

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 17, 2025

New Landscape Analysis of Quad Cities Region Finds Opportunities in Education Offerings and Workforce Development

Findings will inform implementation of state's higher education equity-centered strategic plan in the region

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), in partnership with the Center for Economic Mobility at WestEd, released a comprehensive education and workforce analysis for the Quad Cities region, *Thrive Quad Cities: An Education and Workforce Analysis Final Report*. The Illinois General Assembly tasked IBHE to complete the study through Public Act 102-0017 and provided the funding to carry out the study. The report outlines critical challenges, opportunities and actionable recommendations that will inform a regional plan to support the implementation of the state's higher education strategic plan, [A Thriving Illinois](#), to align education pathways with workforce needs in the region.

“This analysis will be instrumental in carrying out important, strategic work that will accelerate access to meaningful and life-changing careers for Illinoisans in the Quad Cities region,” **said IBHE Executive Director Ginger Ostro**. “We are energized to continue working with our education and workforce partners in the region to foster a thriving and sustainable economy for its residents.”

The report synthesizes dozens of data points examining workforce, economic and educational trends in the region. Notable findings include:

- **Workforce Gaps:** There are shortages in high-demand sectors, including manufacturing, healthcare, information technology and transportation.
- **Equity Challenges:** There are disparities in educational attainment and workforce participation across gender, race and ethnicity.
- **Collaboration Opportunities:** There is a pressing need for regional collaboration to break down silos between K–12 education, post-secondary institutions and industry leaders.

Stakeholders and partners in the region - including elected officials, higher education institutions, K-12, workforce development, community-based organizations and employers - played a pivotal role in informing the analysis. Moving forward, these organizations are eager to collaborate with the Quad Cities Chamber to better meet the needs of the region

“Through the education and workforce analysis, we have a clearer vision of the needs and goals to better serve the residents in the Quad Cities,” **said State Senator Mike Halpin**. “By being able to see where resources are needed to succeed, we are now able to continue leading the charge in investing into the future of our community.”

“The Quad Cities Chamber was happy to support the Illinois Board of Higher Education in convening industry stakeholders for conversations with WestEd consultants. Our network of business leaders and their interest in developing a high-quality workforce complemented the objectives of this project and positioned us well to partner with the team responsible for preparing such a thorough and actionable report,” **said Christine Caves, Vice President of Business Retention, Expansion, and Workforce, Quad Cities Chamber**. “We have initiated conversations with other Quad Cities organizations to facilitate workforce conversations and operationalize the recommendations in the report.”

To fill the gaps in the workforce needed in high-demand sectors and the currently available post-secondary offerings, the report outlines recommendations including:

- Improve the accessibility and affordability of local postsecondary programming in high-demand occupation training programs;
- Examine ways to remove barriers for teachers to become dual credit or ELL certified; and
- Increase meaningful connections among employers and education partners.

Regional partners like The Grad Center have already started to take advantage of the report's findings to better support the training needs of the community, and plans are already in place to provide annual updates on workforce and higher education data, ensuring the analysis remains a living resource for regional decision-making.

The IBHE contracted with WestEd in 2023 to conduct this analysis of the Quad Cities region to create a process that could be replicated as a model across the state to increase the benefit and impact of postsecondary education and training for residents and employers.

The full report, including detailed findings and recommendations, can be accessed here: [Thrive Quad Cities: An Education and Workforce Analysis Final Report](#).

#

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.