



**PARTNERSHIP FOR**  
**COLLEGE COMPLETION**  
Advancing Equity in Higher Education



## Investors Council Report

Reporting Period—8/16/2022 to 2/14/2022

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# A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As I settle into my role as Executive Director of the Partnership for College Completion (PCC), I am continuously reminded of the complexity of the work to advance equity in Illinois higher education amid a still-unfolding pandemic and the subsequent effects on college enrollment and beyond. Despite the scale of this task, PCC continues to advance our mission priorities with new team members and a deep commitment to rejecting the status quo. In November of 2021, PCC welcomed Dr. Kim Everett, Managing Director, and Tanisha Earwin, Project Manager, to the team of passionate and talented people who are unfailingly focused on creating the conditions in which all Illinoisians have an opportunity to achieve their postsecondary goals.

Despite the challenges, PCC is pleased to share many reasons to remain hopeful:

- PCC's policy efforts to move toward equitable, adequate, and stable funding in Illinois higher education is progressing. From the passage of SB815 to the launch of the state's Commission on Equitable Funding of Public Universities in November, PCC and our partners are leading a growing movement of advocates who are calling for investment in a new equitable funding model for our state.
- Our partner colleges and universities in the Illinois Equity in Attainment (ILEA) Initiative continue to work toward racial and socioeconomic equity on their campuses, building momentum and institutional capacity as they implement their equity plans, while PCC continues to refine and expand its support to them. In the year ahead, we will focus on telling the story of this campus-based work - where we began, where we are today, and where we must go.
- At the intersection of our policy and institutional change work, we are deep into our first effort to build state and institutional capacity to successfully implement legislation. The Developmental Education Reform Act (DERA), which passed last year with the leadership of the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus, was a significant policy priority of PCC. With the support of the Ascendium Education Group, we are working with the Illinois Community College Board to support robust planning for implementation of corequisite models of support.

As we look to the future, we are focused on outcomes, sustainability, and strategic growth. With your continued support, we forge ahead in championing equity-centered public policy, providing evidence-based technical support to college and universities, and elevating research and data to support each of these priorities and raise awareness about the realities and possibilities of higher education in Illinois. Living, working, and attending school through the COVID-19 pandemic, social unrest, and the ongoing racial reckoning, has taught us that much good can be done in less than ideal circumstances. So as we have done since the very beginning, PCC will continue to press forward, ask the hard questions, and hold our leaders accountable because Illinois' students and families cannot wait.



**Lisa Castillo Richmond**  
Executive Director



## Operations Staffing Update

The appointment of Lisa Castillo Richmond as PCC’s next Executive Director in August 2021 left a vacancy for her previous role as Managing Director. After an extensive search, PCC welcomed Dr. Kim Everett in November 2021. Dr. Everett began her work in equity and inclusion in student affairs and most recently served as the Director of the Office of Multicultural Student Success at DePaul University. Dr. Everett is a Chicago native and CPS alum. She earned a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies with an emphasis on Social Justice in Higher Education, an M.Ed. in Student Affairs Administration, and a B.S. in Elementary Education – all from Iowa State University.

In addition to welcoming Dr. Everett, PCC also welcomed Tanisha Earwin as a Project Manager. Tanisha’s role at PCC is connected to the new investment from Ascendium Education Group for the implementation of developmental education reform centered around co-requisite models. Prior to coming to PCC, Tanisha worked with City Colleges of Chicago in Admissions Advising as well as serving as a Senior Early College Coordinator.

Other staffing updates for this reporting period include the promotion of Jonathan Lopez to Senior Manager of Operational Effectiveness.

Lastly, PCC is in the final stages of two searches for new positions to add capacity to the PCC team, including a Communications Associate and an Operations Associate.

## Development

During this reporting period, PCC received new grants from Ascendium Education Group, the Vivo Foundation, Crown Family Philanthropies, and the Lumina Foundation, as well as renewals from the Sirigusa Family Foundation, the Julian Grace Foundation, the Gorter Family Foundation, and the Best Portion Foundation. PCC continues to seek renewals from our longstanding investors while adding new investments to support the expansion of the organization’s work.

It is essential for PCC to continue to expand our capacity to deliver on equity by attracting new sources of funding in order to be responsive to a changing landscape of Illinois higher education. To fulfill these goals, PCC’s new Executive Director is working with the Development Committee of the Board to develop a fundraising strategy to identify and engage new regional and national funders in our work.

PCC management has a number of priorities to take us through the remainder of the fiscal year, which include Board diversification, a fiscal infrastructure review, building of fundraising systems and structures, exploration of opportunities to diversify PCC revenue streams, and growth plans for revenue and staffing to deliver on organizational priorities. These [] will serve as the foundation for the next chapter of organizational and programming growth in service of PCC’s mission.



# PROGRAMMING

## Programming

### College and University Partnerships

#### *Illinois Equity in Attainment (ILEA) Initiative*

As ILEA partners returned to campus for the 2021-2022 school year amid a still-evolving COVID-19 pandemic, PCC decided to continue to provide all supports virtually targeted to individual campus teams, small groups, the full cohort, and campus leadership support virtually.

In October, PCC launched the second year of the Equity Academy for Presidents and Cabinet Members (EAPC) where leaders focus on equity efforts at the senior leadership level of their institutions. This year, 63 participants across seven ILEA partner institutions are participating in the EAPC. As a part of the EAPC, these seven ILEA partners are participating in four half-day professional learning sessions. The four sessions include: 1) state of equity on campus, 2) internal and external equity communication, 3) aligning budget with equity goals, and 4) scaling and sustaining institutional strategies. Each session includes a presentation from a recognized campus leader on the session topic, institutional team time, and time to meet with other ILEA partners.

PCC held its fifth ILEA Summit November 3 -5, 2021, for over 500 faculty, staff, and administrators from Illinois colleges and universities. The participants that attended made the convening the highest-attended summit to date. “Lifting Voices for Racial Equity with Intentional Structures,” was the event theme, with Dr. Jose Luis Cruz Rivera, President of Northern Arizona University delivering the opening keynote and Dr. Theodora Regina Berry, Vice Provost for Student Learning and Academic Success and Dean of the College of Undergraduate Studies at the University of Central Florida delivering the closing keynote. Participants attended 18 workshop sessions, including on such topics as creating a culture of care on campus, mentoring to achieve Latino educational success, rewarding diversity, equity, and inclusion in faculty promotion, and tenure and a host of others. As always, a standout session from the summit was the Student Panel: Centering Student Voices in Equity Efforts, a panel discussion led by members of the PCC Student Advisory Council.

In December, PCC held its first Equity Circle for Change (EC4C) meeting – the EC4C is PCC’s version of a community of practice, bringing together 10 to 20 campus leaders to share experiences, research, data, and insights for the purpose of learning from each other, strategizing creative ways for addressing systemic barriers, and amplifying successful equity-centered practices. As ILEA serves many Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and emerging HSIs, PCC’s first EC4C is “Creating Equitable Outcomes at Hispanic-Serving Institutions.” Currently, 12 members across seven institutions are participating in the EC4C. The second and third meeting will take place during the spring semester.

During the reporting period, our partner NORC at the University of Chicago, began conducting interviews, observing meetings, and analyzing documents for the “Using Facilitated Collaborative to Build Racial Equity in Higher Education Institutions” research study. The study is designed to capture how ILEA institutions are working to eliminate college completion

## College and University Partnerships, cont'd

disparities on their campuses and how the ILEA Initiative, staffed and developed by PCC, is contributing to their success.

### *Developmental Education Reform Act (DERA)*

In September, PCC was awarded a grant from Ascendium Education Group to support the implementation of the Developmental Education Reform Act (DERA). DERA—part of the historic HB2170—was signed into law in March 2021 by Governor Pritzker, and aims to address inequities in degree completion by race and income status through a system-wide reform of developmental education placement and delivery. The legislation requires each college to develop and submit a plan to the state for implementing and scaling evidence-based developmental education models that maximize students' likelihood of completing gateway courses in mathematics and English within two academic semesters. Institutional plans are due May 1, 2022.

In partnership with the Illinois Community College Board, PCC is supporting colleges that are interested in implementing and scaling corequisite models on their campus. In November and December, two statewide webinars were held to inform colleges and universities about the DERA. Over 200 participants learned about the legislation, co-requisite models and data, and heard from practitioners who have successfully implemented and scaled co-requisite models on their campuses. Since then, a statewide faculty advisory board made up of English and math faculty have been recruited and tasked with developing resources to support corequisite implementation. Currently, PCC is recruiting two dozen institutions for the statewide project and working with expert partners to develop in-depth workshops and coaching sessions to support DERA plan development in March and April.

## Public Policy

### *Accountability Table*

During this reporting period, PCC convened state and national higher education accountability experts and stakeholders for monthly meetings. Currently, the group includes representation from The Century Foundation, the Illinois Community College Trustee Association, Illinois Federation of Teachers, Illinois Education Association, the Student Borrower Protection Center, the Responsible Lending Center, Women Employed, the Illinois Attorney General's Office, the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, Young Invincibles, and the Education Trust. Since its launch in July 2021, this table has created a shared vision for higher education accountability, identified policies and actions that could advance the shared vision, and zeroed in on potential legislative action for spring 2022. PCC is considering introducing legislation this spring that would require for-profit institutions to spend a certain percentage of tuition revenue on instruction relative to other spending areas, like advertising and recruiting, helping bring parity between for-profit institutions and their non-profit peers.

### *Equitable Funding Campaign*

#### ***Coalition for Transforming Higher Education Funding***

This fall, PCC engaged in several actions to advance its goal of creating an equitable higher education funding formula in Illinois. First, in October, the Partnership launched the Coalition for Transforming Higher Education Funding (Coalition), a group of advocates, students, and stakeholders that will help hold the Commission on Equitable Public University Funding (Commission) accountable to its legislative charge – centering racial equity in its final recommendations. Over the last three months, the Partnership has engaged over 20 organizations as part of its Coalition outreach and set a foundation for new voices to engage in equitable funding advocacy – including planned advocacy for increased funding for the Monetary Award Program and opportunities to provide public comment at the next Commission meeting.

#### ***Commission for Equitable Public University Funding***

In October, the Partnership participated in the first meeting of the Commission on Equitable Public University Funding. In advance of that meeting, PCC's Policy team met with Commission co-chairs, Representative Carol Ammons and Leader Kimberly Lightford to discuss our goals for the Commission, revisit the data that inspired its creation, and to re-center the focus on equity. PCC will continue to meet with the legislative co-chairs before each Commission meeting and begin building relationships with other mission-aligned members of the Commission.

Finally, PCC finalized its 2022 Policy Agenda, which was released in February 2022. The updated agenda centers on three principles of change, including equitable college access, accountability, and affordability. The updated agenda will serve as the foundation for PCC's policy work over the next five years.

## Communications and Public Awareness

### *PCC Website and Branding*

This January, PCC launched its redesigned website and refreshed visual branding to enhance how the organization tells the story of its accomplishments since its launch in 2016. The new site aims to tell our story, share knowledge with, and engage prospective supporters in our work, as we continue to strengthen this dimension of PCC's presence for the future.

The updated site takes care to maintain the spirit of PCC's identity while also elevating and amplifying visual content, improving navigation and accessibility, centering PCC's new and ongoing work and providing new sections and features for greater engagement:

- PCC's organizational profile now shows PCC milestones with the help of an interactive timeline.
- The website's **Resource Library** is an ever-expanding library of best in class content, webinars, articles and more to support higher education practitioners doing equity work.
- Lastly, PCC's enhanced **Get Involved** section invites visitors to learn about how to become an advocate for equity-centered public policy, explore opportunities to join the PCC team, or make a financial gift to the Partnership.

### *PCC Digital Advocacy*

During Fall 2021, PCC expanded its work using digital campaigns to raise awareness about its own work as well as broader issues in higher education equity.

### *PCC 5 and Counting*

In August, the organization celebrated its fifth anniversary with the launch of a dynamic digital campaign featuring social media posts highlighting PCC milestones and was capped off with a video conversation between PCC's departing Founding Executive Director Kyle Westbrook and Lisa Castillo Richmond, the organization's former Managing Director and new Executive Director. Westbrook and Castillo Richmond discussed PCC's origin story, reflected on past accomplishments, and discussed future hopes for the organization.

### *ILEA Summit*

While PCC's ILEA Virtual Fall Summit is a closed event designated for leaders, staff, and practitioners of ILEA partners to convene to deepen and further inform their campus equity work, PCC increased its public promotion of the event on social media platforms, in particular. There, awareness building of anticipated keynote addresses and learning sessions elevated the organization's College and University Partnerships work. Similarly, the uplifting of blogging by ILEA members and broadcast of a Twitter Chat on Supporting Men of Color in College served to further extend awareness building efforts.

## Communications and Public Awareness, Cont'd

### *#FirstGen Celebration*

Once again the Partnership participated in this critical awareness building campaign by NASPA's Center for First Generation Student Success to highlight students who are the first in their families to attend college. As the only organization in Illinois working to advance equitable solutions in both practice and policy to increase college completion for underrepresented students, including first-generation students, PCC was thrilled to participate. PCC had the privilege of elevating the experiences and advice of four firstgen members of the organization's Student Advisory Council.

### *Coalition for Transforming Higher Education Funding*

Last fall, the Partnership launched a digital advocacy campaign in collaboration with our partners at Women Employed and Advance Illinois that will run through Spring 2023 to continue to build the campaign for an equitable funding model for Illinois' public institutions. The goals of this campaign are to:

- raise public awareness about the current state of institutional funding and the urgent need for an equitable, adequate, and stable funding model;
- support the creation and mobilization of a community of champions for equitable higher education champions across diverse stakeholder groups; and
- equip advocates with tools to multiple public discourse on the issue, influence the Commission on Equitable Public University Funding, and engage their lawmakers on policies supportive of an equitable funding model.

PCC continues to refine its approach to leveraging owned and earned media to reach its goals of educating and empowering advocates to drive policy change.

# APPENDICES





## Op-Ed: Illinois Can Go From Worst to First in Equitable Higher Education Funding

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College costs are rising. Many students struggle to afford a public university education. There might not be a difference in costs between staying in Illinois or leaving the state altogether. And most people would have to go deep into debt to do either. So the question that we are all grappling with is who can afford to go at all?

These sentiments have been growing over the last 20 years for a generation of Illinoisans, and are now so widespread that they have been normalized. We cannot accept this as normal, they are not normal.

Illinois has gone from being one of the best to one of the worst states in terms of college affordability. The state has cut funding to public universities as much as any state over the last two decades, but this hasn't cut overall costs – it has merely shifted them to universities, who have then been left with little choice but to push much of them onto students.

All 12 of our public universities have been hurt by this. However, just as not all students can afford tuition increases, all universities cannot withstand these cuts in the same way. Due to the fact that Illinois has no actual model for how it distributes 99.5% of its funding (possibly the only state where this is still the case), each university has been periodically asked to cut the same percentage from their budgets, which are now half what they were 20 years ago. That might appear

fair until you consider that our universities are different and enroll different student populations. Equity doesn't mean making sure every budget gets cut, it means giving each university the resources it needs to successfully serve its students.

Disinvestment has been bad for everyone, and it has disproportionately hurt universities that tend to enroll more students of color and students from low-income households. Though they might get less attention, these institutions are essential in providing future opportunities to Illinoisans. Because they are more reliant on state funding, these cuts have forced them to steadily raise their prices; the 10 universities that receive the least funding from the state now have to charge their lowest-income students the second highest prices in the country. Unsurprisingly, they have 21,000 fewer students than they did a decade ago. Illinois now has the unenviable distinction of the greatest university enrollment declines in the country. Again: this is not a 'normal' that Illinois can accept.

With a new state-level effort set to kick off on Nov. 9, Illinois could be poised to turn this around and become a leader in higher education. In June, the legislature passed SB 815, which creates a bilateral, bicameral commission that will ultimately recommend an adequate, equitable, and stable funding model

## **equitable funding, cont'd**

that Illinois can adopt. Just as funding cuts put us in this position, increased and equitable investment in our public university system can put us back on track. This is urgent – for our kids, our returning adults, our families, our collective futures, and the economic vitality of our state.

University appropriations funding is complicated, in-the-weeds policymaking, which is why they've been cut so dramatically and so quietly over the past two decades. However, for all of Illinois to have an inclusive, booming economy, and for each student to have a fair shot at a prosperous future, we'll need to make sure that the SB 815 commission succeeds in its charge – to make equitable investment its number one priority – and that the Illinois legislature takes action on the Commission's recommendations.

*Lisa Castillo Richmond is executive director of the Partnership for College Completion. Robin Steans is president of Advance Illinois and Cherita Ellens is president and chief executive officer of Women Employed.*

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