STRATEGIC DIRECTION

CONTEXT FOR STRATEGIC PLAN

We recognize that this Strategic Plan is being developed in a time where:

- **COVID-19 has shaped and will continue to reshape the educational experience.** It has made inequities more evident; yet, shown us we can be nimble. It means that teaching and learning has been more challenging, but opened us to ways to be better. It means that student voice is more important than ever before so that we can respond to what students need in the current and future environment. We can be certain that even post-COVID, we won't return to business-as-usual.

- **Racial injustice can no longer be ignored.** Higher education is examining its role as contributor to systemic racism while recognizing its place in providing opportunity and upward mobility. There is no doubt that higher education must be a powerful actor in dismantling systemic racism.

- **Changes in the nature of work are accelerating.** We already were in a time when the nature of work was changing. COVID-19 has accelerated and perhaps redirected the trajectory of that change. We also anticipate that the jobs of the future will continue to change rapidly. Our higher education must help drive and prepare people for this future.

- **Innovative disrupters to traditional postsecondary education are growing.** Badges, micro-credentials, corporate training and other new models that pair with degree programs delivered in flexible formats have entered the postsecondary space to meet students' current and life-long learning needs. Just as many industries have been disrupted by new models, higher education is poised for similar changes. We must create an environment for our higher education institutions to lead such innovation.

- **Budget challenges are exacerbated.** Illinois had just begun to reinvest in higher education and now economic uncertainty abounds. While we must be cognizant of the fiscal condition, we do not want to let it dim our vision but make our efforts more focused.

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.

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.

WORKING PRIORITIES FOR STRATEGIC PLAN

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:

- ➔ **Increase Postsecondary Credential/Degree Attainment and Develop Talent to Drive Illinois's 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. To achieve this we must:

- Embed equity in our attainment goal, meet the needs of the many adults without a credential or degree, and strengthen the connection throughout the P-20 pipeline.
- Continuously identify what employer demand will be across the state and create innovative, responsive educational opportunities for students to be prepared for the jobs of today and in the future.
- Address resource needs, institutional alignment, and accountability of our higher education system to ensure it remains responsive.

➔ **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 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.

➔ **Improve Affordability, Increase Access, and Manage Costs:** Affordability is too often seen as the biggest barrier to access and attainment. 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.