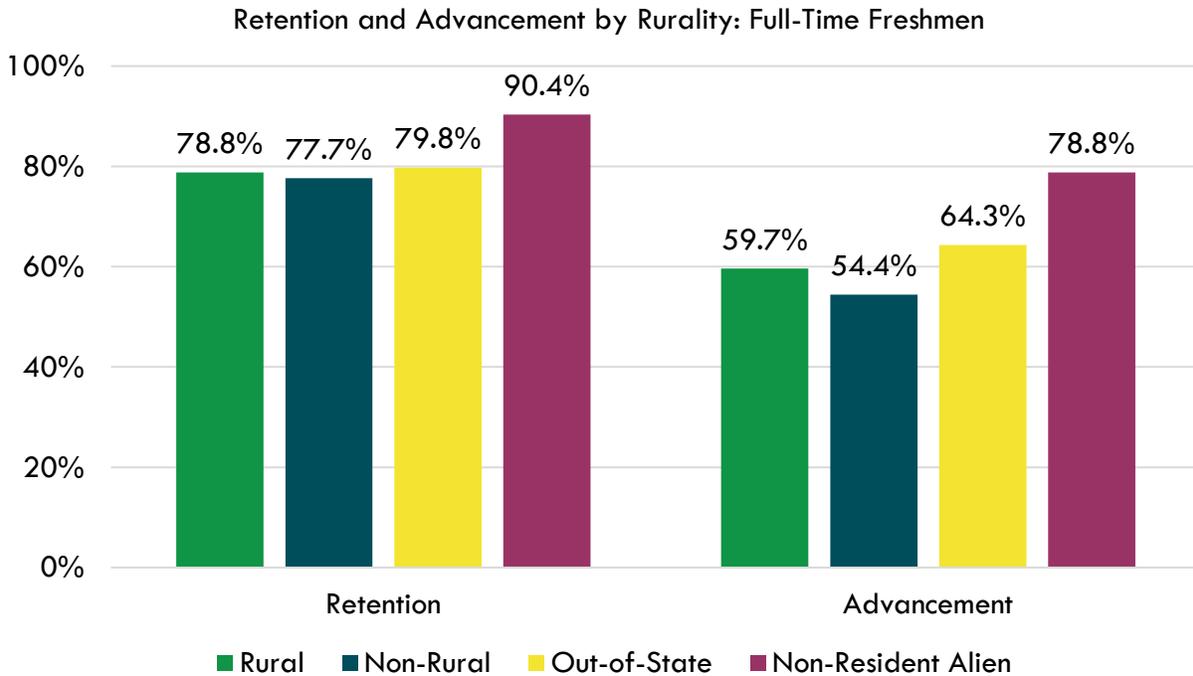
Source: Illinois State Board of Education Report Card File 2019

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 school located in non-rural areas. For those that do enroll, 43% will go to a community college, compared to 33% of students from non-rural areas. Relatedly, the rate of enrollment at four-year institutions was substantially lower among students from rural high schools (22.0% to 37.1%).

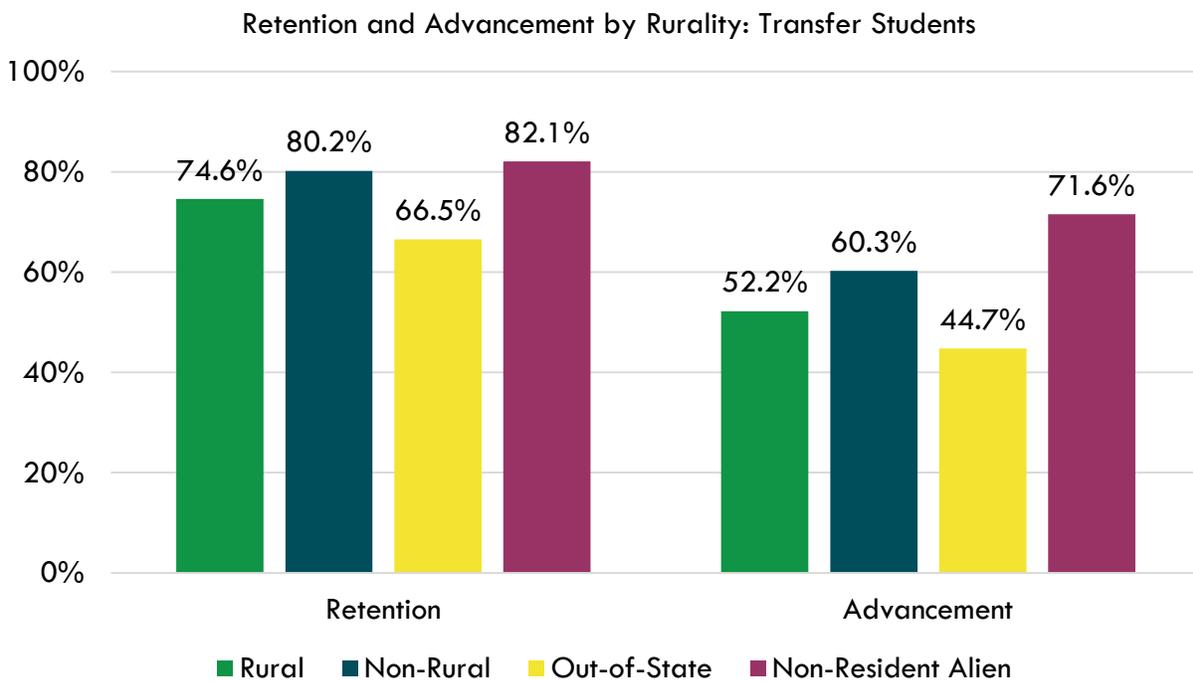


Source: Illinois State Board of Education Report Card File 2019

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.



Source: IHEIS Fall Enrollment Collections from 2018-19 and 2019-20



Source: IHEIS Fall Enrollment Collections from 2018-19 and 2019-20

THE EQUITY IMPERATIVE

Illinois has wide disparities in the postsecondary attainment rates of adults across the state, by race, ethnicity, gender. Yet, demographic projections show that the state is becoming more diverse. And economic analysis indicates that more and more jobs will require education past high school and throughout one’s career in order to succeed. That means Illinois higher education must do better in serving students of color, low-income students, working adult students, rural students, students with disabilities, and undocumented students, among others. Achieving equity is both a moral and an economic imperative.

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

Based on the data laid out above, the results of the survey, and the 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.**

To achieve that vision, the Board laid out three goals for the Strategic Plan to achieve:

- **Close Equity Gaps:** Too many students are left behind by our current higher education system—particularly students who are African American, Latinx, low-income, first generation college goers, rural, working adults, or have disabilities. We have a moral imperative and, with the changing demographics of the state, an economic imperative to adapt our system to meet their needs.
- **Increase Talent that Drives Economic Growth:** Estimates are that over 60% of jobs in Illinois will require a postsecondary degree or credential by the year 2025 and that percentage will only grow.
- **Build a Stronger Financial Future:** Affordability is too often seen as the biggest barrier to access and attainment. To increase attainment and close equity gaps, we must ensure access, address the underlying affordability issues, and consider the cost structure of higher education. This includes opportunities to improve efficiency through shared services and equitable and adequate ways to fund the system.



The strategies outlined below will help the state achieve the three goals and ultimately the vision.

INCREASE TALENT THAT DRIVES ECONOMIC GROWTH: A FUTURE-READY SYSTEM

THE FUTURE OF WORK AND THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

We are in an era of rapid change in the nature of work. 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 and knowledge and prepare for multiple career changes over their lifetimes. These ideas are further underscored by the impact of COVID-19 on accelerating automation and changing where and how people work. The disparate impact of the pandemic on sectors such as food service and hospitality, as well as the people working in those sectors, means that many individuals will need opportunities to up- and re-skill.

The Governor's economic development plan, [A Plan to Revitalize the Illinois Economy and Build the Workforce of the Future](#), outlines the foundation for the State's long-term growth while recognizing the need to reduce equity gaps for economically-disadvantaged populations. The 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.

Research and innovation at our state's universities drive the economy forward. For example, the Illinois Innovation Network (IIN) is a \$500 million state investment in university-based regional hubs to drive innovation, workforce development and economic growth, supporting the state's inclusive economic development plan.

To meet the state's talent needs, the higher education system must provide future-ready learning opportunities that meet student needs for flexibility and portability while allowing them to build upon their learning over time and across settings.

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

DRAFT STRATEGIES:

- 1. Align the state's economic development plan and higher education strategies, ensuring both address historic inequities.** Support new and existing regional partnerships between 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. Create opportunities for periodic industry-wide input. Build on the Illinois Innovation Network (IIN) to strengthen regional focus, while connecting the state. Conduct annual supply and demand analysis to identify areas of need to inform institutional and IBHE reports and approvals.
- 2. Establish a statewide Business and Employer Advisory Council to the Illinois Board of Higher Education to support 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.

3. **Expand models of teaching and learning that provide access and 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. 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, and to 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, and undocumented students.
4. **Develop strategies to encourage high school graduates to enroll in the Illinois higher education system and keep talent in Illinois.** One out of five 2019 Illinois high school graduates 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. Public universities award four-year scholarships (for freshmen) or two-year scholarships (for transfer students) using their own merit criteria for families whose income is less than six times the poverty level. Institutions must also provide matching funds. The [first-year program report](#) found that 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. The AIM HIGH pilot runs through October 1, 2024. An evaluation of the pilot—including its impact on stemming outmigration—should be used to guide the decision whether it should continue. The Direct Admissions program described in the Equity section can help retain high school graduates in Illinois.
5. **Strengthen statewide, coordinated transfer initiatives to ensure students have seamless paths to build on previous academic learning and earn postsecondary credentials.** Students have, for well over two decades, taken courses at multiple institutions of higher education to earn their degrees. This transfer “swirl” can mean that students are accessing courses at the places and times they need them. 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, have 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. The following strategies emanate from these reports.

- Create a state campaign to locate and communicate with adults who hold substantial college credits 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.
- 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
- 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 of degree and full details about their transfer path
- Develop state recommendations for the transfer of credits earned through Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) scores, as well as prior learning assessment
- Develop and disseminate best practices for students with a large number of transfer credits through AP, IB, dual credit, and military learning
- 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 and in instances where they know the institution and major they want to transfer.

6. **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), some with multiple locations, 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 the expectations and goals of higher education but should be.

THE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE

A well-qualified, diverse educator workforce is essential to ensuring that all children have a high-quality education that meets their needs. The research is clear that well-prepared educators are the most important in-school factor impacting student learning outcomes; and well-prepared principals set the school climate and culture that, in turn, is a key factor in retaining highly qualified teachers.

Higher education's role in preparing the educators of the future, and particularly diverse educators, is fundamental to the state's success. 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. 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.

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

The strategies outlined below will help ensure Illinois has the diverse educator workforce that it needs. The following principles are fundamental to the proposed strategies.

- **Make the acceptance of previous academic and relevant work experience consistent, seamless, and systematic.**
- **Create options for rural, place-bound, and working adults that allow a student-centered choice between local and virtual coursework and completion.**

DRAFT STRATEGIES:

7. **Scale transfer pathways for educator preparation allowing students to complete courses at a community college and transfer seamlessly to a university.** Expand 2+2, 3+1 and dual degree agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions that allow students to complete baccalaureate-level coursework. Such agreements help students know the courses they need to complete, where they will take those courses, and how those courses will transfer to the partner institution to complete the baccalaureate degree on time. To facilitate transfer, the Illinois Articulation Initiative General Education Core Curriculum package should be leveraged, and other flexibilities should be pursued in concert with the Illinois State Board of Education to allow candidates to meet General Education licensure requirements in a consistent manner across institutions.
8. **Create personalized paths that allow for flexible progression to completion for individuals with work experience in education and specific content areas.**
 - Leverage prior learning assessment and competency-informed approaches.
 - Grow the use of residency, apprenticeship, and other models that provide candidates with extended classroom experience with guided supervision and coaching.
 - Develop a post-baccalaureate certificate leading to licensure for individuals with baccalaureate degrees in fields other than education. This post-baccalaureate certificate would provide the coursework needed for licensure with the option for individuals to continue coursework leading to a master's degree.
 - Disseminate information, in collaboration with the Illinois State Board of Education, about options currently available to educator preparation programs in creating these more personalized paths and highlight innovative practices.
9. **Build a consortium of institutions to make educator preparation coursework available in targeted areas of need.** Institutions, working in a collaborative consortium, can help students access courses across the participating institutions, particularly in cases where the number of students at single institutions is not sufficient to maintain a full class or cohort.
10. **Enhance access to educator preparation programs through technology** by leveraging 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.
11. **Evaluate strategies focused on upskilling the early childhood incumbent 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 City of Chicago has adopted a policy and the state is focused on increasing the credentials for those teaching in early childhood settings, moving an estimated 8,000 educators with only an Associate's degree to a baccalaureate and an estimated 20,000 who lack an Associate's to earning one. Specific strategies focused on a working, place-bound adult student population

are needed. Since systematic upskilling of this scale has not been undertaken, before being launched, the **strategies below must be further evaluated:**

- Mandatory full transfer of “standardized” Applied Associate Degrees in Early Childhood Education with commonly accepted courses across institutions
- Leveraging existing competency-based credentialing system and prior learning assessment options
- Expanded pathways to completion between credentials, associate's degrees and bachelor's degrees for educator licensure
- Compensation for apprenticeship, clinical, and student teaching work and options to allow practice in the workplace
- Wrap-around supports in a “one-stop” format including information about pathway options
- Financial support in the form of scholarships, stipends, and debt reduction
- Scaling university programs in partnership with community colleges to meet the need
- New models of consortia or collaboratives of institutions to operate programs, with input from stakeholders, including employers
- New authority to offer baccalaureate degree preparation for early childhood teacher licensure at community colleges, including an evaluation of near-term and long-term impacts on the higher education ecosystem

CLOSE EQUITY GAPS: A LEARNER-READY SYSTEM

A LEARNER-READY SYSTEM

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. Under this design, a student-centered focus is the guide, with particular attention paid to 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.

Today’s higher education system serves students throughout their lives and careers. We must support a higher education system that serves students going straight from high school to college, those who have chosen to begin their careers and return as adults for college, those who need to re-skill or up-skill to change career paths, and many other patterns.

We have done much to smooth the path from high school to college but more still needs to be done. Landmark legislation, like the Postsecondary Workforce Readiness Act, the Dual Credit Quality Act, and the various developmental education reforms discussed below have addressed many of the bumps in the road. Still, too many students face barriers in getting to and through higher education. This is particularly true for students of color, low-income students, undocumented students, and students who are first in their families to go to college. Additional barriers manifest themselves in rural settings. We see this throughout the data that shows significant equity gaps in access to early college experience, placement in developmental education, rates of retention, advancement, and completion.

We must rebuild our systems for a post-pandemic world. Students experienced many disruptions to their education and routines as they transitioned to remote learning and remained in remote or hybrid learning environments as a result of the pandemic. We must provide the supports students need to be successful. But it shouldn’t end there. We must take the lessons learned through the pandemic to build a stronger system overall.

We have untapped potential in the adults who haven’t yet received a postsecondary degree/credential. As the data above shows, 28% of African Americans, 16.2% of Latinx and 21% white adults over age 25 have some college and no degree. Additionally, 42% percent of African Americans over age 25, 64% of Latinx, and 32% of white adults have less than a high school diploma. 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. This is even more important as [recent analysis by WICHE](#) projects a declining population of high school graduates after 2026.

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. Whether the students are seeking short-term career credentials now and may seek more later, or whether they are seeking a two-year or four-year degree that may take them through a combination of institutions, or returning after years away from school, we must have a system that works seamlessly to help them achieve their goals. Illinois leads the nation in bachelor’s degree completions among community college transfer students (53.8 percent), yet students face challenges in ensuring academic credits transfer, that paths are clear for degree completion, that courses and services are available at times and in ways that are responsive to their needs.

The draft strategies outlined below 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.

The strategies below generally focus on the non-financial supports required to close equity gaps. Financial strategies are covered in the Affordability section of the report.

DRAFT STRATEGIES:

12. Support the ongoing learning renewal of students and systematic implementation of evidence-informed student support practices. Students from low-income families and families of color were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, and the pandemic has exacerbated the factors that place students at risk of not enrolling, dropping out, and not 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 as they transition to or continue their postsecondary education. 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 socio-emotional transition to college and help them succeed. Summer bridge programs have been shown to increase retention and graduation rates.
- 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. To bring such programs to scale additional resources, like extending MAP to summer term, would be required.
- Proactive and comprehensive advising, first-year experience, experiential learning, professional support for students with disabilities, along with wrap-around supports, like those provided to community college students through [One Million Degrees](#) and other organizations.
- [High-impact practices](#), including service learning, learning community, 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 according to the [National Survey of Student Engagement](#) of first-time and transfer Black and Latinx students. For example, 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.
- Support for meeting students' basic needs, including housing and food insecurity, mental health/wellness services, child care, among others.
- Reformed financial policies, including polices on financial holds, financial literacy, emergency financial assistance.
- 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
- Examine and evaluate other efforts to address student learning needs, identify and share best practices, and scale high impact practices that have been demonstrated to be successful.

13. Expand equitable access, support, and success in rigorous and strategic early college coursework. Access to high-quality early college opportunities, such as dual enrollment, dual credit, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate, 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.

- a. Build capacity to support students from rural communities to access early college opportunities and student support through flexible, online, and other delivery options. Build capacity to provide Black and Latinx students access to early college.
- b. Consider financial support to institutions to offer dual credit/enrollment courses.
- c. Expand graduate-level learning opportunities that ensure Illinois high school teachers earn the credentials to teach dual credit coursework in their high schools, consistent with the standards required by the institutions, the State, and the Higher Learning Commission. Examine appropriate mechanisms for scaling these efforts (e.g., the Midwestern Higher Education Compact's Graduate Quest program, etc.). In order to achieve this, four-year institutions could design graduate-level certificates/programs to provide educators with the requisite coursework in disciplines leading to an endorsement in dual credit instruction on the Illinois State Board of Education Professional Educator License. Additionally, IBHE, the State Board of Education 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).

14. Establish and implement institution-level equity plans to close access, progression, and completion gaps.

Making equity a core aspect of postsecondary planning at the institutional level is critical for reducing disparities and achieving a more equitable educational outcome for underrepresented students and historically disadvantaged students. Equity plans should outline each institution's specific steps to close equity gaps in access, progression, and timely completion, including:

- 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, among other intervention points, "on-track" predictive and other screening tools. As one example, the University of Illinois-Chicago developed a [tool](#) that with 4 indicators predicts with 75% accuracy whether a college freshman is likely to graduate within 6 years. These indicators include GPA, credits earned, grade in the required freshman English course, and no unresolved financial hold in the first term. By intervening with the right supports when students are "off-track," the institution can change the student's graduation trajectory. Such a predictive tool should be coupled with other tools (e.g. non-cognitive student need surveys) to ensure students receive appropriate services.
- Equity impact analysis, 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.

15. 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. The University of Southern California provides [training on faculty hiring practices](#) to avoid issues of microaggression that can occur in job advertisements and review of CVs. Appointment and inclusion of a faculty diversity recruitment liaison in search committees has had results.³ Cluster hiring programs, a research-based approach that fosters faculty retention and diversity, much like the "Posse" program for students, means institutions bring on faculty of color in a cohort

to provide shared experiences and support. Pipeline programs, such as the state’s Diversifying Faculty in Illinois (DFI) program can identify promising scholars from diverse background to support their development as graduate students and post-doctoral fellows.

16. **Continue the developmental education reform** underway as a result of the SJR 41 Task Force recommendations and PA 101-0654, the adoption of placement recommendations by the Illinois community college system, and other related legislation. Such efforts should include evidence-based model implementations that allow for expeditious placement into credit-bearing coursework.
17. **Consider implementation of a direct admissions program.** Under a direct admissions program, students are automatically notified of admission to all of the participating 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. [Research](#) on the direct admissions program coupled with a common application in Idaho 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. 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.
18. **Expand the role of college access and support models.** Navigating the college-going process involves many steps from completing admissions applications to filing the FAFSA for financial aid. Students, particularly those who are first in their families to go to college, need supportive, just-in-time guidance. 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 goals. ISACorps members are near-peer mentors, who support students and families in making key college access and finance decisions, including information and assistance completing a FAFSA¹, the key to unlocking federal and state aid. Now with new legislation signed by Gov. Pritzker, FAFSA² completion is a high school graduation requirement. Although federal legislation recently passed to simplify the FAFSA and make the total cost of attendance more transparent, students and families will still need help navigating the college-going process. The ISACorps and similar programs are among Illinois’ most powerful tools to support students on the path to and through college. We must expand students’ access to counselors, peer mentors and college transition coaches to positively impact college-going and completion rates.
19. **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 post-secondary 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. (consider programs such as the [Tennessee Reconnect](#) and [Minnesota Reconnect](#) models).
 - 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 (e.g. debt forgiveness, adult-oriented scholarship programs, etc. Also see strategies in the *Affordability* section).
 - Adopt teaching and learning methodologies and practices most appropriate for adult students and professional learning opportunities to deliver quality learning.

BUILD A STRONGER FINANCIAL FUTURE

INTRODUCTION:

Affordability is too often seen as the biggest barrier to higher education access and success, especially for low-income students, students of color, first-generation college students, immigrants, undocumented students, and many others who are underserved by the higher education system. Embedded in any definition is a recognition that tuition, financial assistance, family income, state, local, and federal government funding, institutional, and private funding all play an interrelated role.

The strategies outlined below 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 the state's system of funding higher education to ensure it is equitable, stable, and sufficient.

NEED FOR NEW HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING APPROACH:

Students who come from families with low resources are underserved by Illinois' higher education system.

As the data above showed, low-income students are less likely to go to college directly from high school and more likely to go to community college when they do. Enrollment by low-income students has been dropping disproportionately. And we continue to see patterns of disproportionate placement in developmental education, lower retention and advancement rates, and lower rates at which institutions graduate low-income students.

For years, 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.

Public universities for decades have been funded through an across-the-board approach (i.e. the same percentage decrease or increase from the prior year for all institutions). 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. The funding system does not recognize the resources needed to support the varying ways higher education institutions serve the state.

Both university and community college funding approaches have exacerbated inequities, shifted costs to students and families and increasing the amount of debt they take on.

As student and workforce needs have changed, the state funding system simply has not kept up.

As state appropriations for institutions declined, tuition increased. As the state's support declined, tuition and fees have increased. In FY 2002, state funds 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 also shifts the burden to 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 (last fully audited year), state appropriations had declined to 14.4% of community college costs, with tuition and fees covering 40.4%, and property taxes 45.2% of FY 2019 costs.

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 (allowing qualified undocumented students and transgender students who are not otherwise eligible for federal financial aid to apply for MAP grants).

Over time, the state appropriation for MAP has not kept up with rising tuition and fees, creating a gap in purchasing power. In FY02, MAP covered 100% of average tuition and fees at Illinois public universities and community colleges. However, by FY20, MAP awards dropped to 34% of average tuition and fees at universities and 36% community colleges, respectively, even after an additional \$86M infusion to MAP between FY18 and FY20.

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 FY20, funds were insufficient to grant MAP awards to an estimated 53,000 eligible students. 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.

Even with federal and state financial aid, many low-income students are unable to afford college. In FY20, 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. 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, many students turn to additional loans to fill the financial gaps between available financial aid and college costs. Illinois has 1.57 million student loan borrowers, with \$59.1B outstanding in principal and interest as of March 2020. That represents about 3.8% of the total outstanding student loan debt in the U.S. (Milken Institute).

Students need access to good information about college costs and student financial aid. The forthcoming report of the Chicago State University Equity Working Group for Black Student Success Action Plan⁴ 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 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.

We can do more to decrease the cost of college. In FY20, public universities reported spending over \$1.1B on institutional support and physical plant. While much of that includes personnel costs, universities spent \$341M on contractual services and \$64M on student health services. Similarly, in FY 18 community colleges spent \$995M on operations/maintenance and institutional support from all funds, and \$96M on contractual services from the operating funds. This creates opportunities for savings from joint purchasing. Moreover, many operational activities are governed by state policy and therefore require similar processes across institutions, lending themselves to the potential for shared services.

Illinois needs a new higher education funding policy with equity at its core that recognizes the interaction of state funding for institutions, scholarships, and MAP; student and family resources; property taxes; institutional expenses; and student debt levels.

The strategies below lay out the components of an equity-driven funding policy.

⁴ Draft Report by Equity Working Group for Black Student Access & Success in IL. Publication forthcoming.

DRAFT STRATEGIES:**20. Create an equitable, stable higher education funding system that provides sufficient funding and 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 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 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 interest *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.
- **Ensure no institution loses funding.** 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.** The Higher Education Strategic Plan 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.

21. **Invest \$50M each year to double 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, disproportionately impacting 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. Estimates suggest that the \$50M annual investment in MAP will ensure that all students can continue to be served⁵ and that a MAP grant will cover 50% of average tuition and fees in 10 years.

22. **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. These “holds,” often for relatively small amounts, are designed to incent students to pay an outstanding balance, but instead, by preventing students from re-enrolling, force them to 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. A [report](#) by IthakaS+R consulting analyzes the extent of the “stranded credit” problem and several actions being undertaken. They also estimate that in Illinois, over 275,000 students have nearly \$800M in outstanding debt to Illinois institutions, an average of \$2,900. These significant consequences can result even if balances are relatively small or the student is close to graduation. Innovative debt forgiveness programs, like Chicago State University’s [Finish Strong](#) or City Colleges of Chicago’s [Fresh Start](#), help students get back on track to completing their degree. Another idea under development 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. Innovative solutions exist, and Illinois students should not be locked out of completing their degree due to small outstanding balances.

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

24. **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

⁵ Under assumptions about the number of students completing FAFSA, tuition and fee increases, etc.

on track to degree completion. 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.

- 25. Implement creative options for building family savings through Illinois' 529 savings plans.** The Treasurer's Office provides robust college savings plans through the Bright Start and Bright Directions 529 programs. Research⁶ 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. 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.
- 26. Pilot "Transfer Guarantee" models.** Under these programs, students are able to enroll in a "fixed-price" bachelor's degree program that begins at a community college and is completed through a public university. The course sequence is fully defined, and the financial model designed so that students will earn their degree on-time and at a lower cost. A transfer guarantee holds the promise of marrying transfer articulation agreements—insufficient for producing equitable transfer outcomes on their own—with clear pledges about cost and time-to-degree that attract students and support their transfer success.
- 27. 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 center 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. Public universities are all 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 \(SMHEC\)](#) 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. SMHEC's "**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.
- 28. Expand joint purchasing among institutions.** 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. Another option to consider is a statewide student health insurance pool/purchase. 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. Finally, ongoing saving opportunities are available to Illinois higher education institutions through the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC). As a member of this 12-state compact, Illinois school districts, higher education institutions, state and local governments, and students have saved [\\$55 million in 2019-2020](#) by

⁶ Terri Friedline, William Elliott, Ilung 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.

participating in MHEC's computing hardware, software, and technology contracts, the master property program and other negotiated services.

NEXT STEPS

Illinois can achieve the vision of a higher education system that ensures individuals, families, and communities across the state can thrive. This Strategic Plan outlines three ambitious but attainable goals 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 this Strategic Plan 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.

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

There are many other measures and metrics that should be reported to ensure we stay on track. One of the first steps after the Board's adoption of this plan will be to convene a group to further develop the accountability system.

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

Work should begin right away to develop a charter and identify the leaders who can share the business and employer perspective with the higher education system. This 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. The analysis of employer needs compared to degree/credential production should also be undertaken in the first phase of implementation.

Begin Development of Funding System

This plan identified a set of core principles for a new higher education funding system. A broad group of stakeholders should be convened to begin the work of turning those principles into an operational financial model.

Support for Learning and Social-Emotional Renewal

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 the Strategic Plan 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.

Bring Adults Back

Efforts should begin right away to reach out to the many adults who were displaced during the pandemic or whose careers are threatened because of the changing nature of work. The supports and programs needed to help them

succeed should be identified so that they can enroll for the first time or return to college to prepare for the next phase of their career.

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. With various packages of federal funding available for the next few years specifically for early childhood, we have a tremendous opportunity to transform the skills and credentials of the early childhood workforce. Work on this should begin immediately.

Implement Next Phase of Transfer Infrastructure

The state’s transfer infrastructure is key to supporting the timely progression of students to completion of a postsecondary credential. Throughout the plan, 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.