



Illinois Center for Equity in Education: Project Overview

Program Overview

The Illinois Center for Education Equity will address the state's crisis in connecting Black communities to a college degree through research, policy, and practice driven by diverse stakeholders. The statewide initiative will convene employers, the secondary and postsecondary education systems, faculty, students, legislators, philanthropy, and community-based institutions to collect data and release research that tracks Illinois' progress with supporting Black students and to identify policies and practices that diverse stakeholders must deploy to eliminate the equity gap for Illinois' Black students.

Program Need

In 2020 Chicago State University (CSU) convened the [Equity Working Group](#) for Black Student Access and Success in Illinois Higher Education in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and data showing a significant 37% decline in Black student enrollment in Illinois higher education. Additionally, Black students in Illinois who do enroll in college are significantly less likely than their white peers to be retained by institutions and to complete with a degree or credentials. In short, Black students are failed in every way by the higher education system according to the Illinois Board of Higher Education. This fact is demonstrated in the table below.

	Black Students	White Students		Black Students	White Students
High School Graduation Rate	75%	91%	First-Time Full-Time Retention	64%	82%
Postsecondary Enrollment	54%	70%	Transfer Student Retention Rate	69%	78%
Graduation Rate	62%	82%			
Unemployment Rate	17%	9%			

The statewide initiative convened leaders from K-12 school systems and postsecondary education institutions, nonprofit organizations and government agencies, the private sector, philanthropy, faith institutions, and other community-based organizations. This spring, the Equity Working Group released a multi-year, cross-industry Action Plan that offers actionable solutions to address systemic racism in higher education policies, practices and institutions through collective efforts and advances recommendations on how to improve higher education and professional outcomes for Black students.

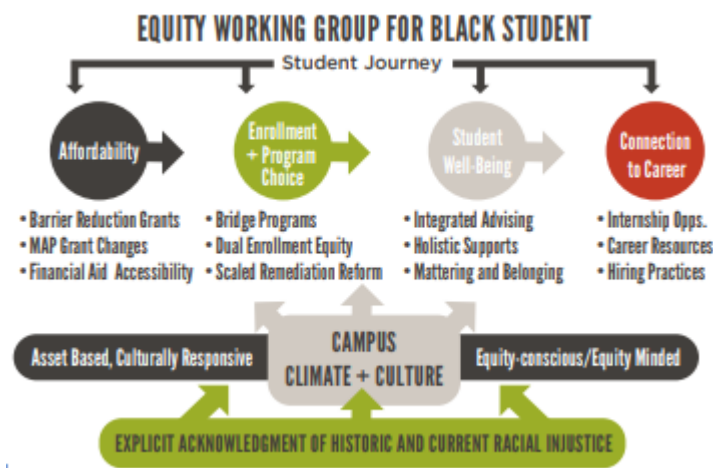
The Equity Working Group found the challenges along a student's journey range from facing racism within high school and college settings, to challenges with affordability, enrolling within programs and



institutions that are a good fit, supporting students' well-being, and accessing career opportunities. The framework of recommendations are outlined below.

As outlined in the Action Plan, specific challenges facing Black students include:

Affordability: Illinois has one of the highest tuition rates in the country. For many students, one financial emergency can make the difference between earning their degree or not. Many Black students in Illinois are particularly vulnerable to this type of financial barrier—61% of Illinois Black families live in liquid asset poverty, meaning that their savings cannot cover three months of basic expenses, compared to only 28% of White families



Student Well-Being: Black youth—especially those who grew up in low-income families—are at higher risk for depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues as a result of discrimination, poverty and trauma that they experience. Racial tensions on campus and beyond can create further stress and anxiety for many students. Additionally, Black students are less likely to seek help for mental health issues due to stigma. Student panelists emphasized the importance of mental health supports for Black college students. In order to support Black students' wellbeing and mental health on Illinois

campuses, institutions must increase holistic student supports, decrease stigma surrounding mental health issues among Blacks students, and connect students with high-quality, culturally competent supports and services on or near campus.

Connection to Career: College education is a key driver of social mobility and economic stability for individuals and families. However, for many Black students who graduate from higher education in Illinois, the return on their investment is lower than for their White peers. According to a study by Georgetown's Center on Education and the Workforce, the percent of Black workers holding "good jobs" (those that pay at least \$35K per year, or \$45K for workers age 45 and older) after receiving a bachelor's degree or higher is only 68%, compared with 75% of White workers.

In Illinois, equity gaps in labor force participation and unemployment rates persist—in the second quarter of 2020, White Illinoisans experienced 13% unemployment, while the rate of unemployment among Black Illinoisans was 21%. In order to increase the return on investment for Illinois Black students and ensure that higher education remains a driver of economic opportunity for all, Illinois must build stronger connections between the classroom and the workplace throughout and beyond students' time in college. As described below, the Equity Working Group's Action Plan outlines strategies related to research, policy, practice and collaboration that will drive forward solutions to the challenges outlined above.



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Program Activities

Members of the Equity Working Group have committed to ongoing collaboration to actualize the Action Plan and create significant change for Black students. To ensure robust implementation of the Action Plan, CSU is launching the Center for Education Equity in the winter of 2021. The Center will focus on the following strategies:

1. Research & Data: Generate research and data that illustrates progress and thought leadership on how the sectors can continually improving access and support for Black students,
2. Policy & Practice: Develop policy research and recommendations for individual constituencies and statewide change that can occur with policy and practice changes,
3. Cross-Sector Collaboration: Facilitate and initiate cross-sector collaboration critical to the sharing of best practices and the dismantling of isolated work taking place within individual siloes.

Activity 1 - Research & Data: The Equity Working Group found that Illinois lacks foundational disaggregated data on who is and is not accessing and completing college as well as the resources demonstrated to support student access and success. Further, Illinois does not track the impact of interventions, particularly for Black students. Without this information, Illinois is unable to quickly identify where progress is or is not occurring in students starting or completing college. This gap also prevents Illinois from understanding the degree to which Black students are accessing support services that are proven effective. Finally, even when interventions do reach Black students, Illinois lacks disaggregated data that allows an analysis of the impact the invention has for Black students.

Examples of gaps in data include:

- Disaggregated data on student progress: Although there are tools like the Illinois Report Card and Illinois Postsecondary Profiles, these tools do not have data broken down to reflect race and ethnicity data across all key metrics (including postsecondary enrollment).
- Data on the reach and impact of interventions: The Equity Working Group found that when evidence-based practices were used, those interventions were only available to a small set of students/communities, but also did not disaggregate data to understand who is and is not reached and the differential impact of the programs for Black students. For example, the Illinois Student Assistance Commission provides financial aid advising services, an important practice. However, they do not track basic demographic data on the students they reach or disaggregate outcome data to understand whether the program is effective for Black students.

The Action Plan recommends cross sector partnerships, including between high school, community-based organizations, student success organizations, and postsecondary institutions, that track and regularly publish finely disaggregated data on progress toward equity goals at the institutional and state level. The report further recommends tracking disaggregated data on interventions to understand the interventions' reach and efficacy.

In the first year, the Illinois Center for Education Equity will create infrastructure for enhanced data collection and analysis that diverse stakeholders can use. The Center will also create guidance that



empowers partners to provide data that the Center can collect. The Center will then collect and assess data to track progress on the metrics for success identified in the Action Plan.

Activity 2 - Policy and Practice: Across Black students pathway from considering and enrolling into a postsecondary program through graduation to career, the Equity Working Group found policies and practices that hindered students' ability to progress. Policy challenges include issues that impact affordability (such as how state funding is distributed) to the persistence of remedial education (which lengthens time to degree and impacts students' ability to graduate). Practices led by education institutions, employers, agencies, and others also have a large impact on students' ability to move forward.

Addressing the challenges outlined in the Action Plan will require extensive policy and practice change over the foreseeable future in order to see a meaningful change in outcomes for Black students. The Center will advance policies by releasing data and research that illustrate problematic policies and strategies for overcoming those policies and then educate decision-makers on the policy research. The Action Plan outlined a wide range of problematic practices by education, employment, and community-based systems. The Center will support practice change by those stakeholders by releasing research on strategies for overcoming problematic practices that both reflects best practice and is created in partnership with stakeholders who will ultimately implement the recommendations to ensure the strategies are actionable.

Activity 3 - Cross-Sector Collaboration: Because the Equity Working Group membership reported that the cross-sector engagement was particularly powerful, the Center will maintain a framework for ongoing engagement of the original working group members and other leaders committed to this effort. The work will advance through:

- Advisory Council who serve as a strategic resource ensuring the Center is addressing the most critical issues using the most impactful strategies possible. The Advisory Council is responsible for broadening the collaboration with an emphasis on employers who traditionally have been missing from this work.
- Working Group members who advance the strategies selected by the Advisory Council. The Working Group will include members who participated in the Equity Working Group.

Evaluation

From January 2022 through December of 2022, the Illinois Center for Education Equity will establish a governing structure, collect and publish data that is not currently available to outline progress with the Action Plan, and advance implementation of at least one policy and one practice outlined in the Action Plan.

Goal 1: Create Accountability Through Data Systems, Research, Publications, and Education

- Data: The Center will begin to create a system for collecting data identified as critical in the Action Plan, that is not currently publicly available.



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- **Research:** The Center will release a report on Black student access and success in Illinois, reflecting newly available data due to the Center's data collection efforts and progress with the Action Plan since its release in May 2021.
- **Information dissemination:**
 - The Center will share the findings widely through briefings that reach key constituencies, including employers, legislators, and community-based organizations.
 - The Center will host a conference ("State of Access, Success, and Employment for Black Students in Illinois") that reconvenes the stakeholders reached through the Working Group and others

Goal 2: Enhance Black Student Access & Success Through Policy & Systems Change

- **Policy Implementation:** The Center will support implementation of at least one policy outlined in the Action Plan, likely focusing on statewide implementation of the test-optional policy. The Center will not only support implementation but also evaluate the policy implementation's effort impact on Black students.
- **Policy Adoption:** The Center, through engagement with decision-makers alongside participants in the Equity Working Group, will support the advancement of legislative and executive policies outlined in the Action Plan.

Goal 3: Cross Collaboration

- **Advisory Committee:** An Advisory Committee will direct the Center's work, with the Committee mirroring the diversity of the Equity Working Group. The Committee will have statewide membership with stakeholders from each sector who participated in the Equity Working Group. The Committee will meet at least quarterly.
- **Working Groups:** The Center will convene at least three Working Groups composed of multiple sectors which will be tasked with implementing part of the Action Plan.

Budget - Year One

Expense	Cost
Salaries Center Director - \$100,000 Research Assistant - \$75,000 Data Analyst - \$85,000 Administrative Support - \$55,000 Graduate Assistant 1 (\$1000/month for 9 months) - \$9,000 Graduate Assistant 2 (\$1000/month for 9 months) - \$9,000	\$333,000
FTE Benefits (36%)	\$119,880



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Marketing & Publications	\$50,000
Events & Travel	\$30,000
Commodities	\$5,000
IT: Computers, software, projector	\$10,000
Overhead (15%)	\$82,182
Total	\$630,062

Center Timeline

Q2 April - June 2023

- Hired inaugural Director for the Illinois Center for Education Equity

Q3 July - September 2023

- Began planning for the first annual Equity in Illinois Higher Education conference

Q4 October - December 2023

- Hosted first Annual Equity in Illinois Higher Education Conference
- Submitted 3 grants related to understanding and improving outcomes for Black students in public 4-year institutions in Illinois
- Attended 5 conferences with our various partners including Partnership for College Completion (PCC) and the Latino Policy Forum (LPF)
- Met with PCC and LPF partners to work on a proposed collaborative events calendar to consider ways to address intersectional priority areas; discussed setting a quarterly meeting with LPF

Q1 January - March 2024

- Set quarterly meetings with LPF
- Advisory Board members outreached and early planning for how to best implement grants and other areas of opportunity/research through Q2 2025.

Q2 April - June 2024

- Begin work on approved grants and research projects
- Hire a research assistant for the Illinois Center for Education Equity
- Convene Advisory Board to set priorities for the next 2 quarters
- Collaborate with our partners and policy-advocates to assess changes to student admissions, enrollment, and retention after the adoption of the test-optional admissions policy within the state of Illinois.



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- Prioritize the goals and action items defined in the [Equity Working Group report](#)
 - Dual enrollment can be one priority as we're currently waiting for updates on a submitted grant proposal in this area (as of Q1 2024).

Q3 July - September 2024

- Continue grant funded projects
- Onboard the Center's Research Assistant
- Planning and logistics for second annual conference
- Attendance at equity conferences, panels, and events hosted by our institutional, policy-advocacy and community partners
- Revisit data gathering around CSU campus climate and culture to assist the campus in the re-development of surveys meant to understand the student experience and inform updates to campus policy

Q4 October - December 2024

- Continue grant funded projects
- Convene Advisory Board
- Host second annual Equity in Illinois Higher Education conference
- Publish post-conference newsletter and report
- Attendance at equity conferences, panels, and events hosted by our institutional and community partners

Q1 January - March 2025

- Continue grant funded projects and submit new grant applications for continued research and funding opportunities
- Continue supporting CSU in campus culture and climate survey revisions

Q2 April - June 2025

- Continue completion of, and new application submissions for, grant funded opportunities.
- Convene Advisory Board to set Q3-Q4 2025 priorities

Background: Leadership, Membership, & Engagement of the Equity Working Group

Co-Chairs:

- Zaldwaynaka Scott Esq., President at Chicago State University
- Hon. Elgie Sims, Illinois State Senator, 17th District Illinois State Senate
- Karen Freeman-Wilson, President and Chief Executive Officer at Chicago Urban League
- John Atkinson, Executive Vice President and Managing Director at Willis Towers Watson; Board Chair at Illinois Board of Higher Education

Steering Committee:

- Kimberly Hollingsworth, President at Olive-Harvey College
- Ginger Ostro, Executive Director at Illinois Board of Higher Education
- Dr. Leslie Roundtree, Interim Provost, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at Chicago State



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University

- Zaldwaynaka Scott Esq., President at Chicago State University
- Tyronne Stoudemire, Global Vice President of Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) at Hyatt Corporation

Corporate / private sector represented by: AT&T, Advocate Aurora Health, Deloitte US, John Deere, Hyatt Corporation, Spark Foundry, Willis Towers Watson, Cleveland Avenue

Educational institutions represented by: Chicago Public Schools, Chicago State University, University of Illinois System, City Colleges of Chicago, National Louis University, Bradley University, Illinois State University, Northern Illinois University, Governors State University, Northeastern Illinois University, Southern Illinois University System, Illinois Central College

Philanthropy, community-based organizations, and advocates represented by: Joyce Foundation, Circle of Service Foundation, Metropolitan Family Services, Chicago Urban League, Coppin Memorial AME Church, Illinois Justice Project, Partnership for College Completion, Education Trust, Women Employed, Cleveland Avenue Foundation for Education

Public offices and agencies represented by: Illinois State House of Representatives, Illinois State Senate, City of Chicago, Illinois Community College Board, Illinois Student Assistance Commission

Student Focus Groups, including: high school and college students from Peoria, East St. Louis, DeKalb, and Chicagoland region.

Focus group with faith leaders and high school counselors