



PARTNERSHIP FOR COLLEGE COMPLETION

Accelerating action to close the graduation gap

Investors Council Report

Reporting Period—2/15/2021 to 8/15/2021

Lisa Castillo Richmond, Executive Director

Email: lcastillo@partnershipfcc.org

Phone: 917.817.6472

- Letter 2
- Operations 5
- Programming 7
- **Appendix A: PCC Financials**
- **Appendix B: PCC Newsroom**
- **Appendix C: PCC Board of Directors & Staff**
-
-
-
-

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I am thrilled to be writing this letter to our steadfast PCC supporters as I step into my new role as Executive Director of the Partnership for College Completion (PCC). It has been the highlight of my professional life to work alongside Kyle to build this organization for the past five years. I am deeply honored and excited to have the opportunity to lead this talented team into the next chapter, while capitalizing on the momentum that Kyle's leadership has brought to issues of higher education equity in the state.

When we first hit the road in those early days to meet with higher education leaders and legislators, there were many small pockets of reform happening across the state and some very promising larger initiatives. However, there was a noticeable lack of focused attention to these issues that were just calling out to be addressed by an organization dedicated to higher education equity and excellence. That is what our team, in collaboration with our many partners, has been able to set in motion with your early vision and ongoing support.

There is a big appetite in Illinois to address the issues of equity, access, affordability, and accountability. We have heard a noticeable shift in the language. There is more discussion about equity and completion, and that conversation is far more nuanced. As many joined forces with us, we have continued to be surprised in the best way by the deep commitment of the many partners in this space who have stepped up, often at the risk of exposure to themselves or their institutions. However, entrenched interests that fail to prioritize students are formidable. We will continue to direct PCC time and resources in the ways in which we believe we can most effectively push against the unacceptable status quo on behalf of students.

With this commitment, we must recognize that this moment in our history continues to be an extremely difficult time for students, for families, for teachers and faculty, for institutional leaders, and for higher education as a sector. As we enter the third academic year to be impacted by COVID-19, which has also disproportionately impacted communities of color and low-income communities, we have more tools with which to fight the virus even as it continues to transform in its ability to cause physical and educational harm and disruption. Meanwhile, the public discourse about racial justice continues to be waged from two sides – those who would prevent the discussion and teaching of our institutionalized racism and legacy of oppression, and others like PCC and our many partners that press toward justice with acknowledgement of where we are and have been, openness to solutions, and unwavering focus on how students experience our higher education systems.

We have weathered hard times before, and we will again. When PCC began, people talked about what a terrible time it was to ask anything of higher education after the bruising period of the state budget impasse. However, today we repeat what we said then: our students cannot wait. Our community colleges, and public and private universities that serve the majority of Illinois' Black, Latinx, and Pell students cannot wait. Educational justice cannot wait.



Lisa Castillo Richmond
Executive Director

Operations Executive Director Update

In April 2021, PCC Founding Executive Director Dr. Kyle Westbrook announced that he would be stepping down from the organization. The Board of Directors immediately established a search committee to assess the future needs of the organization and hear from stakeholders about the next phase of the organization's development. After weeks of engagement with external stakeholders, including college and university presidents, public officials, students, and investors as well as members of PCC's staff, the Board appointed Lisa Castillo Richmond as the next Executive Director. Bringing years of experience in higher education access and success, systemic reform, and a deep commitment to racial and socioeconomic equity, Castillo Richmond assumed the role on August 1, 2021. The Board congratulates and welcomes her in this new appointment and extends its deep gratitude to Dr. Westbrook. Instrumental in building the organization into a powerful voice for equity in the state of Illinois, he guided the organization in reshaping the narrative of Illinois higher education to focus on what is possible for all Illinois students, their families, and Illinois' communities. As Dr. Westbrook moves into the next phase of his career, the Board sends its warmest well wishes.

Development

During this reporting period, PCC received new grants from the Lumina Foundation, as well as a renewal from the CME Group Foundation. As founding investments are nearing the end of their second three-year commitment, PCC's Founding and incoming Executive Director will continue to engage existing funders to renew and help sustain the organization's strong foundation of local general operational support.

While it is essential for PCC to maintain its current general operating support and attract new sources in order to fulfill its mission, it continues to maintain a solid base of net assets and positive cashflow. Due to the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we anticipate lower programmatic spending in 2021 resulting from decreased meeting costs and lower cost approaches to other programmatic efforts. Assuming our funding base remains stable as expected, this should result in modest contributions to the organization's reserves.

Operations

PCC continued to operate remotely while offering limited availability to the PCC office for staff needing to work outside of their respective homes during this reporting period. After a three-year engagement, PCC ended its agreement with Quattro for accounting services and has since retained Kodi Akins, as its accountant. Kodi, an independent African-American accountant who graduated from DePaul University, is also the part-time controller for a small college in Indianapolis. PCC is excited to work with Akins as he automates some accounting functions that were previously done manually by Quattro. PCC is currently planning for its annual audit with the accounting firm Desmond and Ahern.

In February, PCC welcomed the addition of Sonianne Lozada as its Community Engagement Manager. Prior to coming to PCC, Lozada held community engagement and advocacy positions with the Greater Chicago Food Depository and Chicago Public Schools.



Programming

Public Policy

During the reporting period, the PCC Public Policy team continued its momentum and collaboration with the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus to author, advocate for, and ultimately successfully achieve the passage of SB 815. SB 815 creates a 33-person statewide commission charged with developing recommendations for an equity-centered funding model for Illinois' public universities. Thanks to the tireless efforts of state Senator Kimberly Lightford and House of Representatives member Carol Ammons, the bill passed in the last hours of the spring legislative session. The commission will convene for the first time in October 2021 and meet regularly to hear from experts on funding formulas, examine models, and consider the overall need to fund Illinois' public universities both adequately and equitably. PCC as well as other advocate organizations will have seats on the commission, which will deliver recommendations to the General Assembly in July 2023.

Other significant legislative victories supported by PCC during the spring legislative session include:

Student Parent Data Collection Act SB267 (Villanueva/Guzzardi) -

Requires institutions to collect data to determine a student's parental or legal guardian status and disaggregate the data by race, ethnicity, income, gender, age, enrollment status, type of credential sought, receipt of financial aid, grade point average, persistence toward a degree or credential, and completion outcomes. Requires institutions to collect specific campus child care center enrollment data.

Higher Education Fair Admissions Act HB226 (Greenwood/Belt) -

Requires public colleges and universities to develop a test-optional admissions policy for Illinois residents.

Undocumented Student Liaison HB3438 (Hirschauer/Villa) -

Requires public Illinois colleges and universities to designate an employee as an Undocumented Student Resource Liaison to be available on campus to provide assistance to undocumented students and mixed-status students. The liaison would help streamline students' access to resources including financial aid and academic support that are critical to persistence and degree completion.



Programming

College and University Partnerships

As Illinois Equity in Attainment initiative (ILEA) partners continued to respond to evolving developments in the pandemic, PCC's College and University Partnerships (CUP) team continued to provide institutions targeted team, cohort, and leadership programming and support to help advance their campus equity work.

In February, PCC held its first-ever virtual Winter Equity Institute themed, Building Bridges Across Student Services to Foster Social Belonging. The target audience were practitioners in student affairs, student development, and holistic support services. Dr. Frank Harris III, Professor of postsecondary education and Co-Director of the Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL) at San Diego State University delivered the keynote address, "Racial Equity in our Colleges and Universities: An Imperative Call to Action." Over the two-day event, more than 300 student support services practitioners from 26 institutions were in attendance.

The CUP team delivered new virtual programming on equity-driven practices and student support through its Spring Equity Webinar Series. The series kicked off with a presentation from University of Wyoming's Black Studies Center Director Dr. Fredrick Douglass Dixon on "Mayor Richard J. Daley, the City Colleges of Chicago & Contemporary Social Movements." Other presentations on food insecurity on campus (Dr. Katharine Broton, University of Iowa and Clare Cady, Single Stop), and building equitable STEM transfer pathways (Dr. Xueli Wang, University of Wisconsin-Madison) were also delivered during the series. In June, members of the Student Advisory Council led the webinar, "Institutionalized: Supporting Students Behind These Walls," sharing their personal experiences of being college students amid the complex and challenging health and sociopolitical context of 2020.

In April, over 150 leaders from ILEA core teams and institutional research departments at 24 ILEA institutions attended Building Data Capacity workshops. The training series was developed in partnership with Achieving the Dream (ATD) to help the ILEA cohort utilize and leverage the disaggregated data within the NSC-PDP dashboards to support their equity and student success work, a necessary component for addressing inequities in graduation rates.

PCC's yearlong collaboration with the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program, Equity Academy for ILEA Presidents and Cabinets (EAPC), continued this spring, convening the group of 11 ILEA college presidents and their cabinets in February and June. The cohort built on its focus of measuring and evaluating equity across campus and building institutional capacity to support strategies at scale in four meetings during those months. Because of the program's success, the PCC team has decided to continue and expand this programming in the coming year.

In addition, the William T. Grant Foundation recently funded "Using Facilitated Collaborative to Build Racial Equity in Higher Education Institutions," a research study aimed at capturing how ILEA schools are working to eliminate their college completion disparities and PCC's role

College and University Partnerships, cont'd

in strengthening colleges' and universities' capacities to set and achieve equity goals. The project, led by researchers at NORC at the University of Chicago and Fordham University, kicked off May 1, 2021, and will include interviews with leadership and staff at a subset of ILEA-member institutions selected for a closer examination of how ILEA operates in schools.

Finally, during this reporting period, PCC awarded ILEA Catalyst Grants totaling nearly \$230K to 19 ILEA colleges and universities to support new approaches outlined in their campus Equity Plans.

Funded through the support of the Crown Family Philanthropies, with additional support from the Gorter Family Foundation and the Julian Grace Foundation, the grants will support efforts such as:

- Supplemental instruction
- Streamline the reverse transfer process
- Increase use of Affordable Educational (AER) and Open Educational Resources
- Create faculty professional development related to equity and degree completion

Looking Ahead

Beginning this academic year, PCC will release its first ILEA annual report. The report will qualitatively describe the work that has been done to date in the initiative and will quantitatively report key baseline data for ILEA colleges and universities.

In addition, and in the spirit of continuous improvement, ILEA partner institutions that published Equity Plans will submit an annual equity plan progress report that will provide an update on the strategies they have implemented to address disparities in student outcomes, progress on important leading indicators, and changes to the plan for the next academic year based on institutional learning.



Programming Communications

This spring, PCC launched the exciting and intensive process of redesigning its website and refreshing its visual branding based on survey feedback from external and internal stakeholders including staff, board members, investors, and policy and practice partners. Slated for launch in October 2021, the new partnershipfcc.org will work to meet key goals:

- Inform users about the issues PCC is working to address and clearly communicate its strategy
- Share past and current evidence and impact of PCC's work, creatively telling PCC's story and accomplishments to date
- Be a destination where higher education practitioners can access tools and information to advance equitable practices and institutional policies on their respective campuses
- Provide clear ways for different types of users to connect with us and engage in our work

PCC's refreshed visual branding, which will roll out in conjunction with the site relaunch, will feature updates to the organization's logo, tagline, color palette, typography, and overall aesthetic. These have been designed to be vibrant, dynamic, and accessible to convey alignment between PCC's visual identity and PCC's organizational brand reputation as an impactful, engaging, and thoughtful leader in this space.

In February, PCC continued to explore ways to highlight its practice and policy efforts. For the first-ever ILEA virtual Winter Equity Institute, in addition to live tweeting, PCC's Communications team collaborated with the College and University Partnerships team to support institutional leaders in penning blogs related to the event as well as host a pre-event Twitter chat exploring the Institute's theme. This March, Communications supported the Public Policy team in filling a critical need for information on Illinois higher education policy with the launch of a new e-newsletter. The *PCC Higher Ed Policy Quarterly* provides a look at developments in higher education at the federal and state levels, interviews with state lawmakers, and more.

To further drive awareness about Illinois College Forward (ILCF), launched with financial support from the Steans Family Foundation and the Origami Works Foundation, PCC this spring launched an e-newsletter for the online hub. *Monthly Highlights* spotlights the latest articles and blogs posted to the site and invites users to visit ILCF'S most popular feature, its college directory. The directory, which previously included links to campus reopening plans for more than 120 institutions in light of the pandemic, now includes links to information about COVID-19 vaccines requirements for students returning to campuses. PCC plans to continue to update and maintain this site through 2021.

Communications, cont'd

Media Highlights

The Partnership continues to establish itself as a leading voice in equity in college completion in Illinois through earned media coverage. The Council of State Governments' *Stateline—Midwest* featured PCC in its reportage on the implications of the Developmental Education Reform Act. Following the passage of SB 815, PCC was featured in an article by Northern Public Radio exploring what the legislation could mean for universities and the students they serve. Insight from PCC on the topic of equitable funding was also picked up by POLITICO's Illinois Playbook. Finally, this spring, PCC was featured in *Chicago Tribune* articles discussing the inequities of test-based college admissions and continued declines in enrollment at Illinois community colleges.

APPENDICES

NORTHERN PUBLIC RADIO



‘Nationally, Illinois Is An Outlier’: Illinois Looks to Make Higher-Ed Funding More Equitable

Peter Medlin / WNIJ and WNIU / June 21, 2021

Illinois K-12 education Evidence-Based Funding takes 27 key elements like the number of nurses or low-income students a school has and calculates an adequacy target for each district. Higher-ed institutions in the state have no defined funding formula.

A recently passed bill looks to completely change how higher education is funded, just like what lawmakers did with K-12 schools four years ago. Kyle Westbrook, executive director of the Partnership for College Completion, says this new equity-focused mindset is long overdue.

“We have institutions in our state who are serving significantly high percentages of low-income students, students of color that, frankly, are being inadequately funded to serve the interests of those students.”

That could start to change with the passage of Senate Bill 815. It creates a commission to research equity-based funding strategies and return to the legislature with a report.

The State Board of Higher Education also just released a strategic plan calling for a new funding formula to close graduation and retention gaps among low-income and students of color.

“I think it’s important to first realize that, nationally, Illinois is an outlier in this regard,” said Westbrook, who gave testimony during a committee hearing for the plan. “The vast majority of other states have a true formula for how they appropriate their state funds every year. And Illinois is one of only a few that does not have a defined formula.”

Westbrook says the idea is to look at criteria like the number of low-income students and how much a university relies on state appropriations to calculate an “adequacy target.”

For example, some schools like Chicago State serve the highest percentages of Pell-eligible and students of color but depend more heavily on state aid than the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

When those schools need to provide more services for students but don’t have the funding, tuition goes up.

The newly-passed proposal also asks institutions to establish equity plans. Westbrook says many Illinois schools have significant graduation and retention gaps along racial and socioeconomic lines. These plans will look at what each school can do to help close them.

He says universities can make changes by removing standardized testing requirements from scholarships and stopping financial holds on student accounts. Every year, tens of thousands of Illinois students miss out on MAP Grant financial aid because the first-come-first-serve money runs out. Westbrook also says the state needs to commit to consistent funding for MAP Grants, so that doesn’t happen.



More bad news for higher education: Illinois community college enrollment plummets as COVID-19 sidelines would-be students

Elyssa Cherney / Chicago Tribune / May 5, 2021

Enrollment declines at Illinois colleges and universities continue to outpace other states, with community colleges shouldering the brunt of the losses, as the coronavirus pandemic looms over another school year, according to new national and state data.

The state's community colleges saw enrollment plunge by 13% this spring compared with spring 2020, when the pandemic and schoolwide lockdowns were just beginning, according to research from the National Student Clearinghouse. Total postsecondary enrollment in Illinois dropped by 5.2% and undergraduate enrollment slid by 7.5%. All three figures are worse than the national average.

"There were very significant declines in the fall that have largely continued in the spring," said Lisa Castillo Richmond, managing director of the Partnership for College Completion, a Chicago-based nonprofit. Castillo Richmond noted vaccinations weren't widely underway and financial uncertainty abounded when students were signing up for spring classes.

Enrollment falls at community colleges

During the coronavirus pandemic, enrollment at Illinois community colleges fell dramatically. Chicago colleges are represented in dark blue and the suburban colleges are in light blue. Though colleges are hoping to welcome more students back for in-person classes next fall, most relied on online learning or hybrid

formats this year. Capacity limits, health concerns and economic challenges interrupted progress for thousands of students who didn't return to campuses. Some worry students who paused their studies — particularly students of color or from underprivileged backgrounds — might never come back.

At Elgin Community College, spring enrollment is down nearly 15%, said Gregory Robinson, the dean of students who also serves as associate vice president of student services and development.

While declines were recorded across all student demographic groups, the college's adult education programs, which offer GED completion and English as a second language courses, took the biggest hit — a 30% drop, Robinson said. Those classes predominantly serve Hispanic students, he said.

Many students at Elgin had never taken online courses and needed time to adjust, Robinson said. The community college will offer more in-person classes this fall but will also continue to provide hybrid and online courses, particularly for lecture-based disciplines.

"We have tried to set up a schedule to accommodate that," said Annamarie Schopen, assistant vice president of teaching, learning and student

continued on next page

plummets, cont'd

development. “We have many, many hybrid sections offered this fall and then we have a nice balance of synchronous and asynchronous. Our fully face-to-face is still a little bit lower.”

Class size limits last year meant fewer students could sign up to learn in person, which affected enrollment, Schopen said. Elgin saw fall 2020 enrollment dip by 16%, Schopen said.

Spring enrollment is down 14% at Joliet Junior College this year, according to Robert Morris, dean of enrollment management. Figures collected by the Illinois Community College Board on the 10th day of classes show greater losses but don't account for students continuing to register for late-start programs, Morris said.

Morris said that many students chose not to enroll because of financial or technological limitations, though the school started a laptop loaner program and offered financial aid through federal relief funding, he said.

“Many students that typically go to school here are in professions that were most impacted by the pandemic, whether that be retail or restaurants or working at Amazon,” Morris said.

He's optimistic that more students will return for the fall but doesn't expect a complete rebound. Students will only come back if they see the professional benefit of earning a college degree, he said.

“I think the pandemic has really caused people for the first time to calculate the value of going to college,” he said. “Everyone is taking a much more closer look at their own situation.”

The situation for community colleges remains precarious nationwide. In prior recessions, community colleges saw steady or increased enrollment from adults who wanted to increase their skills during a shaky job market, but the pandemic has exacerbated economic challenges, Castillo Richmond said.

“The community college population is a much more financially vulnerable population,” she said. “Community colleges serve far higher percentages of low-income students, adult students and students who are caregivers.”

According to the National Student Clearinghouse, community college enrollment nationwide stooped even lower this spring than in the fall. While fall 2020 enrollment was down 9.5% compared with the same period the previous year, the numbers for this spring dropped 11.3%.

Undergraduate enrollment as a whole also took its deepest dive since the beginning of the pandemic, down 5.9%.

A different data set from the Illinois Community College Board shows spring enrollment dropped by 14.2%, or 39,715 students. The report, published in March, notes that more than 65,000 students graduated from the state's 48 community colleges in 2020 despite the enrollment dip, the sixth highest annual graduation rate.

Only two community colleges saw enrollment increases this spring — McHenry County College and Malcolm X College, one of the City Colleges of Chicago. The report did not include demographic information, but ICCB said it would analyze that information in the summer to more fully understand the pandemic's toll.

The spring data mirrors what ICCB saw in the fall, when enrollment was also down 14%. Then, enrollment for Black and Latino students declined about 19% compared with a 12% decrease for white students.

The Illinois Board of Higher Education, which oversees four-year universities, hasn't yet released spring enrollment data.



Can you get into college without an ACT or SAT? University of Illinois might extend test-optional admissions beyond the COVID-19 pandemic that prompted the change

Elyssa Cherney / Chicago Tribune / March 22, 2021

Nearly half of all undergraduate applicants declined to submit ACT or SAT scores to Illinois' largest university during the pandemic-altered admissions cycle — the first time in decades that students could choose whether to share results from the high-stakes exams.

Now, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign wants to extend the test-optional policy for at least two more years, citing continued disruptions from COVID-19.

"We were able to make what I think are good, sound decisions with or without test scores, and we worked really hard not to penalize the students if they elected not to submit a test score," said Andy Borst, director of undergraduate admissions.

About 40% of in-state students withheld test scores, compared with 60% of international students and 25% of out-of-state students, Borst said. In total, about 44% of all prospective students opted to apply without test scores and the overall number of undergraduate applications jumped significantly, particularly for competitive programs such as computer science, Borst said.

The recommendation to expand test-optional admissions for 2022 and 2023 applicants relates solely to challenges posed by the pandemic — such as limited opportunities for high school students to take the exams — and was not in response to long-standing

equity concerns that have prompted many universities to abandon the requirement altogether.

The decision, however, isn't finalized. Despite support from the Faculty Senate, U. of I.'s board of trustees must also approve the proposal.

In May, the board will also consider requests from the Springfield and Chicago campuses to extend test-optional admissions for another two years "because of the pandemic and to encourage talented students to apply to our institutions," according to spokeswoman Kirsten Ruby.

UIC has already waived test requirements for first-year undergraduate applications through fall 2022.

More than two dozen colleges and universities across the state have adopted test-optional admissions since 2005, according to the Partnership for College Completion, a Chicago-based organization that advocates for low-income, first generation students and students of color. The PCC has called for all schools in Illinois to drop testing requirements in the wake of COVID-19, saying inconsistent practices will limit less-resourced students' chances to attend selective institutions.

Kyle Westbrook, executive director of the PCC, said years of research demonstrate that high school grade-

continued on next page

test-optional, cont'd

point average is a better predictor of college success and that test scores tend to correlate with income brackets and a family's ability to pay for expensive test preparation lessons.

"That message has resonated and been received by universities all over the country, even before the pandemic," Westbrook said, noting how the University of Chicago and DePaul University previously went test optional.

Some supporters of using standardized tests in college admissions say the scores can help less privileged students stand out and provide important data to prospective students about an institution's academic environment.

While equity isn't at the core of U. of I.'s proposed extension, professors opened the door to that conversation. When the Faculty Senate overwhelmingly approved the test-optional policy at a meeting this month, it also called for the creation of a task force "to evaluate the efficacy and fairness of entrance exams."

The task force would collect data to examine the impact of the test-optional policy on student enrollment, performance and diversity in coming years.

U. of I. isn't alone in revising its admissions policy. Other Big 10 schools including the University of Wisconsin at Madison and Penn State University are stretching the test-optional protocols through 2023 while others, most notably the University of California, are exploring permanent options to ditch standardized tests.

Competitive private colleges such as Harvard and Stanford universities will also continue a test-optional policy for another year.

"We urge students not to jeopardize their health or well-being to take future sittings of these non-required tests," according to a message on Stanford's website, which also notes there will be limited access to admission testing worldwide.

For Illinois students, scheduling exams proved difficult last year, when the pandemic hit in the spring and school districts abruptly shut down for extended periods. National testing dates for the ACT and SAT were canceled time and again.

Many Illinois students take the SAT just once — for free at school — and don't have access elsewhere, so the Illinois State Board of Education, with permission from the federal government, waived its completion as a graduation requirement for students who are now 12th graders.

Now Illinois schools must offer the SAT to current juniors in April or have them test as seniors in October, according to ISBE. The U.S. Department of Education won't allow districts to skip assessments for a second year, saying data is needed to assess student progress and learning loss.

But it's still not clear how many chances applicants will have to test.

"I don't want a student to be traveling great distances to take the SAT or ACT again because he or she isn't happy with their score," said Borst, the U. of I. undergraduate admissions director.

That seemed to be a challenge for international students too. Borst said many likely struggled to find testing opportunities since international students comprised the largest group to apply without exams, despite historically scoring well. With more than 7,600 international students enrolled in fall 2020, U. of I. boasts one of the largest populations of international scholars of any American university.

Yet for students everywhere, the biggest question is the same: Will applying without tests be a disadvantage?

Borst said there was no significant difference in acceptance rates between students who submitted test scores and students who didn't, when comparing candidates within the same grade-point average.

"What we learned through the review cycle this year is that, by and large, test scores acted more as confirmation for us," Borst said, explaining that students who chose challenging classes and earned impressive grades tended to also have high test scores while students with worse grades and less rigorous courses had lower scores.

Borst declined to share total application numbers for this cycle, saying they're still in flux. But schools across the country have reported a surge in undergraduate applications, which some attribute to the more lenient test-optional protocols.

Illinois revamps college-level developmental education with goal of improving completion rates

Tim Anderson / Stateline Midwest / February 2021

This past summer, following the killing of George Floyd, legislators across the country began asking questions about racial justice and disparities in their own states. Among them was Illinois Rep. Carol Ammons, and one of her questions, along with other leaders in her state's Legislative Black Caucus, was this: "Is this just a police issue?"

"Our answer was no," she says.

Their legislative response was to develop a sweeping policy agenda built on four pillars: criminal justice reform, economic equity and opportunity, health care and education. Much of the work on that last pillar fell to Ammons, last year's chair of the House Higher Education Committee. Her efforts culminated in January with the passage of HB 2170. The measure seeks changes at all levels of the education system, with an overarching goal of advancing racial equity.

On the higher-education side, one piece of that bill illustrates the kind of systematic reforms being sought. It has to do with how the state's community colleges deliver developmental education to students, and how these institutions choose who takes part in this coursework.

Developmental education is remedial instruction in subjects such as English and math, often traditionally taken before students can move on to college-level, credit-bearing courses. State-level reforms in this

policy area became "a centerpiece," Ammons says, in part because of what legislators learned in committee testimony over the summer.

In Illinois, almost half of high school graduates enrolled full-time in a community college are placed in developmental education. Among minority students, this rate is even higher — nearly 71 out of every 100 Black students, for example, and among this group, only six of 100 go on to graduate.

"The traditional developmental-education courses cost students time, money and financial aid, but they don't count toward college credit," Ammons says. "It becomes a barrier."

HB 2170 seeks to change that.

First, community colleges must look beyond standardized test scores and college-placement tests when determining who gets placed in remedial education. For example, a graduating high school student who has a high grade-point average or who has successfully completed college-level or transitional classes must be placed in credit-bearing courses.

Second, HB 2170 uproots the traditional developmental-education approach, calling for it to be replaced with an "evidence-based model that maximizes a student's likelihood of completing an

continued on next page

deved, cont'd

introductory college-level course within his or her first two semesters.”

One likely result: community colleges’ adoption of a “co-requisite model,” under which students are placed directly into college-level coursework with concurrent instructional supports.

“What we’ve seen with the traditional model is that 18 percent of Black students in math and 29 percent in English completed a gateway course with a C or better in three years,” says Emily Goldman, senior policy manager for the Partnership for College Completion.

“With the co-requisite model, it’s 69 percent and 64 percent.”

Illinois isn’t alone in seeking these kinds of policy changes. More states around the country are recognizing the traditional model as an obstacle to postsecondary completion, says Nikki Edgecombe, a senior research scholar at the Community College Research Center.

The loss of time and money (including the possible exhaustion of financial aid) while taking remedial courses are factors, she notes, but so is the impact on a student’s academic outlook.

“It can be demotivating for a student, ‘I applied to college, they let me in, and now they won’t let me take college classes,’ “ Edgecombe says. “Getting students into and through their gateway courses is important to generating academic momentum.”



PCC Board of Directors

Beth Swanson (Chair)

CEO
A Better Chicago

Liz Thompson (Co-Chair)

President
The Cleveland Avenue Foundation for Education

Jim Parsons (Treasurer)

Senior Advisor
The Brinson Foundation

Kevin Considine

President and CEO
Lake County Partners

Greg Darnieder

Founding Partner
National Postsecondary Strategy Institute (NPSI)

Joan DiLeonardi

Trustee Emeritus
Oakton Community College

Arne Duncan

Managing Director
Emerson Collective

Sherry Eagle

Executive Director Emeritus
Institute for Collaboration, Aurora University

Judy Erwin

Managing Director
Kivvit

Brian Fabes

CEO
Civic Consulting Alliance

Adam Levine

President
Circle of Service Foundation

Dr. Nivine Megahed

President
National Louis University

Robert Pullion

Foundational Talent Training Program Manager
Zurich North America

Tim Schwertfeger

Former Chairman and CEO
Nuveen Investments

Margaret Daniels Tyler

Social Venture Advisor
TheTylerGroup with the Strategic Consulting Network

Douglas Wood

Senior Fellow Justice, Equity and Opportunity
Aspen Institute

Yasmin Zavala

Student Board Member
Senior (Spr '21) at Saint Xavier University

PCC Staff

Lisa Castillo Richmond

Executive Director

Mike Abrahamson

Policy Manager

Emily Goldman

Senior Policy Manager

Paula Hanley

Equity Program Manager

Bravetta Hassell

Senior Communications Manager

Jonathan Lopez

*Communications
& Operations Manager*

Sonianne Lozada

Community Engagement Manager

Joe Saucedo

Equity Program Manager

Julian Williams, Ph.D.

Senior Partnerships Manager

**PARTNERSHIP FOR
COLLEGE COMPLETION**
Accelerating action to close the graduation gap