

Educational Success

Aspiration: A world-class education for every child

Illinois should be the best place to raise a child in America. Every family, beginning prenatally, should have access to comprehensive health care, information about home-visiting, and access to high-quality, birth-to-five early learning services that prepare their children to enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

Every child should have access to an adequately and equitably funded public school led by high quality, well-compensated educators who are prepared to meet their unique needs. The climate in every school should be healthy, safe, inclusive, and supportive.

Every young adult should have access to affordable college and career training opportunities that are aligned to workforce needs. These opportunities should be available in every region of the state and provide people with a reason to build their future in Illinois.

Our state should provide every student with the best opportunities that it has to offer, regardless of their race and ethnicity, family income, zip code, ability, citizenship status, primary language, or LGBTQ status. In order for this to occur, inequities must be addressed in every phase of a child's life and adequate funding should be established, maintained, and used to ensure all students succeed. This vision of cradle-to-career success is achievable if state leaders, systems, laws, and investments operate with a shared student-centered, equity-focused purpose.

Illinois today:

Illinois' greatest strength is its people, especially our children, who hold the promise of our state's future. Over time, the state has established the foundational elements of educational success. Illinois' educational system is ranked in the top half of states across the country.ⁱ Illinois offers comprehensive, birth-to-five early learning programs. The new evidence-based K-12 funding formula positions the state to provide an equitable and adequate public education to students living in every corner of the state. Illinois is home to internationally recognized universities and has one of the most comprehensive community college systems in the nation.ⁱⁱ With appropriate support, Illinois has the potential to be a national leader in education.

Illinois is home to nearly three million children under the age of 18.ⁱⁱⁱ Just over two million of them attend public schools and approximately 950,000 are 5 years and under.^{iv} There are roughly 465,000 students of all ages attending public colleges and universities, about 27,000 students participating in non-credit community college courses, and another 215,000 attending independent not-for-profit institutions.^v

Although a mountain of empirical evidence suggests that access to high quality birth-to-five programming improves school readiness and life outcomes, Illinois' commitment to early care and education has waned over time. Financial instability and fluctuations in

program eligibility reduced participation in the state's Child Care Assistance Program by approximately 30,000 children.^{vi} While the state ranks fourth in the nation in preschool access for 3-year-olds, it ranks 22nd in preschool access for 4-year-olds.^{vii} Illinois' inadequate investment in early learning, along with other factors, has affected children's preparation for school. New data from Illinois' Kindergarten Individual Developmental Survey shows that only 24 percent of children enter school ready to learn at the kindergarten level.^{viii} Among student subgroups, only 13 percent of Latino children, 19 percent of Black children, and 29 percent of white children were found to be kindergarten ready.

As young children transition from early learning programs to elementary school, too many enroll in schools that are severely underfunded. The state's overreliance on property taxes to fund education created inequities that have persisted for far too long. For years, the state share of the total cost of education has been among the lowest in the nation, at approximately 25 percent with local taxpayers covering nearly 67 percent.^{ix} Nationally, the average share of state funding for education is 47 percent with an average local contribution of 45 percent.

Inadequate and inequitable funding, combined with other factors, has contributed to the achievement gap between low-income students and their more affluent peers. Only 20 percent of low-income students in fourth grade are proficient in reading compared to 55 percent of wealthier students.^x In eighth grade, 18 percent of low-income students are proficient at math compared to 47 percent of their wealthier peers. Gaps in performance persist in high school where 80 percent of low-income students graduate within five years compared to the statewide average of 88 percent.^{xi} If adequately funded, the state's new evidence-based K-12 funding formula will provide a more equitable investment in students across the state and position our schools to reduce the achievement gap between low-income students and their peers.

In addition to well-funded schools, students need educators who are well-trained, appropriately compensated, and recognized for their leadership. Unfortunately, Illinois, like many states, is suffering from a teacher shortage. Over the last ten years, the number of teachers declined by nearly three and a half percent.^{xii} Classroom vacancies are especially prevalent in rural communities and in Chicago Public Schools. Nearly half of the vacant teaching positions are for special education, 36 percent, and bilingual/ESL, 12 percent.^{xiii}

As young adults weigh college and career training options, Illinois has not done enough to provide them with attractive, affordable local opportunities to pursue their dreams. Diminishing state support for public colleges and universities, rising tuition and fees, and insufficient investment in the Monetary Award Program have pushed students out of state or out of college altogether. Today, only 51 percent of adults in Illinois have a postsecondary degree or credential, far short of the 70 percent estimates suggest are needed for the jobs of 2025.^{xiv}

Path forward: Moving towards equity and adequacy

As the administration charts a new course for education from cradle-to-career, it should focus on the following themes:

- Align priorities across systems,
- Ensure equitable and adequate funding,
- Strengthen the pipeline of teachers and child serving-professionals, and
- Ensure that education meets the needs of all learners.

Given the diversity of students attending public schools, policy changes and investments must be responsive to the multifaceted needs of our youth, especially those who are racially and ethnically diverse, low-income, English learners, high school dropouts, students who are undocumented, LGBTQ, rural residents, and students with disabilities. This is essential to achieving a welcoming, safe, and supportive learning environment for all students.

Theme 1: Align priorities across systems

Near-term action for the state - Create a multi-agency, cradle-to-career vision and strategic plan for advancing student and whole person success.

There is a disconnect between the state agencies and governing boards that oversee early learning programs, elementary and secondary education, and post-secondary institutions. State agency leaders rarely work together towards common goals, in part due to different governance structures, funding priorities, and measures of accountability. The lack of alignment hampers student transitions between grade spans, prevents the coordinated use of data systems, and hinders progress towards state goals. The new administration should facilitate the coordination of agency heads and governing boards to develop a shared vision and strategic plan to promote student success from cradle-to-career.

Foster collaboration among all child-serving state agencies to ensure that children and families are provided seamless support aligned to a shared vision for student health, safety, and success.

Establishing a common vision and strategic plan for student success across systems is necessary, but not sufficient to achieve alignment. The new administration should establish a consistent meeting schedule for agency leaders that is focused on advancing agencies' common goals, information sharing, and addressing common challenges. Advisory boards, like the Illinois Early Learning Council and the P-20 Council, should be involved in this effort given their expertise and institutional knowledge about Illinois' programs and services.

Strengthen and utilize data systems to improve decision-making, accountability, and the quality of services provided to young children and their families.

Individual state agencies lack the capacity to produce timely data and they have difficulty utilizing the data they produce to improve services and drive decision-making. Insufficient data limits the ability of service providers and other stakeholders to conduct needs assessments, improve recruitment and enrollment strategies, and foster equity and inclusion. Every strategy for improving educational success would be strengthened

by access to better data. The new administration should create a culture of data use, data-sharing, and accountability among agencies for the production of data.

Theme 2: Ensure equitable and adequate funding

Review, reform, and expand funding for birth-to-five programming and services to increase access and promote equity for children and families.

The state has a fiscal responsibility to support the education, health, and safety of every child. The new administration should examine the funding structures that underpin state investments to ensure that they advance equity and provide sufficient support to achieve the state's vision for early learning. Illinois' early learning programs are funded and administered by multiple state agencies. Programs' funding formulas and model for distributing funding should be reviewed and adjusted in a manner that promotes equity and inclusion.

Fully fund elementary and secondary schools by 2027

The new administration should aggressively fund k-12 schools with the goal of fully funding elementary and secondary schools by 2027, a benchmark recognized by advocates and lawmakers when the state adopted the new evidence-based school funding formula. The state should consistently review and assess the distribution and utilization of resources to ensure that resources are being used to meet state goals.

Establish an equitable, adequate, and stable funding environment for community colleges and public universities that promotes student success and institutional accountability.

The state should reestablish a stable funding environment for community colleges and public universities. The budget impasse diminished the reputation of the state's post-secondary institutions, encouraged more students to leave the state, and weakened the infrastructure of our schools. As the administration expands its investment in higher education, it should review the funding mechanisms that support community colleges and public universities to ensure that they promote equity, inclusion, and accountability for student success. The state should also prioritize funding for post-secondary institutions as it advances a capital plan. Insufficient capital investments at colleges and universities have delayed critical projects, affected schools' operating budgets, and diminished the campus experience for students and professors.

Near-term action for the state - Increase college affordability by investing in need and merit-based programs that give students resources to cover student tuition, fees, and other expenses.

The new administration should prioritize efforts to improve college affordability so that every student has an opportunity to attain a degree or credential in Illinois. The state can pursue this goal by expanding its investment in need and merit-based financial aid programs that help students cover tuition, fees, books, and housing.

Theme 3: Strengthen the pipeline of teachers and child serving-professionals

Strengthen and diversify the early childhood workforce by improving compensation and reducing obstacles to entering the field.

For Illinois to achieve its vision of universal access to high-quality, birth-to-five early learning programs, the field will require many more teachers and child-serving professionals across service-delivery models. As the field expands, it should prioritize the recruitment of Black, Latino, and bilingual teaching candidates. The new administration should examine and address the obstacles that prevent more people of color from entering the field. Insufficient compensation and poor benefit structures also make recruitment and retention in the field very difficult. The new administration should review and increase the rate paid to early learning providers in order to improve the wages of child care workers and other early learning professionals.

Strengthen and expand strategies to increase the racial and ethnic diversity of teachers.

The teaching profession should reflect the demographic population of students. Research suggests that children of color benefit from having high-quality teachers who share their race and culture.^{xv} In Illinois, 83 percent of teachers are White and 51 percent of students are children of color.^{xvi} The new administration should review licensure requirements, strengthen efforts to recruit and retain minority teaching candidates, and make it easier and more affordable for career changers to enter the profession.

Revamp teacher training, teacher placement, and ongoing support to ensure that all students have teachers who are prepared to meet their unique needs.

Teacher preparation programs should be updated and improved to meet the diverse, multidimensional needs of today's students. Illinois' participation in the Council of Chief School State Officers' recent *Diverse and Learner-Ready Teachers Initiative* is encouraging, but more work needs to be done.^{xvii} The new administration should convene officials from the Illinois State Board of Education, teacher preparation programs, and practitioners in the field to examine and strengthen the state's approach to teacher preparation. The state should also strengthen efforts to support teachers in the field through evidence-based teacher mentoring and induction programs.

Near-term action for the state - Develop new strategies to attract people to the teaching profession, especially in high-need areas like special education and bilingual/ESL.

Young potential teaching candidates are pursuing other careers. Data from the Illinois State Board of Education shows that, "between 2010 and 2016, the number of candidates enrolling in and completing teacher preparation programs decreased by 53 percentage points."^{xviii} The new administration should examine and address the reasons why fewer people are entering the field, streamline the teacher licensure process, and reinvest in specialized teacher preparation programs to address the teacher shortage. The state should also increase the compensation of teachers to make the profession more competitive to other industries.

Theme 4: Ensure that education meets the needs of all learners

Evaluate and support the comprehensive needs of children starting at birth.

The identification of developmental delays among infants and toddlers should be discovered and addressed as early as possible. Detecting delays and disabilities early allows families with young children to seek and secure interventions during important periods of a child's development. Although the state has been proactive in improving the connection between Early Intervention and health care providers, the new administration should promote new, innovative approaches to expanding the use of screenings and referrals for services.^{xix}

Ensure that schools are equipped to meet the needs of students who have experienced trauma or have other mental health needs.

Schools funded below adequacy often do not have the staff, e.g. social workers, psychologists, and nurses, to provide sufficient support for students. Insufficient recognition, acknowledgement, and support for students who have experienced trauma or have other mental health needs affects the climate and culture of a school. The new administration should support efforts to expand training on trauma-informed practices for all school personnel. As the state expands k-12 funding through the new evidence-based funding formula, schools will have more resources to hire and train the staff they need to support students who have experienced trauma or have other mental health needs.

Make every school a safe and welcoming environment for LGBTQ students.

Every student should feel safe and supported at school. The new administration should encourage the Illinois State Board of Education to provide affirming, student-centered guidance to school districts on how to support LGBTQ students, with an emphasis on gender expansive and transgender students. This could help school districts across the state create a more welcoming, safe, and supportive learning environment for students.

Near-term action for the state - Develop a new, student-centered strategic plan for higher education.

It's been a decade since the state produced a strategic plan for higher education. As Illinois leaders strive to increase the attractiveness and affordability of Illinois' post-secondary institutions, the new administration should establish a strategic planning process to create a common vision, new goals, and a comprehensive, student-centered plan to guide policy-making and new investments over time.

Incentivize strong partnerships between K-12, higher education, and employers to expand access to vocational education and career pathways.

The state should play a larger role in proactively connecting young people to opportunities that will prepare them for labor market success in every region of the state. There are companies throughout Illinois that have difficulty filling positions because they can't find workers who have the specialized training required to do the job. The new administration should convene the business community, higher education, and high school administrators to promote career pathways, expand vocational education in high schools, and increase access to apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship opportunities.

Conclusion:

Illinois can lead the nation in student achievement and educational attainment by aligning systems, providing adequate and equitable funding for education, strengthening the pipeline of teachers, and ensuring that teachers are prepared to meet the needs of every child. While it will take years to implement the strategies above, the new administration should pursue progress with a fierce sense of urgency. Children across Illinois are depending on state leaders to put them in the best position to succeed in our global economy.

ⁱ <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rankings/education>

ⁱⁱ https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2019/world-ranking#!/page/1/length/25/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats

ⁱⁱⁱ https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5_YR_S0101&prodType=table

^{iv} https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5_YR_S0101&prodType=table

^v Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), *Enrollments & Degrees System 2016*.

<http://legacy.ibhe.org/EnrollmentsDegrees/Search.aspx>

^{vi} http://www.actforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/021418_BudgetAddressResponse_IAFC_Ounce_FINAL.pdf

^{vii} http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Illinois_YB2017.pdf

^{viii} https://www.theounce.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/KIDS_2018_data_STATE_8-12-18.pdf

^{viii} https://www.theounce.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/KIDS_2018_data_STATE_8-12-18.pdf

^{ix} https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_235.20.asp?current=yes

^x <http://www.advanceillinois.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/TheStateWereIn-AdvanceIL-113016.pdf>

^{xi} <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/state.aspx?source=trends&source2=graduationrate&Stateid=IL>

^{xii} <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Teach-Illinois-Memo.pdf>

^{xiii} <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Teach-Illinois-Memo.pdf>

^{xiv} Lumina Foundation, “A Stronger Nation: Illinois’ Report 2018,” 2018.

<http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2018/#state/IL>;

Carnevale, Anthony, et al., Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW), “Iowa: Education and Workforce Trends through 2025,” 2015, page 10.

https://1gyhoq479ufd3yna29x7ubjn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Iowa_Wrkfrce2025.pdf (page 10).

^{xv} <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272775715000084>,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/10/upshot/teacher-diversity-effect-students-learning.html>

^{xvi} <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/state.aspx?source=teachers&source2=teacherdemographics&Stateid=IL>,

<https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/state.aspx?source=studentcharacteristics&source2=studentdemographics&Stateid=IL> (2017 data)

^{xvii} <https://ccsso.org/blog/ccsso-launches-effort-foster-diverse-and-culturally-responsive-teaching-workforce>

^{xviii} <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Teach-Illinois-Memo.pdf>

^{xix} <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/797-illinois-targets-developmental-screening-as-a-model-for-coordinating-services>