



PARTNERSHIP FOR COLLEGE COMPLETION

Accelerating action to close the graduation gap

Investors Council Report

Reporting Period—2/16/2020 to 8/14/2020

Kyle Westbrook, Ph.D., Executive Director

Email: kwestbrook@partnershipfcc.org

Phone: 312.857.4643

● Letter	3
● Operations	5
● Programming	6
● Appendix A: PCC Financials	i
● Appendix B: PCC Newsroom	ii
● Appendix C: PCC Board of Directors & Staff	iii

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The world changed when a global pandemic that treats human suffering as kindling ran headstrong into our nation's long history of violence towards black people on the corner of 38th Street and Chicago Avenue in Minneapolis, Minnesota. COVID-19 and the long-overdue racial awakening in Illinois and across the nation provoked by the killing of George Floyd, demand forward-looking and aggressive leadership from every sector.

Granted, there have been notable changes among some in higher education to address the twin forces of health and justice, but those changes have been the exception rather than the rule. We applaud the heroic efforts of many institutions to ensure that the basic needs of our students are met during the pandemic and celebrate their public proclamations in support of Black Lives Matter, but few have done much to substantially address underlying racial inequities. The disparity of higher education's response to the disruption of COVID-19 versus to the renewed public demand to address enduring issues of racial inequity is stark. While campus closures and moves to hybrid learning models will surely have an impact on the bottom line for colleges and universities and likely trigger more consolidations and mergers, their public proclamations in support of racial justice have not been followed up with substantial changes to the way Illinois confronts an inaccessible and racially-stratified higher education system. With a few exceptions, ours is a system that continues to treat the diminished educational prospects of black students as simply an unfortunate consequence of larger societal forces that leaders themselves are powerless to shape.

We reject this racial fatalism and excuse making and applaud leaders in Illinois such as Mayor Lori Lightfoot, City Colleges of Chicago Chancellor Juan Salgado, and Chicago State University President Zalduaynaka "Z" Scott for publicly declaring that it is high time for our leaders to *lead* on racial justice in Illinois higher education. We will continue to support the incremental changes being championed by the institutions in the Illinois Equity in Attainment initiative, while at the same time calling upon our state and university leaders to boldly prioritize racial justice in policy and practice.

The academic year ahead will surely be one of fits and starts, continued health and safety challenges, a state fiscal situation unlike anything that we've seen in recent memory, and even louder demands from young activists whose impatience is our state's fuel to finally make the changes that countless task forces, commissions, and studies have already concluded, that solutions to our challenges exist but they require courage, vision, and yes, money.



Kyle Westbrook, Ph.D.

Executive Director, Partnership for College Completion

Operations

Like so many other companies and nonprofits, the Partnership for College Completion (PCC) has made significant operational changes as well as programmatic changes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure staff health and safety. Chief among the operational changes has been shifting to remote work beginning on March 12. PCC's Board of Directors and staff continue to monitor developments and plan for a soft reopening of the office on September 9, following health and safety protocols developed consistent with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and City of Chicago Phase 4 reopening guidelines. PCC will limit the number of employees in the office on any given day to ensure appropriate distancing, while leaving open the option for remote work for staff who choose to or need to remain remote. In addition, PCC has shifted to electronic payments for invoices as well as conducted the April and July Board meetings via Zoom video conferencing.

Board of Directors

In April, the PCC Board approved its FY21 budget as well as began preliminary discussions about updating the organization's strategic plan. PCC subsequently retained EduDream LLC. to lead the strategic planning process. Beginning in May, EduDream conducted interviews with PCC Board members, staff, investors, and other stakeholders. In July, the PCC Board participated in a full Board discussion about ongoing strategic priorities, as well as new potential areas of work for the organization. A small steering group consisting of Board members, staff, and funders has been developed to provide ongoing support and guidance throughout the process, culminating in the presentation of the 2020 strategic plan to the Board and other stakeholders in October 2020.

Development

During the reporting period, PCC received general operating support renewals from the Julian Grace Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Siragusa Foundation, as well as a new grant from the Joyce Foundation to support the development of a policy framework for harm reduction during times of economic downturn, which PCC expects to begin socializing with lawmakers in November.

During the reporting period, PCC maintained a positive cashflow and ended FY20 with a \$150K budget surplus that will be moved to the organization's reserves (See Appendix A).

PROGRAMMING

Programming

Public Policy

Though the COVID-19 pandemic forced the Illinois General Assembly to only take up the most urgent legislation, FY20 was the busiest year to date for PCC with five pieces of legislation led by PCC introduced into the legislature.

After attending PCC's *Priced Out* event at Northern Illinois University, Representative Maurice West (D-Rockford), worked with PCC to introduce HB3992, which would phase out MAP funding for for-profit colleges and universities in the state.

Similarly, ongoing conversations with Senator Ram Villivalam (D - Chicago) led to the introduction of HB3676, requiring equity training for state university trustees. PCC also worked with Representatives Latoya Greenwood (D-East St. Louis) on legislation (HB4064) that would make standardized tests optional for admission to Illinois' public universities. Additionally, PCC worked alongside a coalition of other organizations to support HB5001, mandating that colleges and universities provide information on child care resources to student parents. As a result of advocacy on that bill, the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) will be adding a page on their website that will direct student-parents to child care and financial resources and will send related material to MAP-eligible students.

Most significantly, during the spring legislative session, PCC led the advocacy behind HB5262 (Rep. Smith), a bill seeking \$15 million to fund college emergency grant programs. The language of HB5262 was included in the education omnibus bill (SB 1569 - Bertino-Tarrant/W. Davis - Public Act 101-0643) that passed this session. The bill gives the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) the authority to administer a completion/emergency grant program but the budget does not fund the program. PCC is committed to amending the bill to provide more structure to the program and advocating for the state to fund it.

Besides this legislative push, which PCC expects to resume in the next legislative session, PCC has in recent months pivoted to a more robust online presence through policy-related webinars for various stakeholders. PCC recently partnered with the Fair Tax campaign to lead a webinar for community-based organizations on the Fair Tax Amendment and its potential for education funding. On July 27, PCC partnered with The Education Trust, Advance Illinois, Women Employed, and Young Invincibles to host a webinar on race-conscious policy in higher education. The webinar was attended by 19 members of the Illinois General Assembly, leaders from IBHE, the

Public Policy, continued

Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), and ISAC, and nonprofit organizations working in education.

Finally, the SJR41 Task Force on Developmental Education completed its work and issued its report to the General Assembly on how to improve developmental education across the state. The report can be found [here](#). PCC will continue to advocate for developmental education reform and work with the Governor's office, lawmakers, and state agencies, to maximize the reach of the committee's recommendations.

Learn more about **Colleges and University Partnerships**
on page 8

College and University Partnerships (formerly, Technical Support)

In response to the outbreak of the coronavirus and its sweeping impact on all facets of life including education delivery, PCC's College and University Partnerships team worked closely with ILEA partners to understand their students' academic and non-academic needs as they arose at the outset of the crisis and how the organization could support institutions in addressing these. Resulting PCC supports developed included an online resource highlighting more than 40 online teaching, equity, and financial support resources crowdsourced by ILEA partners and PCC staff to share with the cohort as they responded to COVID-19, and a weekly resource email series throughout April and May that enabled PCC to stay connected to the work of ILEA partners and provide additional resource information to support teaching and students.

As ILEA concluded its first annual Equity Webinar Series, it kicked off its first ILEA Summer Webinar Series with sessions on virtual orientations for incoming students, teaching and learning in a remote environment, and strategies for supporting undocumented and DACA students. Webinars were led by ILEA partners, attended by more than 150 ILEA members and non-ILEA members, and were followed up with additional related materials via email that received substantial engagement.

In July, PCC launched its year-long equity leadership collaboration with the Aspen Institute for the PCC/Aspen Equity Academy for Presidents & Cabinets (EAPC) with 11 ILEA college and university presidents and their cabinets. ILEA presidents applied to be part of this experience that supports their efforts to align equity approaches across their institutions, as detailed in their Equity Plans (to be published in August 2020). In lieu of single-day, in-person meetings, as was originally planned, EAPC teams will meet virtually on a quarterly basis. Virtual half-day meetings kicked off this July and August, continue this November, and in February and June 2021. This year's EAPC includes: 1. Northern Illinois University 2. Chicago State University 3. Malcolm X College 4. William J. Daley College 5. Harry S. Truman College 6. Kishwaukee College 7. College of Lake County 8. College of DuPage 9. Moraine Valley Community College 10. Joliet Junior College 11. William Rainey Harper College.

This spring, William Rainey Harper College joined the ILEA initiative as the cohort's newest member. Harper College is also part of national efforts focused on equity and student success, including the Frontier Set and Achieving the Dream.

Colleges and University Partnerships, continued

ILEA EQUITY PLANS

After the postponement of the public release of the ILEA Equity Plans this spring to focus PCC capacity on supporting ILEA partners in responding to the immediate needs created and exacerbated by the coronavirus crisis, PCC will publicly share the Equity Plans in August 2020. The release could not arrive at a more pivotal time, with broad and reenergized calls for sweeping social justice reforms across all sectors.

ILEA VIRTUAL FALL SUMMIT

This fall, PCC will host its first ILEA Virtual Fall Summit, following cancellation of the in-person event previously scheduled for March 2020 due to COVID-19. The virtual convening, to be held October 21-23, 2020, will feature Dr. Estela Bensimon, professor of higher education at the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education and Director and Founder of the Center for Urban Education.

Learn more about **Public Awareness**
on page 10

Public Awareness

In an effort to be responsive to student needs as they arose in the earliest days of the rapid spread and impact of the coronavirus pandemic, PCC leveraged its social channels and website to highlight resources stateside and nationwide – in financial assistance, internet access, educational materials and more – that could be of support to students seeking assistance.

As the impact of the pandemic continued to evolve in the spring and summer, PCC’s communications team continued to mobilize its resources to support the organization’s COVID-19 response to colleges and universities and their students. In conjunction with the ILEA Equity Series’ “Going Test-Optional” webinar, PCC launched a multi-channel communications campaign to raise awareness about the state of test optional practices in Illinois – highlighting institutions that had adopted such policies on a permanent or temporary basis, and urging public support of PCC’s policy push for all public universities to go test optional for the next three admissions cycles. Through the Illinois Higher Ed Matters Week, a new public awareness initiative created by PCC, PCC’s Communications and Colleges and University Partnerships teams collaborated to engage ILEA partners and other institutions across Illinois in sharing stories of their service work amid the COVID-19 crisis. All told, more than 80 stories were shared during just one week in May across Facebook and Twitter.

This August, PCC will be raising awareness about the long-anticipated ILEA Equity Plans release – postponed from its previous date due to COVID-19. Through media outreach, guest blogging, and dynamic web presence, PCC looks forward to highlighting the focused and comprehensive action plans that ILEA partners developed to address racial and socioeconomic achievement disparities on their campuses.

Looking ahead, PCC, along with its partners in the Illinois Higher Education Network, continue to build up and roll out a communications strategy aimed at raising awareness about the costs to students of our current challenges as well as opportunities that the crisis has exposed to implement forward-thinking policies. Future campaigns in addition to Illinois Higher Ed Matters and Going Test Optional in Illinois will continue to demonstrate PCC’s growing capacity and leadership in elevating and emphasizing the critical importance and impact of an equitable and adequately-funded higher education system on the social and economic fabric of the state.

CONTINUED EARNED MEDIA

During this period, PCC continued to elevate itself as a leading voice in college completion in the state of Illinois, receiving coverage from NPR and its WBEZ affiliate, and authoring an op-ed for *Crain’s Chicago Business* praising the standard-bearing step of City Colleges of Chicago this summer to forgive the debt of former students who left before

Public Awareness, continued

completing their degree in an effort to address racial disparities in completion and help the city of Chicago recover from the economic toll of COVID-19.

New Initiatives - Illinois Colleges Forward

With financial support from the Steans Family Foundation & Origami Works Foundation, PCC this August launched the online information hub Illinois Colleges Forward, dedicated to providing regularly-updated content related to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on college-going across the state of Illinois. From financial aid and basic needs resources to institutional plans for reopening their campuses, the website empowers postsecondary counselors and community partners with up-to-date information that supports students in their college decision-making process and encourages them to continue progressing toward their postsecondary goals.

APPENDIX

B



Chicago State Organizes Statewide Effort To Boost College Success For Illinois' Black Students

Kate McGee/ WBEZ / July 30, 2020

Faced with a 25% drop in Black enrollment at Illinois' public universities and colleges, a group of university officials, business leaders and advocacy groups are joining together to try to improve outcomes for Black students. The drop in enrollment, as well as declining graduation rates, have come while rates for other underrepresented student groups have increased.

Chicago State University, Illinois' only predominantly Black university, announced Thursday it is forming a working group to increase opportunities for Black students to enroll and graduate from college and find good jobs.

"Black students are having a different experience from that of white students," said CSU President Zaldwaynaka Scott. "[We] need to figure out what is at the root cause that is creating more obstacles, roadblocks and impediments to that."

According to the Illinois Board of Higher Education, Black student enrollment at public universities and community colleges dropped 25% between 2013 and 2017. The percentage of Black students graduating from public universities and community colleges dropped 12% during that same time.

A recent report from the nonprofit, the Education Trust, recently gave the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and the University of Illinois at Chicago

"F" grades for their Black student enrollments, which are 6% and 8% respectively, and make up a slightly smaller percentage of the student body than they did two decades ago. This week, the university pledged \$2 million to prioritize faculty research and campus discussions on systemic racism.

While Illinois has seen its black population decline in recent years, Scott said there are more fundamental issues at play, which has been made more apparent by the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Black community and the current national reckoning on systemic racism and policing after the death of George Floyd at the hands of police.

"This whole system is not working for Black people," Scott said. "It's not just higher ed's problem. Our entire state are stakeholders in the outcome."

The working group will be chaired by Scott, Illinois Sen. Elgie Sims (D-Chicago), John Atkinson, Chair of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, and Karen Freeman-Wilson, President of the Chicago Urban League. The group includes public and private university leaders, state lawmakers, and representatives from businesses including John Deere, AT&T and the Hyatt Corporation. It also includes representatives from community advocacy groups.

continued on next page

college success, cont'd

“Through a long history of disinvestment in our state’s public universities and community colleges, Illinois has, through state policy, limited opportunities for students and families who are least able to afford to attend college, and those students are disproportionately African American,” said Kyle Westbrook, executive director of the Partnership for College Completion and a member of the working group. “[I] hope that this collection of legislative and institutional leaders can increase the momentum towards enacting policies to remove barriers to success for Black students.”

Scott said she’d like to see recommendations that focus on the transition from high school to college to better support Black students interested in a degree, including financial literacy and more college-level coursework in high schools. She also said continued financial resources beyond tuition grants and scholarships are key for students who are discouraged or overwhelmed by the additional cost of college, such as books, living expenses and food. Meanwhile, Westbrook pointed to policies that he says are barriers for students, including using standardized test scores for admissions and requiring underprepared college students to take developmental or remedial education classes before being able to take college-level courses.

The first meeting is scheduled for September 10. The goal is to develop an equity plan that includes policy recommendations by January 2021 ahead of the next legislative session.

Kate McGee covers education for WBEZ. Follow her on [Twitter@WBEZeducationand@McGeeReports](#).



Op-Ed: City Colleges Makes Bold Move Toward Equity

Kyle Westbrook, Ph.D. / Crain's Chicago / July 14, 2020

For far too many of our students, and members of our community, the emails that filled our inboxes a month ago affirming the importance of racial equity, rang hollow. With no concrete, bold, and demonstrable action to follow, these messages can easily be filed away in the spam folder of white guilt relief. That email from a company or even a college or university may make the authors feel proud of a well-crafted response to the moment, but it does little to address the enduring structural racism baked into our institutions.

While companies such as Chicago's Quaker Oats and D.C.'s pro football team have made important steps to remove the worst iconography of racism and oppression from their brands, fewer have taken the most meaningful steps in actually investing money into dismantling institutional racism and providing the foundation for a future that has justice at its core.

This is why the incredible step taken by Mayor Lori Lightfoot and City Colleges of Chicago Chancellor Juan Salgado is so important. By cancelling the college debt for some 21,000 students who re-enroll in City Colleges, Mayor Lightfoot and Chancellor Salgado acknowledge two important facts: first, that the increasing cost of college limits opportunity for students who are least able to afford it, and second, that it is high time to get serious about investing in the tens of thousands of residents who started their journey to a degree or credential but were unable

to complete it. This debt forgiveness program also represents a modest investment toward rectifying the economic injustice heaped on the backs of Chicago's black and brown communities for decades.

A 2017 Brookings Institute report described a crisis in which black student borrowers with a Bachelor's degree default at a rate five times higher than their white peers--20% versus 4%, respectively, making it no surprise that the wealth gap between black and white America has persisted. City Colleges of Chicago's investment announced this week can go a long way toward reversing this trend for the largely black and brown students who would be Fresh Start's major beneficiaries.

This important investment in our city's future should not stand alone but should be matched by other public and private colleges and universities in and around our city, and should provide the blueprint on how to aggressively prioritize racial equity now and in the future.

Here are 5 other steps that colleges and universities should take today to make good on their email messaging about racial equity:

Permanently eliminate SAT and ACT from their admissions decisions.

Eliminate or radically reduce developmental education courses which limit opportunities for black and brown students.

continued on next page

City Colleges, cont'd

Commit substantial resources to recruiting and retaining black and brown faculty.

Make eliminating the racial gap in degree completion the highest priority for the institution and commit to sharing disaggregated data on completion and student progress.

Actively recruit in every single high school in the city of Chicago to ensure that our institutions, especially our public institutions, represent the diversity of our student population.

If cash-strapped City Colleges can make this kind of investment in its future and racial justice at the same time, so can others.

Kyle Westbrook, Ph.D., is the founding executive director of the Partnership for College Completion, a nonprofit promoting policies, systems, and practices to ensure all students in Illinois graduate from college and achieve their career aspirations.



Illinois Higher Education Leaders Withholding Judgment On Pritzker's Budget Bet

Kate McGee / Northern Public Radio/ Feb 21, 2020

The budget plan unveiled by Gov. JB Pritzker's this week holds back funding increases for public schools and higher education if a proposed graduated income tax doesn't pass in November, endangering funding for two of his top priorities.

Some public school advocates and state leaders reacted swiftly, expressing disappointment and anger at the prospect of losing out on \$150 million in new state funding.

But there has been little outcry among higher education leaders. This comes even though a \$55 million increase for public universities and a \$15 million increase for community colleges hangs in the balance. If voters don't approve the graduated income tax, that money won't materialize under the governor's budget plan.

"The higher education funding is absolutely necessary for us right now. At the same time I understand the money may not be there," University of Illinois at Chicago Chancellor Michael Amiridis said on Thursday. "They have to balance the budget. So I'm glad it's part of the budget and I hope it will be realized eventually."

Amiridis went as far as to describe Illinois' current higher education landscape as undergoing a "renaissance" at an event with the governor at the UIC

campus.

"We have a governor who understands the importance of access to education, especially for low-socioeconomic background students," Amiridis told a crowd of university officials in the middle of the UIC library, as students chatted and hunched over books at tables nearby. "[He] not only talks about it, but also works to support it financially."

Illinois lawmakers increased general funding for the state's public colleges and universities funding by 8.2% last year, the largest percentage jump in nearly three decades. The increase drew applause after years of underinvestment and two years where public universities had to live with drastically reduced state appropriations during the budget impasse.

Pritzker's public support after that tumultuous time could explain why higher education leaders are quick to support him now, despite the proposal that could leave them with no budget increase next year.

Governors State University President Elaine Maimon said she believes the governor wants to do whatever he can to support higher education. And the three higher education boards in Illinois touted the governor's proposal in a press release.

continued on next page

Pritzker's bet, cont'd

"This second year of increased investment signals that we have a champion who understands how important higher education is to students, families, employers, and the state as a whole," Ginger Ostro, executive director of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, said in a statement.

The release did not mention that the funding is contingent on the graduated income tax. Instead, it focused on other funding proposals that are not reliant on passage of the tax, including increased money for need-based tuition grants, known as the Monetary Award Program.

Pritzker wants to make an additional \$50 million available for low-income students to use toward tuition, increasing the total amount to over \$500 million for the first time in decades.

He also set aside 15% of that money specifically for community college students, which state leaders believe would make community college tuition-free for all eligible students with family income under \$45,000.

"The investment in a MAP set-aside for community college students is a commitment to equity, access and attainment for working families in Illinois," Brian Durham, executive director of the Illinois Community College Board, said in the release. "This set-aside will allow community college students to make decisions knowing they will have the support of the state."

Pritzker also proposed adding \$27 million to the College Illinois! Program, which lets families save for college for a future student. He said the fund will run out of money in six years if the state doesn't put money toward the program. This program is also contingent on the graduated income tax, according to Pritzker's proposal.

He also wants to fund statewide implementation of the national college application so students could apply to all public-four year universities at the same time using one application. If included in the final budget, Illinois would be the first state to implement this policy. This is

seen as another way to encourage students to remain in-state for college. Most Illinois students are already using the Common App, but for out-of-state schools. Pritzker also continued funding the merit-based AIM High grants, another way lawmakers have tried to attract Illinois students to enroll in-state.

State groups focused on higher education, including the Partnership for College Completion in Chicago, also said they understand the governor's decision to make the higher education funding increases contingent on new revenue. But they said it's important to keep advocating for increased investment.

"The governor and the General Assembly have demonstrated a willingness to invest in our students and our institutions that is noteworthy given our state's recent history," Kyle Westbrook, executive director of Partnership for College Completion, said in an email. "But we'll only be in a renaissance period when every eligible low-income student has the funding necessary to enroll in one of our colleges; when those colleges have student populations that are representative of our state's population; and when underrepresented minorities are graduating at the same rates as other students."

Northeastern Illinois University president Gloria Gibson had no comment on the issue. The University of Illinois system did not return multiple requests for comment.

Kate McGee covers education for WBEZ. Follow her on Twitter at @WBEZeducation and @McGeeReports.

APPENDIX



PCC Board of Directors

Beth Swanson (Chair)

CEO
A Better Chicago

Liz Thompson (Co-Chair)

President
The Cleveland Avenue Foundation for Education

Adam Levine (Treasurer)

President
Circle of Service Foundation

Laz Lopez (Secretary)

Chair
Illinois Community College Board

Dave Agazzi

Former Vice President of Administrative Affairs
College of Lake County

Kevin Considine

President and CEO
Lake County Partners

Margaret Daniels Tyler

Social Venture Advisor
TheTylerGroup with the Strategic Consulting Network

Joan DiLeonardi

Chair of Board of Trustees
Oakton Community College

Arne Duncan

Managing Director
Emerson Collective

Sherry Eagle

Executive Director Emeritus
Institute for Collaboration, Aurora University

Greg Darnieder

Former Senior Advisor to the Secretary on the College
Access Initiative, U.S. Department of Education

Judy Erwin

Managing Director
Kivvit

Brian Fabes

CEO
Civic Consulting Alliance

Dr. Nivine Megahed

President
National Louis University

Jim Parsons

Senior Advisor
The Brinson Foundation

Robert Pullion

Foundational Talent Training Program Manager
Zurich North America

Tim Schwertfeger

Former Chairman and CEO
Nuveen Investments

Douglas Wood

Senior Fellow Justice, Equity and Opportunity
Aspen Institute

Yasmin Zavala

Student Board Member
Junior at Saint Xavier University

PCC Staff

Kyle Westbrook

Executive Director

Lisa Castillo Richmond

Managing Director

Mike Abrahamson

Policy Analyst

Emily Goldman

Senior Policy Manager

Paula Hanley

Program Manager

Bravetta Hassell

Senior Communications Manager

Jonathan Lopez

*Communications Manager &
Operations Manager*

Joe Saucedo

Program Manager

Julian Williams

Program Manager

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