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Gov. Pritzker Announces IL Public Universities Achieve Highest Enrollment Level in 10 Years

Achievement supported by unprecedented investments in higher education under the Pritzker Administration

CHICAGO – Today, Governor Pritzker and the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) announced that public universities in Illinois achieved the highest enrollment level in 10 years, with nearly 190,000 students enrolled during the fall semester of the 2025-26 academic year. Total enrollment at Illinois public universities increased for the second consecutive year and is the highest in 10 years according to IBHE's annual [First Look Fall Enrollment](#) report.

"Illinois has made significant investments in higher education, and it's paying off, with public universities achieving the highest enrollment in a decade," **said Governor JB Pritzker**. "No matter their background, Illinoisans deserve accessible, high-quality education—and high enrollment in our state's public universities means that more Illinoisans are realizing their full potential."

Since taking office, Governor Pritzker has made historic, sustained investments to make higher education more affordable, accessible, and attainable for every Illinois student. Over the past seven years, Governor Pritzker has increased operating funding for public universities and community colleges by more than \$255 million; increased financial aid by \$345 million; expanded public universities' use of the Common App; made Illinois a top five state for FAFSA completion; and this past legislative session, signed into law a direct admissions program that will make it easier for Illinois students to enroll in the state's public universities.

Illinois' public universities are seeing renewed momentum in student enrollment and retention, according to the latest statewide data. Total student enrollment across Illinois' 12 public universities increased by 2.3% this fall—bringing total enrollment to 189,791 students. This marks the second consecutive year of total enrollment growth and also reflects significant increases in African American and Latino student populations.

The overall increase in enrollment was attributable to a variety of factors, including:

- Increase in first-time, full-time freshman enrollment (6.8% increase)
- Higher rates of transfer students (6.5% increase)
- Increase in fall-to-fall retention (1.4% increase)

"The continued increases in enrollment across the state's higher education system, especially of African American and Latino students, show that we are making progress toward equity and expanding access," **said IBHE Chair Pranav G. Kothari**. "We strengthen both our workforce and our economy when we make higher education accessible to all Illinoisans, and we are eager to continue working to close equity gaps with Governor JB Pritzker's leadership."

"These enrollment gains reflect our continued commitment to removing barriers to make our higher education system more equitable and ensuring everyone in Illinois has an opportunity to pursue a higher education no matter their starting point," **said IBHE Executive Director Ginger Ostro**. "When we remove barriers, we create opportunities, and that is what this growth is all about."

Supporting Illinois' Students and Higher Education

Governor Pritzker's budgets have delivered the largest reinvestment in Illinois higher education in a generation. Since 2019, the state has significantly increased operating support for public universities and community colleges, reversed years of disinvestment, and expanded financial aid so more students can afford to earn a degree in Illinois.

A major driver of this progress is the state's expansion of need-based aid. Funding for the Monetary Award Program (MAP) has grown by more than \$320 million since FY19—an 80% increase and more than 151,000 students projected to receive support this year, 22,000 more than in FY19. The state has also strengthened its merit-based aid through an additional \$25 million in AIM HIGH Scholarships, bringing the total number of students benefitting from MAP and AIM to about 162,700.

To align higher education with workforce needs, the state has also made major investments in high-demand jobs. Through the state's Pipeline for Advancement of the Healthcare (PATH) workforce program, more than 25,000 students enrolled, and more than 15,000 students have completed the program and entered high demand medical positions. The state has also sustained critical funding for dual credit and workforce grants at community colleges.

Strong Undergraduate Enrollment Growth

Overall Fall 2025 undergraduate enrollment at Illinois public universities increased by 3.8% compared to the previous year. First-time, full-time freshman also increased for the fifth consecutive year.

Undergraduate enrollment increased at eight of the 12 Illinois public universities, and Chicago State University (CSU, 15%) and Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE, 10.7%) experienced the largest increases.

Enrollment of first-time, full-time freshmen increased at nine of the state's 12 public universities. CSU experienced the largest gains with a 111.9% increase. University of Illinois Chicago (UIC, 22.4%), Northern Illinois University (NIU, 21.8%), Governors State University (GSU, 20.2%), and University of Illinois Springfield (UIS, 20.2%) also experienced notable increases in enrollment of first-time, full-time freshmen.

Large Increases for Underrepresented Groups

Enrollment of African American and Latino students increased across multiple areas compared to the previous year, reflecting an increase in access to state universities for these students. Total enrollment of African American students increased by 9.7%, and total enrollment of Latino students increased by 8.3%, underscoring the universities' progress in attracting and retaining students from these underrepresented groups.

More Transfer Students Choosing Illinois Public Universities

Enrollment of new full-time transfer students at Illinois public universities increased by 6.5% compared to the previous year, signaling progress toward removing barriers for transfer students and strong interest from students to continue their education at state universities. Eight of the 12 public universities reported year-over-year growth in new transfer students. CSU led with a 50.6% increase, and SIUE followed with a 20.6% increase.

Enrollment at Illinois Community Colleges

The state's community college system also experienced enrollment increases. In its recently released report, [Fall 2025 Illinois Community College Opening Enrollment Report](#), the Illinois Community College Board reports an overall enrollment increase of 3.7% across the state's community colleges.

The report, IBHE First Look – Fall Enrollment 2025-26 – Illinois Public Universities, is available online and can be accessed [here](#).

About Illinois Board of Higher Education

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) is the planning and coordinating body for the state's higher education system. In June 2021, IBHE adopted the new strategic plan, "A Thriving Illinois," to accomplish three goals: close the equity gaps for students who have historically been left behind, build a stronger financial future for individuals and institutions, and increase talent and innovation to drive economic growth.