

WORKING VISION STATEMENT

Illinois has an equitable, accessible, innovative, nimble, and aligned higher education ecosystem that ensures individuals, families, and communities across the state thrive.

TO FULFILL THIS VISION OVER THE NEXT 10 YEARS, ILLINOIS MUST IMPLEMENT A SET OF STRATEGIES AND AN ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM ALIGNED WITH THE CORE PRINCIPLES THAT ADDRESSES THE THREE PRIORITY AREAS LISTED BELOW.

PRELIMINARY STRATEGIES UNDER CONSIDERATION ARE LISTED UNDER EACH PRIORITY AREA.

PRIORITY AREA 1: INCREASE POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIAL/DEGREE ATTAINMENT TO DEVELOP THE TALENT THAT DRIVES ILLINOIS' ECONOMY

Estimates are that over 60% of jobs in Illinois will require a postsecondary degree or credential by the year 2025 and that need will only grow.

PRELIMINARY STRATEGIES UNDER CONSIDERATION FOR PRIORITY AREA 1

- **Future of Work and the Future of Learning:** The nature of work is changing and the skills that employers need are evolving. As a result, life-long learning is now essential as people will change careers multiple times. **What should learning look like in this evolving environment? What will be the relationship between higher education and employers?**
 - Establish stronger partnerships between higher education and industry to:
 - Ensure relevance between learning in the classroom and the rapidly changing skill needs in the workplace
 - Meet growing corporate training needs and the needs of the incumbent workforce to regularly upskill
 - Identify and develop transferrable and other needed skills as technologies continue to change how work is done
 - Develop students' skills and capacities to learn and work in both in-person and virtual settings
 - Build on current educational delivery innovations and broaden to new ways and flexible ways to deliver and document education (e.g., shorter-term, stackable learning modules to help students develop new skills; competency-based models that provide options for students to complete a personalized path to degree; portable ways for students to document their credentials, like a "passport").

- Support faculty, staff, and administrators to implement innovations in educational delivery and documentation of learning.
- Help students see pathways to employment, understanding trends and opportunities.
- **State's Workforce:** The state's workforce needs vary by region and by field. The Governor's Economic Development Plan outlined specific growth industries for each region in Illinois. **How do we ensure that the higher education system is prepared and can respond to these needs today and in the future?**
 - Regularly bring business and higher education leaders together to identify and determine how best to meet the state's regional economic and societal needs.
 - Support continuous supply/demand projections and analysis. Identify gaps and build strategy for filling gaps through regional and multi-regional approaches.
 - Define quality non-degree credentials that align to employment in state and regional job markets and stack to further education and training.
 - **State's Educator Workforce:** At the same time we establish strategies for meeting the state's overall workforce needs, our higher education system has a special role in preparing the educator workforce for the state. ISBE's Strategic Plan sets a goal that Illinois' diverse student population will have educators who are prepared through multiple pathways and are supported in and celebrated for their effectiveness in providing each and every child a high-quality education that meets their needs. In addition, recent legislation encourages the Board of Higher Education, in the course of the strategic planning process, to review the barriers to higher education and career advancement experienced by the early childhood workforce and by teachers of color. **How can the higher education system respond to the state's urgent need to address educator shortages, including early childhood educator upskilling needs?**
 - Develop delivery models for rural and place-bound individuals to access educator preparation programs.
 - Build out and expand educator preparation pathways, including 2+2, 3+1, and other partnership models that support seamless transfer.
 - Examine options for applied baccalaureate degrees.
 - Consider competency-based programs and other strategies to validate prior learning and provide personalized paths to completion and licensure.
- **Adults with Some College and No Degree (or less education):** In Illinois, 28% (324,000) of African Americans over age 25, 16.2% of Latinx (195,000) and 1.2 million white adults have some college and no degree. 42% percent of African Americans over age 25, 64% of Latinx, and 32% of white adults have less than a high school diploma. Adults with higher levels of education earn progressively more over their lifetime than their peers with less education. It is both an equity imperative and an economic imperative that the education system adjusts to the unique needs of adult students to ensure they are not left behind. **How do we meet the unique needs of a) adult students with some college and no degree and b) adults with less than a high school diploma, and c) English Language Learners to ensure they are not left out of the economy?**
 - Develop nimble and flexible learning opportunities that account for the unique circumstances of working adults in rural, urban and suburban settings.

- Build better articulation between community colleges and universities that account for the unique needs of adult students who may require the flexibility to attend multiple institutions in order to complete their credential.
 - Pursue strategies for re-engaging adults who dropped out due to non-academic barriers such as financial holds, advising errors, life circumstances, pandemic related challenges, etc.
 - Assess the capacity and readiness of universities to best serve adult students.
 - Develop clearer certificate, degree and career pathways for adults enrolled in adult basic education and high school equivalency (e.g. GED) programs.
 - Pursue debt relief strategies to mitigate barriers to enrollment (e.g. debt forgiveness, adult-oriented scholarship programs, etc.).
 - Design advising, outreach, and counseling specifically for adults. Pursue and provide wrap around student services for adults, including the resources and counseling necessary to navigate the higher education ecosystem.
 - Adopt teaching and learning methodologies and practices most appropriate for adult students.
 - Consider partnerships with employers to collaborate with colleges to do upskilling.
- **High School, College, and Career Connection:** Many students enrolled in Illinois' public high schools face barriers, particularly when transitioning from high school to college and/or career. This is particularly true for students of color, low-income students, and students who are first in their families to go to college. While recent data suggests that AP success rates are climbing, access to dual credit is increasing and remediation rates are dropping, better transitions between high school to colleges and ultimately into careers remain critical. **How can the higher education system bolster these successes and close persistent equity gaps caused by barriers that students face in the high school to college transition?**
 - Develop strategies to mitigate skill gaps created by learning disruptions during the pandemic.
 - Complete the implementation of high school to college transition work already underway through the Postsecondary Workforce Readiness Act (e.g. implementation of the PACE framework, transitional instruction, etc.).
 - Expand equitable access to and success in early college, including but not limited to AP and IB, dual credit, early college models, etc.
 - Complete developmental education reform underway as a result of SJR 41 and related legislation.
 - Expand the role of ISAC's near-peer mentors, the ISACorps, and other college access and support models.
 - Implement system-wide summer bridge and other academic/matriculation-preparedness programs.
 - Build better, more explicit partnerships among institutions of higher education, high schools, and employers that:
 - Ensure students have exposure to careers/career categories and the types of jobs available to them in the future.
 - Expand internships, apprenticeships, experiential learning, learn-and-earn opportunities, etc.
 - Provide meaningful career exploration, career development, and work-based learning opportunities for students.
 - Connect high school counselors to all available college and career options for students.

- Ensure career programs are responsive to business/industry needs.
- Strengthen partnerships among institutions of higher education to reinforce the state’s transfer infrastructure and improve time to credential or degree, building on SJR 22 work:
 - Develop strategies to maximize transfer of degree-applicable credit and courses.
 - Leverage reverse transfer to structure new academic pathways.
 - Create options for applied associate degree holders to pursue baccalaureate degrees.
 - Use math pathways to improve student success in non-STEM fields.
- Address reasons students leave Illinois to seek postsecondary education, beginning with an analysis of net import/export of students, including veterans.

PRIORITY AREA 2: 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, rural, adults, or people who 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.

PRELIMINARY STRATEGIES UNDER CONSIDERATION FOR PRIORITY AREA 2

- **Design System to Meet Student Needs:** Data shows equity gaps throughout the educational path for too many students. **What would a system look like that meets the needs and leads to the success of Black, Latinx, Low-Income, first-generation, rural, adult students? Students leaving foster care, students with disabilities, immigrants/undocumented students, justice-involved students? Others?**
 - *Note: Affordability strategies are addressed elsewhere in this document.*
 - Embed equity impact analysis and an equity lens in all decision-making.
 - Increase access to institutions that serve students well when looked at through an equity lens and ensure they are properly resourced; focus both on first-time and transfer students.
 - Support systematic implementation of high-impact academic and student support practices, such as intrusive advising, undergraduate research, creating sense of belonging on campus, first-year experience, summer bridge, meeting basic needs/well-being, addressing financial literacy, digital divide, emergency financial assistance, financial holds, etc., especially in light of COVID and the disparate impact it has had on low-income families and families of color.
 - Review, refine, and implement “higher ed on-track” predictive tool.
 - Implement campus climate surveys and take action based on the results.
 - Increase faculty, staff, and leadership of color.
 - Implement equity-focused professional development for campus administrators, faculty, and staff including cultural competency, training on micro-aggressions.
 - Establish institution-level equity plans, incorporating above elements, to close enrollment, persistence, and completion gaps.
 - Consider successful hybrid learning models.

PRIORITY AREA 3: IMPROVE AFFORDABILITY, INCREASE ACCESS, AND MANAGE COSTS

Affordability is too often seen as the biggest barrier to access and attainment. Student debt has increased and has led to inequitable outcomes. 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 and equitable and adequate ways to fund the system.

PRELIMINARY STRATEGIES UNDER CONSIDERATION FOR PRIORITY AREA 3:

- **Increase Opportunities for Financial Aid and Reduce Student Debt:**
 - Strengthen the Monetary Award Program (MAP), the state’s need-based aid program—with a path to full funding, offering year-round, including total cost of attendance, setting aside funds for community college students.
 - Focus relentlessly on FAFSA completion efforts.
 - Reduce student expenses through Open Education Resources.
 - Implement regulatory options for institutions that have high defaults (e.g. gainful employment rules).
 - Evaluate role of merit aid in advancing equity.
- **Adequately and Equitably Fund the Higher Education System:** Without adequate and equitable funding, the higher education will fall short of expectations. Without adequate, equitable, and stable *state* funding, the burden will continue to fall on student tuition and property taxes. **What is needed for an adequate and equitable funding system?**
 - Define adequacy and equity in public university and community college funding.
 - Establish core principles for Public University funding formula.
 - Consider how to evaluate future capital needs in an evolving higher education system.
- **Manage Costs:** Operating costs for higher education continue to increase. What is driving this cost increase? What are the opportunities to reduce institutional costs through improved administrative efficiency? **How do we “bend” the cost curve?**
 - Examine opportunities for shared administrative services, reduced regulatory barriers (e.g. procurement, civil service), expand shared purchasing (e.g. student health care).

WORKING HIGHER EDUCATION CORE PRINCIPLES

- **Students are our priority.** We exist to serve students – at whatever age and stage – and provide them with an excellent, well-rounded education and supports that meet their needs, give them access to careers and enhanced upward mobility, and foster their civic engagement and leadership potential.
- **Equity drives our system.** We make equity-driven decisions, elevating the voices of those who have been underserved, and actively identify and remove systemic barriers that have prevented students of color, first generation college students, low-income students, adult learners, and rural students from accessing and succeeding in higher education. Access and affordability are embedded in our definition of equity.
- **A varied, aligned, and articulated system is essential for success.** 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.
- **Higher education is a public good that enriches life.** We depend on higher education to preserve, expand, and transmit knowledge, offer solutions to society’s challenges, serve as a civic partner, and enrich life. Research at our institutions expands understanding and drives innovation and economic development. Learning is enhanced when students participate in research and hands-on experiences. Liberal arts and humanities ensure we support the whole student and better understand the human condition. Institutions are vibrant anchors of communities.
- **Talent drives our economy.** We see a strong, nimble, and innovative higher education system, including career education, as essential for the state’s talent development, job creation, and economic growth, which are necessary for residents to thrive.