

ILLINOIS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION  
**ANNUAL REPORT**  
JULY 1, 2024 TO JUNE 30, 2025



December 2025

## ILLINOIS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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## ABOUT THE ILLINOIS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

**IBHE is responsible for planning and coordinating the state's system of higher education** in five major areas: strategic planning; program approval and operating authority; higher education budget; data analysis and research; and grants administration.

## A THRIVING ILLINOIS

**IBHE launched, in partnership with the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC), the higher education strategic plan, [A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth](#).** The plan outlines 25 strategies designed to achieve a thriving Illinois, one which has an inclusive economy with broad prosperity and equitable paths to opportunity for all, especially those facing the greatest barriers:

 **EQUITY:** Close equity gaps for students who have historically been left behind.

 **SUSTAINABILITY:** Build a stronger financial future for individuals and institutions.


 **GROWTH:** Increase talent and innovation to drive economic growth.

The Plan was approved by the IBHE in June 2021 and endorsed by the Illinois Community College Board and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission in Fall 2021. A number of *A Thriving Illinois* strategies have launched and are described below.



## EQUITY PLANS & PRACTICES


**IBHE advanced statewide implementation of the equity plans, in partnership with ICCB, submitted by Illinois' public institutions of higher education.** Institutions are required by statute to develop strategies that improve access, persistence, completion, and student loan repayment for students who have been historically underrepresented, including students of color, rural learners, adult learners, women, and individuals with disabilities. After reviewing the plans submitted by the institutions, IBHE, in collaboration with ICCB and the Governor's Office, assembled a multi-pronged approach that includes Communities of Practice, targeted technical assistance, knowledge sessions, and agency check-ins to help institutions move their strategies into action. The plan will be launched during next fiscal year 2026.

 **EQUITY** *Equity Strategy 2: Establish and implement institution-level equity plans, practices to close access progression, completion, and attainment gaps.*

## DIRECT ADMISSIONS – ONE CLICK COLLEGE ADMIT

**IBHE launched a pilot statewide direct admissions program, One Click College Admit, in partnership with the Common App.** The IBHE was awarded a grant by the Lumina Foundation to implement, in collaboration with the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC), a direct admissions program for community college students transferring to public universities and recent high school graduates. The pilot program required graduating high school seniors to create a Common App account and profile and enter basic biographical information and GPA to receive direct admission offers – submitting an application was not required to participate. The pilot program waived application fees, essays, and letters of recommendation. More than 65,000 students were sent a direct admission offer during the program's pilot (January-June 2025).



 **GROWTH** *Growth Strategy 4: Encourage high school graduates to enroll in our higher education system and keep talent in Illinois.*

## STATEWIDE RE-ENROLLMENT STRATEGY

**IBHE partnered with ReUp Education to support the re-enrollment of adult learners who started college but never earned a degree or credential.** Through this partnership at several public universities, ReUp Education was tasked with re-engaging adults who dropped out or stopped out and providing wrap around student services for adult learners.



**EQUITY** *Equity Strategy 4: Attract working adults through outreach and supports specifically for them.*

## DATA & ACCOUNTABILITY DASHBOARD

**IBHE championed a bill through the legislative session that would require the development of a new public-facing higher education data dashboard in partnership with ICCB.** The bill was passed and signed into [law](#) by Governor JB Pritzker. The new dashboard will improve data accessibility and usability and empower key stakeholders to make informed, data-driven decisions that shape the future of Illinois higher education.



**EQUITY** *Equity Strategy 2: Establish and implement institution-level equity plans, practices to close access progression, completion, and attainment gaps.*

## WORKFORCE INSIGHTS DASHBOARDS

**IBHE developed and launched the Illinois Workforce Insights Dashboards.** The dashboards display the top in-demand jobs based on projected openings by education level; top occupations by demand and wage; and occupational demand insights including employment, job growth, and regional data. The dashboards can help improve alignment between higher education program offerings and the state's workforce needs. Administrators at institutions of higher education can use the data in this new tool to evaluate current programs against workforce demand, expand or scale back programs, and apply workforce trends to course planning.



**GROWTH** *Growth Strategy 3: Align the state's economic development and higher education strategies, ensuring both address historic inequities.*

## FISCAL YEAR 2026 BUDGET

For the fifth consecutive year, the IBHE made budget recommendations that reflected an equitable distribution of funds and invested dollars in the strategies outlined in *A Thriving Illinois*. The governor's budget supported many of these recommendations, and, ultimately, the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 increased by \$47 million from the prior year. Among the highlights in the FY 2026 state budget were a \$10 million increase in the state's need-based student grant program, Monetary Award Program (MAP), a \$38 million (3%) increase in funding for public universities, and a \$9 million (3%) increase in funding for community colleges. Additionally, the budget included an appropriation of \$50 million for AIM HIGH scholarships, \$13 million for Mental Health Early Action on Campus Act grants to universities and community colleges, and \$2.9 million for the Common App initiative to support the implementation of the state's direct admissions program.



**SUSTAINABILITY** *Sustainability Strategy: Build a stronger financial future for individuals and institutions.*

## BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE CENTER

**IBHE and IDHS deepened their collaborative efforts to expand and strengthen the Behavioral Health Workforce Center (BHWC).** Building on the BHWC's inaugural years, the state continued to support a coordinated hub-and-spoke model led by Southern Illinois University School of Medicine (primary hub) and the University of Illinois Chicago (secondary hub) to address the critical statewide shortage of behavioral health workers by spearheading strategies to recruit, train, educate, retain, diversify, and advance the behavioral health workforce.



In fiscal year 2025, the BHWC strengthened its operational infrastructure, expanded its workforce development activities, and broadened engagement with regional partners, employers, and educational institutions. The BHWC staff and partners also worked to develop a strategic plan which will be operationalized in fiscal year 2026.

The BHWC also focused on improved coordination, clearer expectations for statewide deliverables, and enhanced communication across the hub-and-spoke network. These efforts reinforce the BHWC's role as a cornerstone of Illinois' behavioral health workforce strategy, ensuring that communities across the state have access to high-quality, well-trained behavioral health providers.



### GROWTH

**Growth Strategy 3:** Align the state's economic development and higher education strategies, ensuring both address historic inequities.

## BENEFITS NAVIGATORS

**IBHE, in partnership with ICCB, convened HOUSE Liaisons for an all-day, state-wide conference** at Illinois State University in May 2025. All institutions of higher education in Illinois are required to designate a member of staff to serve as a HOUSE Liaison. The role of HOUSE Liaison aims to address the needs of homeless students on college and university campuses by serving as an advocate and resource for homeless students and improving the accessibility and affordability of on-campus housing.



### EQUITY

**Equity Strategy 1:** Support the ongoing learning renewal of students and systemic implementation of evidence-informed student support practices.

## HOUSE LIAISONS

**IBHE convened HOUSE Liaisons**, in partnership with the Illinois Community College Board, from each public institution in Illinois at an expanded annual training a state-wide conference to provide training on how to best support homeless students. All public institutions of higher education in Illinois are required to designate a member of staff to serve as a HOUSE Liaison. The role of HOUSE Liaison aims to address the needs of homeless students on college and university campuses by serving as an advocate and resource for homeless students and improving the accessibility and affordability of on-campus housing.



### EQUITY

**Equity Strategy 1:** Support the ongoing learning renewal of students and systemic implementation of evidence-informed student support practices.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD ACCESS CONSORTIUM FOR EQUITY

**IBHE co-leads the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE)**, a statewide partnership of public and private higher education institutions working collaboratively to expand access, remove barriers, and support degree and credential completion for Illinois' early childhood workforce. In fiscal year 2025, ECACE continued to advance its mission through coordinated systems work, research, and institutional collaboration, even as the federal relief funding that launched the initiative had sunset.

In fiscal year 2025, the state continued to prioritize the early childhood workforce pipeline through the work of the ECACE Consortium as well as state funded scholarships through ISAC with a \$5 million appropriation. In AY2024-25, 741 students across all 62 participating institutions, with recipients representing every Illinois legislative district, received scholarships with an average award of \$7500.

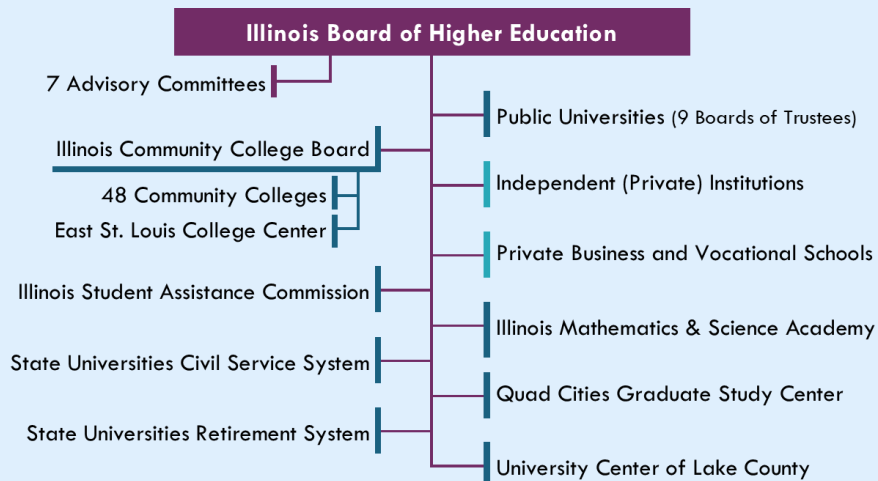
Institutions used ECACE investments to implement lasting improvements. Many redesigned academic programs to meet the needs of working adults, expanded online and hybrid modalities, and honored credit for prior learning earned through employment or training.



**Growth Strategy 5:** Establish a consortium of community colleges and universities to better serve the incumbent early childhood workforce.

## STRUCTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ILLINOIS

IBHE makes budget recommendations and grants operating authority and program approval for public higher education agencies and organizations and private institutions.



Legend: purple is IBHE, blue denotes a public entity with a separate governing board, and aqua indicates private institutions under IBHE authority.