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Governor Pritzker's Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Continues Important Investments in Higher Education

Investments Will Help Close Equity Gaps and Increase Access to Higher Education

SPRINGFIELD – State higher education leaders are pleased with Governor JB Pritzker's proposed fiscal year 2026 budget, which includes a higher education budget of \$2.73 billion. The higher education budget emphasizes college affordability and supports ongoing initiatives by including a \$10 million increase for the Monetary Award Program (MAP) and a \$46 million, or 3 percent, increase to operational funds for public universities (\$37 million) and community colleges (\$9 million).

"The governor's proposed higher education investments will help us build on the progress we've made toward a more affordable and equitable higher education system and thriving Illinois economy for each family and student in our state," **said Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) Executive Director Ginger Ostro**. "Even at a time when the state has to make difficult fiscal decisions, Governor Pritzker has prioritized investing in our students because they are the future of our state."

"Governor Pritzker's unwavering commitment to increasing funding for Illinois community colleges over the past four years has been instrumental in our ability to enhance access, improve educational outcomes, and support workforce development across the state. This continued investment not only strengthens the quality of education we provide but also helps us better serve students from all backgrounds, ensuring they have the resources they need to succeed. We are deeply grateful for the Governor's vision and leadership, and the support of the general assembly, which has allowed community colleges to thrive and contribute to the growth of Illinois' economy and communities across the state," **said Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) Executive Director Brian Durham**.

"The governor's steadfast support for MAP over the last five years has significantly improved postsecondary affordability for Illinois students and families struggling to pursue their education and career goals," **said Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) Executive Director Eric Zarnikow**. "Increases in MAP funding have not only improved the purchasing power of MAP, but more low-income students are attending college. In fact, the rate of low-income MAP eligible students who enrolled in school and used their MAP award increased by nearly 10% this fall compared to last year. It's the largest year over year increase that ISAC has seen in more than two decades."

The governor's budget includes an increase of \$10 million for MAP, bringing the total MAP appropriation to \$721.6 million. This supports the goal of increasing funding for MAP to \$1 billion within 10 years as set out in the strategic plan for higher education in 2021. From 2019 to the fiscal year 2026 additional proposed funding for MAP, the governor has championed an 80% increase in MAP. The historic increases in MAP over the last several years have made significant inroads in affordability, increasing the size and expanding the

number of grants for students from low-income households statewide. As a result of the unprecedented investment in the program, ISAC projects that it will award MAP grants to more than 151,000 students in fiscal year 2025, an increase of more than 22,700 since fiscal year 2019. During that same timeframe, the maximum award size increased from \$4,869 to \$8,064.

The governor's budget also includes \$3 million for the state's direct college admissions program through Common App. Once fully implemented, the direct admissions program will simplify admissions into state public universities for high school seniors and community college transfer students. This is an initiative by IBHE, ICCB, and ISAC that will increase access for every Illinois student to the state's public universities and community colleges.

The proposed fiscal year 2026 budget for higher education includes:

- \$10 million increase for MAP
- \$37 million (3%) increase in operating funding for public universities
- \$9 million (3%) increase in funding for community colleges, adult education, and career and technical education
- \$15 million for the Pipeline for Advancement of the Healthcare Workforce (PATH) program
- \$3 million for the state's direct college admissions program
- \$2 million to continue funding the Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois (DFI) program at fiscal year 2025 levels to provide holistic supports to minority graduate students, in addition to their fellowship stipend
- \$5 million for Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) Scholarships
- \$10.75 million for Golden Apple Scholars and \$5 million for Golden Apple Accelerators

The governor's detailed higher education budget can be accessed [here](#).

The governor's budget goes to the Illinois General Assembly for consideration.

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