

# **PARTNERSHIP FOR COLLEGE COMPLETION**

*Accelerating action to close the graduation gap*

**CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**Illinois Equity in Attainment**

October 19, 2020



**CHICAGO STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

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## Executive Summary

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Chicago State University is excited to partner with PCC and our peer colleges and universities in Illinois who have joined ILEA in sharing best practices and support to close the gap in attainment for underrepresented minorities and low-income students in higher education by 2025. CSU is committed to providing an inclusive learning environment that helps students understand the social, natural, and intellectual world, and embraces a diversity of ideas in the arts and sciences and technology. CSU aims to help students develop into civically engaged citizens who understand the critical role that education plays in achieving social justice. The University seeks to fulfill a commitment to equity and advancement by taking an asset pedagogy approach to teaching and learning that situates students' experience and local knowledge as contributors to their success in the classroom and the global workforce.

CSU is Illinois's only four-year, public Predominantly Black Institution, and also serves a growing Latinx population. Thus, CSU is uniquely positioned to study effective student success strategies that lead to persistence and on-time degree completion among Black and Latinx populations. Due to our distinctive ecosystem, CSU is poised to make an important contribution to strategy and policy focused on student equity outcomes through our research on success stories *within* Black and Latinx populations (versus in comparison to white students). As a case in point, CSU's internal data indicate a notable difference in on-time degree completion rates among first-time freshmen versus transfer students. In 2019, which is the year of CSU's most recent data available at CSU, the six-year degree completion rate for first-time full-time freshmen was 17%, compared to 45% among transfer students.

An underreported yet critical equity gap in education attainment at CSU is located in the disparity between completion rates of Black and Latinx undergraduates who enter as freshmen and those who enter as transfer students. CSU is committed to closing the equity gap in completion rates between entering freshmen and transfer students. For the 2020-21 academic year, CSU has launched an ambitious program of student success initiatives, Cougar Commitment, which brings together a comprehensive tapestry of academic, financial, and holistic support for entering freshmen and transfer students. Chicago State University's equity goal is to increase our 4-year graduation rate by 10% and our 6-year graduation rate by 30% for all undergraduate students by 2025.

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## **Signature Page**

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***Chicago State University***  
***Equity Plan: 2020 - 2025***

This Equity Plan has been endorsed by the following members of our college/university community:

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# Introduction

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## ILEA Overview

Despite improvements in high school graduation and college matriculation rates for Illinois students, there are wide and persistent gaps in college completion rates especially for low-income, first-generation students, and students of color. The launch of the **Illinois Equity in Attainment (ILEA)** marks a major step forward for 25 two-year and four-year public and private non-profit colleges and universities from northeastern Illinois and across the state who are committing to eliminate racial and socio-economic achievement gaps by 2025, while aggressively increasing completion rates on their campuses.

ILEA is the signature initiative of the Partnership for College Completion (PCC), a non-profit organization founded in 2016 to catalyze and champion policies, systems, and practices that ensure all students can graduate from college and achieve their career aspirations. With an initial focus on northeastern Illinois, PCC has set a goal to eliminate institutional achievement gaps in college degree completion for low-income, Latinx and African American students in Illinois by 2025, establishing the region as a national leader in equity in attainment.

Beginning with this initial cohort, PCC will offer direct support and resources to the 25 colleges and universities who have volunteered to be members of ILEA. PCC will work alongside these partner colleges to jointly set commitments, identify appropriate evidence-based strategies to utilize on their campuses, and scale effective practices. PCC will support policy and practice change efforts that have the explicit goal of eliminating racial and socioeconomic degree completion gaps, while increasing institutional college completion rates overall.

By participating in ILEA, partners commit to a core set of principles:

- Colleges are responsible for graduating all of their degree-seeking students as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- All students can graduate with college degrees if they have the right information, tools, and support.

- Achievement gaps between low-income, Black and Latinx students and their higher-income and White peers are unacceptable and should be eliminated.
- These efforts will be undertaken without sacrificing institutional quality or excellence or increasing admission standards.

The ILEA colleges will conduct a deep analysis of their institutional data, develop equity plans that contain annual growth targets, and report progress toward their goals, which will be shared publicly. The colleges will also work to identify obstacles students face and develop programs and policies that break down unnecessary barriers to college graduation.

The launch of ILEA follows a galvanizing 2017 PCC report, “[Unequal Opportunity in Illinois: A Look at Who Graduates College and Why It Matters](#),” which found that only 34% of African American students who start at four-year institutions earn bachelor’s degrees within six years – a rate 33 percentage points below that of their white peers. For Latinx students, 49% are earning degrees, a gap of 17 percentage points. The completion gap between low-income and wealthier students is also alarming: according to Advance Illinois, only 37% of low-income students graduate in six years, while 75% of wealthier students do.

Increased and more equitable graduation outcomes across the diversity of our state’s higher education institutions benefits students, their families, and the state of Illinois. A 3% increase in graduation rates is projected to produce \$1.7B increase in net earnings, \$132M increase in tax revenue, and \$35M in public system savings. The progress of the ILEA member colleges and universities will provide a set of learnings that the Partnership will document and share with practitioners and policymakers across Illinois, the region and the nation, establishing a path forward that will promote equity in college achievement.

For more information on ILEA, please visit: <http://partnershipfcc.org/ilea>.

## **Institution Overview**

Founded in 1867, Chicago State University (CSU) is a public, comprehensive post-secondary institution that stands distinctively as one of Illinois’s oldest public universities, providing open access to higher education for students of diverse backgrounds and educational needs. CSU is a nationally accredited university with five colleges – Arts and Sciences, Business, Education, Health Sciences, and Pharmacy— offering over 70 undergraduate and graduate degree-granting and non-degree programs. Consistently evolving to reflect innovation in higher education, CSU prepares students for success in the twenty-first century.

CSU occupies a unique role in higher education in the State of Illinois with a focus on addressing the broad socio-economic gap between underrepresented minorities and a prosperous white

middle class. CSU is the only public four-year university serving the South Side of Chicago, and it remains the only four-year Predominantly Black Institution (PBI) in Illinois, as recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. CSU is a remarkable resource for higher education in a state where 15% of the population identifies as Black, and Chicago counts 30% of its residents as Black, with Latinx residents making up 29% of the city’s population.

In academic year 2019-20, CSU is proud to serve a diverse population of more than 3,000 student scholars, representing 36 states and 28 countries. Eighty percent of our students identify as Black and Latinx. 81% of our student body receives some form of financial aid. During the most recently completed school year, 52% of CSU’s undergraduate student population were transfers and 61% were first-generation college students.

As a public urban university, CSU explicitly embraces a mission built on teaching, research, service and community development, including social justice, leadership, and entrepreneurship. The mission resonates directly with the neighborhoods that CSU serves, which number amongst the most under-resourced in Chicago. By standard measures, CSU students would be considered “at-risk” by many other universities. CSU’s percentage of Pell Grant-eligible undergraduates, a standard poverty metric, is 89%. In other words, the majority of CSU’s undergraduate student population falls beneath the poverty line. This stands in contrast to Chicago’s poverty rate, which was 20% in 2019. CSU is working to provide access to higher education to the city’s most vulnerable population.

For many of our students, CSU holds the keys to bridging an attainment gap in education and all of the middle class benefits that education unlocks. For an urban population, access to employment, healthcare, and sustainable neighborhoods with shopping, schools and cultural opportunities, is essential.

Student demographics at CSU reflect the larger trends in urban education in the US. As seen in Table 1, the majority of CSU’s full-time enrolled student body are consistently transfer students. For instance, in 2019, nearly two-thirds of incoming freshmen were transfer students.

**Table 1. Chicago State University 5-Year Enrollment Trends**

Graduation year	# enrolled	% full-time students	% transfer students
Fall 2015	697	80%	71%
Fall 2016	295	78%	71%
Fall 2017	374	84%	65%
Fall 2018	496	78%	68%
Fall 2019	553	80%	65%

## Equity Statement



Chicago State University (CSU) recognizes and responds to the disadvantages students face when attempting to access higher education by taking an asset approach to teaching and learning. CSU seeks to address issues related to equity by determining that any suitable definition must address concerns related to sustainable access, opportunity, quality, and advancement for all students regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race and culture, gender identity, and sexual orientation. In addition, CSU is aware of and addresses barriers related to social, cultural, and economic capital that students face. The University is committed to providing an inclusive learning environment to all students that is global in scope and embraces a diversity of ideas in the arts and sciences and technology, in efforts to help students understand the social, natural, and intellectual world. The university is committed to developing civically engaged citizens that are committed to social justice and ready for the global labor market. The University seeks to fulfill the commitment to equity and advancement by taking an asset pedagogy approach to teaching and learning that situates students' experience and local knowledge as contributors to their success as opposed to impediments.

## **Campus Engagement Plan**

CSU serves a primarily commuter student body, with the majority of our students living off-campus, working full or part-time, and meeting family obligations. One of the challenges of working with a commuter student body is the competition for students' attention and time. With that in mind, we have developed a campus engagement plan that involves each of our five colleges. College deans will work with their department chairs and the Provost's Office to hold a series of daytime and evening panel discussions on the student success programs in our Cougar Commitment initiative, aimed at closing the gap in education attainment. CSU will begin a series of virtual campus panels on our ILEA Equity Plan in Spring 2021. In Fall 2021, our campus equity committee will work with leaders on campus and in Chicago to host a CSU Equity in Education forum. We hope to incorporate some of the innovative strategies adopted by other ILEA university partners like student storytelling and podcasts.

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## **Current State**

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### **Snapshot**

As a public urban university, CSU explicitly embraces a mission built on teaching, research, service and community development, including social justice, leadership, and entrepreneurship. The mission resonates directly with the neighborhoods that CSU serves, which number amongst the most under-resourced in Chicago. We know that our students are not all equally prepared for college, and that is a challenge to our mission of offering the broadest possible access to quality higher education. For many of our students, CSU holds the

keys to bridging an attainment gap in education and all of the middle class benefits that education unlocks. For an urban population, access to employment, healthcare, and sustainable neighborhoods with shopping, schools and cultural opportunities, is essential.

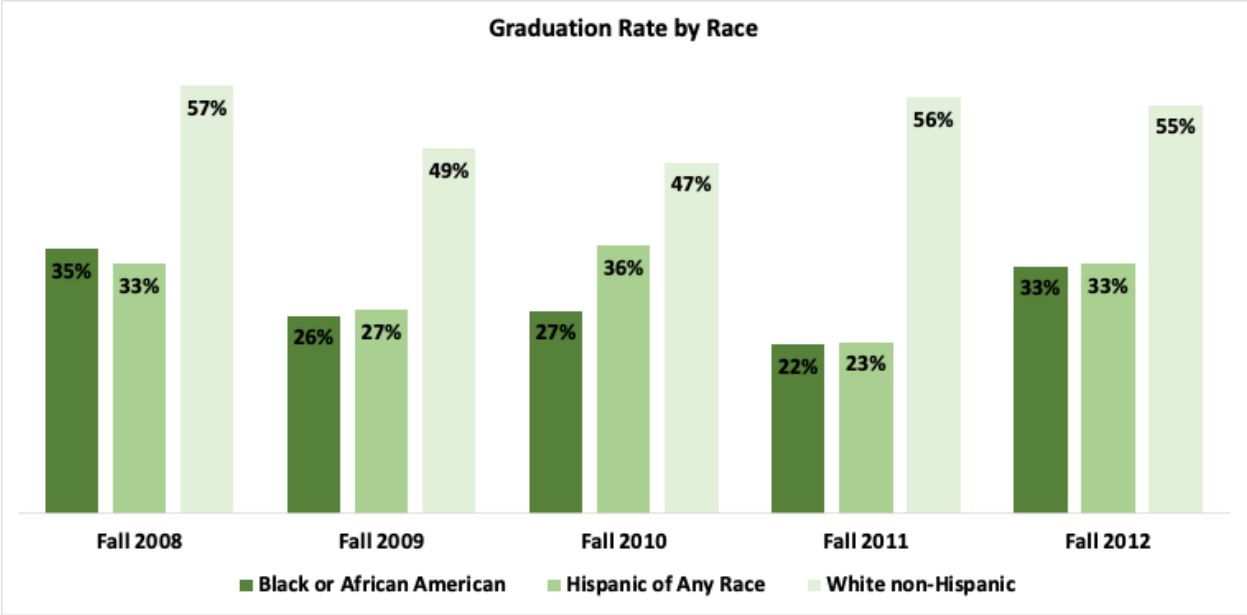
CSU is an anchor for economic and environmental development on the south side of Chicago through its leadership in expanding educational opportunities for traditional and non-traditional students, particularly those of color. CSU proudly serves as a highly accessible higher education institution, ensuring educational opportunities for underserved populations. As the institution undergoes a transformation to prioritize focus on dramatically increasing student retention and graduation rates, an examination of 150% completion graduation rates (6-year cohorts) would allow for a greater understanding of policy interventions.

Significantly, CSU’s full-time undergraduate student body is mostly made up of transfer students; first-time, full-time freshman, the “traditional” student model for most institutions of higher education, make up a smaller (but still important) portion of the CSU undergraduate population. For the 2019-20 academic year, approximately 36% of CSU’s undergraduate population entered as first-time, full-time freshmen. A majority of CSU undergraduates originally entered as transfer students: approximately 64% in the 2019-20 academic year.

Examining six-year graduation rates over a span of the past five years, by race, gender, and Pell Grant recipient status, it is clear that at Chicago State, the most significant gaps in attainment persist by race. As seen in Figure 1, for full-time enrolled students entering in Fall 2012, the graduate rates for African American students were 33%, 22 percentage points lower than for their White non-Hispanic classmates. However, given the differences in N between these student groups (see Table 2 for enrollment counts by race), and various other factors, a significance test will need to be conducted to understand the full scope of the gap.

**Table 2. Chicago State University 5-Year Enrollment Counts by Race**

	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	Fall 2012
Black or African American	665	859	790	676	527
Hispanic of Any Race	57	59	70	57	51
White non-Hispanic	28	39	32	36	22

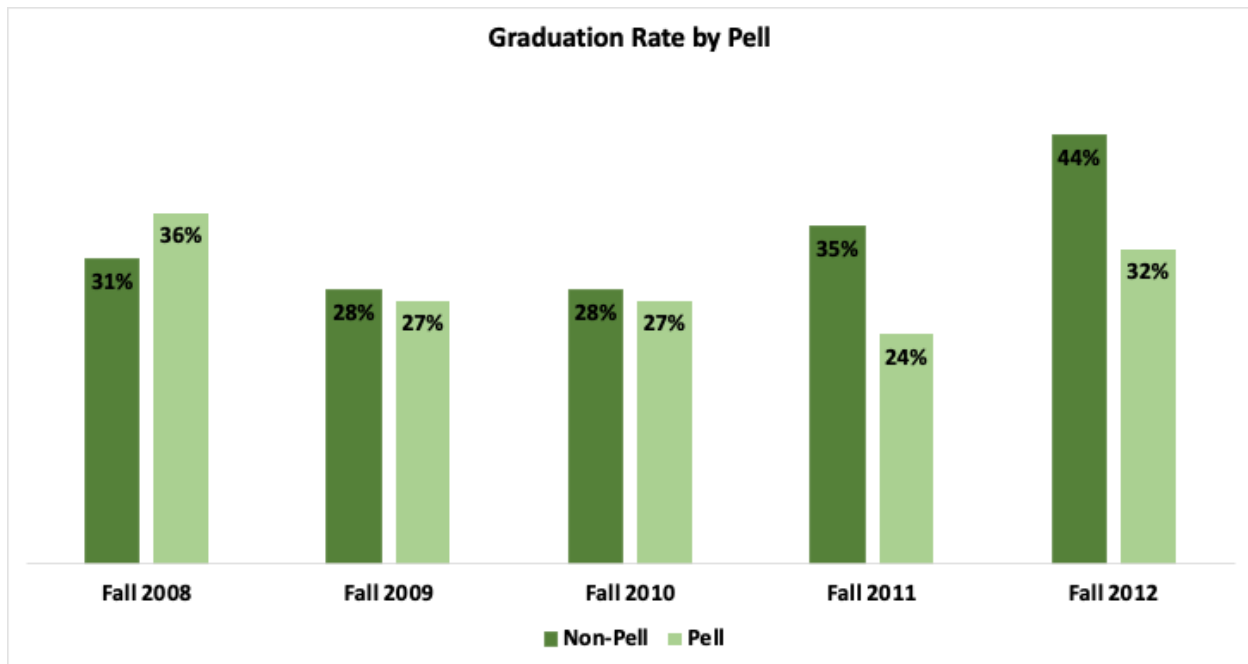


**Figure 1: Chicago State University Academic Years 2008-12 Graduation Rate by Race**

The federal Pell Grant helps to enable lower-income students to gain access to educational opportunities that can bolster their likelihood for social and economic mobility and success. However, we find that Pell recipients are less likely to graduate than non-Pell recipients (see Figure 2; see also Table 3 for enrollment counts by Pell Grant recipient status at CSU). It is noteworthy that, on average, over the past 5 years, 87% of CSU’s First-Time Full-Time Freshmen cohort were Pell recipients.

**Table 3. Chicago State University 5-Year Enrollment Counts by Pell Recipient Status**

	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	Fall 2012
Non-Pell	131	114	152	81	82
Pell	662	898	820	757	596



**Figure 2: Chicago State University Academic Years 2008-12 Graduation Rate by Pell Grant Status**

One of the primary intents of our equity plan is the examination of variables that might explain the attainment gap in 6-year graduation rates between entering full-time freshmen and transfer students in a student population. We define first-time, full-time (FTFT) students as those who enter CSU with 24 or less credit hours, and transfer students as those who transfer to CSU with 25 or more credit hours. Enrollment data for the past five years reveal that full-time enrolled students who enter as transfer students versus those who enter as first-time freshmen have markedly different rates of persistence and on-time graduation (see Tables 4a and 4b). The most recent five year average for six-year graduation rate for transfer students at CSU is 46%. For students who entered as freshmen, that same five-year average is 15%. In other words, the on-time graduation rate for transfer students is more than three times what it is for students entering as freshmen.

Our intention is to assess whether these two groups differ in fundamental ways prior to entering CSU, and to assess differences and similarities after matriculation. Some factors of comparison will include, for example, including economic capital (e.g., income bracket), cultural capital (e.g., parental education level), and psychological factors such as growth mindset and resilience in the face of challenges. In addition, choice of major, entering GPA, average age, WDF rates, and course enrollments. An important outcome of this equity gap study between transfer and FTFT students will be to develop an actionable plan to build on the success of our transfer students and to adapt and extend those strategies to our FTFT cohorts.

We recognize that effective student success initiatives need to reflect the different needs of our transfer and incoming FTFT students. A comprehensive strategic effort is underway to address both sets of needs with targeted incoming FTFT supports as well as implementing ongoing academic and non-academic student success programs to sustain and build on the ongoing success of our transfer student population.

**Table 4a. First-Time Full-time Freshman Graduation Rates**

Graduation year	# in Cohort	# Graduating in six years	% Graduating in six years
Fall 2015	589	65	11%
Fall 2016	523	70	13%
Fall 2017	430	51	12%
Fall 2018	263	48	18%
Fall 2019	225	38	17%

**Table 4b. Full-time Transfer Student Graduation Rates**

Graduation year	# in Cohort	# Graduating in six years	% Graduating in six years
Fall 2015	423	209	49%
Fall 2016	449	206	46%
Fall 2017	408	158	39%
Fall 2018	415	187	45%
Fall 2019	401	179	45%

## Strategies

Under previous administrations, CSU cultivated an institutional strategy which focused on providing academic support to students during their first year on campus, with a particular emphasis on retention from freshman to sophomore year. Two programs, RISE Academy and Freshman Seminars, were good examples of this approach, which ran for many years. A brief overview of those two programs is provided below. The current administration has built on that earlier work, integrating retention into a more comprehensive and deliberate approach to student success, measured by both persistence and on-time graduation rates. CSU's current institutional strategies, borne of the Student Success Task Force, are detailed later in the Institutional Strategies discussion.

### **RISE ACADEMY (prior to 2018)**

An earlier iteration of our RISE Academy (*Retention Initiative for Student Engagement*): RISE Academy was an academic enrichment program designed to help students become academically successful in their first year of college. Through participation in this intensive study skills program, students gain both the study skill set and confidence needed to tackle their classes and all the challenges that may come their way. Participants in the program are the university's at-risk students who have shown difficulty acclimating to the university and subsequently underperform. Freshman student athletes also participate in the program. Students work with staff from the Office of the First Year Experience, the Counseling Center, and the Learning Assistance Center who facilitate the program and are trained in the assessment and teaching of cognitive and non-cognitive skills. Analysis of the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI), which is given to students in RISE, showed that the mean LASSI post-test scores were on average higher than the mean LASSI pre-test scores. This suggests that low Negative Affect scores and high Overall Identity scores contribute significantly to study skills, meaning that students who participated in the program saw a positive change in their study skills which resulted in higher GPAs. Further, students who complete the program are more likely to return the following term as shown in the Table 5 below.

**Table 5. RISE Reenrollment Rates**

Term	Re Enrollment Rate for Completers	Re Enrollment Rate for Non-Completers
Fall 2015	100%	51%
Spring 2016	87%	56%
Fall 2016	100%	68%
Spring 2017	83%	45%

### **FRESHMEN SEMINAR PROGRAM (prior to 2018)**

Freshman Seminar courses are offered in Freshman Year Experience (FYE). FYE has two freshman seminar courses which help students transition successfully into college life. Both classes were designed to complement one another and to give students a full year of classroom instruction aimed at supporting their transition to college. The classes provide students with a sense of place

at the university, ensure they receive guidance from an instruction team (class instructor and an academic advisor), and encourage cohort building. Freshman Seminar classes are small so that students can build relationships with both their professor and classmates. The course is required for the University’s conditional admit population. This group is primarily made up of students who fall within the underrepresented category, especially as it speaks to first-generation, low-income students. The pass rates of students in these classes are monitored as they correlate directly to student success in other courses. Students who fail, withdraw, or receive a grade below a “C” are less likely to do well in other courses. The course is used to help track and monitor those students who are most “at-risk” for non-completion.

- **Freshman Seminar 1500 targets the Chicago State’s University College students.** The course focuses on the following topics: critical thinking skills, study skills, learning styles, test preparation skills, research skills, oral presentation skills, and writing assessments. The course explores interdisciplinary topics through case studies, written assignments, discussions, guest speakers, group work, and technology. Essential to the course is the incorporation of discipline-related learning strategies, the university’s academic policies and procedures, and current campus issues. Library information literacy and technology literacy are also introduced. Table 6a shows the enrollment and passage rates for Freshman Seminar 1500.

- **Freshman Seminar 1510** incorporates self-esteem building, understanding the role of self-esteem in college, risk taking behaviors, stereotypes, familial relationships, and academic support systems. The course also investigates majors and career outlooks for those majors. Table 6b shows the enrollment and passage rates for Freshman Seminar 1510.

**Table 6a. FRSE 1500 Pass Rates**

Year	Fall 2014	Spring 2015	Fall 2015	Spring 2016	Fall 2016	Spring 2017
FRSE 1500 Enrollment	79	19	197	30	79	15
Pass rate	90%	84%	84%	77%	82%	60%
Withdrawals	3	2	4	0	6	1
Failures	5	1	15	7	8	5

**Table 6b. FRSE 1510 Pass Rates**

Year	Fall 2014	Spring 2015	Fall 2015	Spring 2016	Fall 2016	Spring 2017
FRSE 1510 Enrollment	10	43	6	58	10	18
Pass rate	70%	79%	100%	81%	70%	89%
Withdrawals	1	3	0	1	1	1
Failures	2	7	0	11	2	2

CSU is in the process of rolling out a suite of institutional strategies designed to provide comprehensive support to students in the following areas: academics, financial need, and non-academic holistic programs. These areas were identified by the Student Success Task Force, which included senior campus leadership, faculty, staff and students, as essential to closing the gap in educational attainment between African American and non-Hispanic white students on our campus.

## Summary

Since its founding, Chicago State University has been dedicated to providing its students with the education needed to enter the professional workforce and create stable communities. As educational trends in urban areas have changed over time, both the needs of our students and the shape of our student population have shifted. CSU increasingly serves a majority transfer student population, with less than half of the student body entering as traditional full-time freshmen. Additionally, the average age of the undergraduate population is 30, as of 2019-20. As a result, we are working with older students whose needs for academic support differ from those of traditional entering freshmen.

Both of the programs, RISE Academy and Freshman Seminars, featured in our Current State discussion, are directed towards supporting incoming freshman students in their first year of study on campus. While we must continue to assess support measures for this population and innovate academic programming, we also recognize that we need to better identify and serve the needs of all of our student population, in particular, our transfer students.

Looking ahead, CSU senior leadership is committed to the strategic allocation of resources for maximum social impact and successful student outcomes. Our institutional strategies will



include ongoing academic support programs to keep all students on track to timely graduation, and the implementation of non-academic support systems to address material needs like child care and food and housing insecurity.

## **Resources**

University senior leadership is deeply committed to the goal of equity in educational attainment and making CSU a genuinely student-centered university. Our most valuable resource lies in our human capital. Faculty, students, and community members are being engaged to develop a culture of collective accountability for student success on campus, where the expectation is for all students to graduate on time, regardless of race, financial need, or transfer status. Specific details for material support and capital resources are identified later in this report in the Institutional Strategies discussion.

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## **Future Vision**

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### **Goal**

*The goal of this equity plan and the Illinois Equity in Attainment Initiative is to eliminate disparities in degree completion rates on our campus between FTFT freshmen and FT transfer students.*

Throughout our 152-year history, Chicago State University's students, faculty, staff, and alumni have achieved countless innovations and successes, all of which have helped shape CSU into the institution it is today. Since the 1960s in particular, CSU has emerged as a leader among public higher education institutions in Illinois that provides high access for a broad range of students, including first-generation college students, adult learners, and student parents. CSU is proud to educate and provide economic and social mobility for underserved populations, and will remain ever-more committed to that mission going forward. Higher education is an investment in the future of Illinois, and we all must continue to prioritize it.

The senior leadership of Chicago State University has established that as part of the 2020-25 strategic plan for the university and keeping consistent with the priorities for the university's FY21 operating budget and beyond, student success and enrollment management are among the top strategic priorities for the university. Importantly, these priorities are overarching and are meant to guide the work of all internal divisions, departments, and offices towards the goals of increasing retention and graduation rates for all CSU students, as well as remaining committed to increasing access for underserved populations. Innovative strategies for populations that CSU is best positioned to enroll and graduate are necessary, so the key sub-priorities under these two priorities include a focus on data-driven decision-making and workforce development and planning.

Pertinent to an emphasis on data-driven decision-making, the intention is for the development, implementation, and evaluation of student success and enrollment initiatives and projects to be grounded in analysis and academic research. Additionally, comprehension of best practices in the industry are also key to this approach. The application of data-driven decision-making in student success and enrollment allows for a deeper understanding of the context and issue at hand for each focus area, such as the impact on GPA from a student's inability to secure safe housing during a semester or how workforce trends drive course selection among older-than-typical college students.

These deeper level analyses would serve to complement basic generalized analyses of student demographic information and key originating information (i.e. the most prior institution that a student attended). The students that CSU are most likely to serve are the least likely to receive opportunities for graduation and to enroll; therefore altogether, this understanding would help shape the initiatives designed to increase student success and enrollment. This would also help overcome the lack of inertia towards reform when departments and personnel simply rely on how "things have always been done." Dramatic changes are needed in the approach of the development, implementation, and evaluation of student success and enrollment in order to realize the improvements necessary for not just CSU, but for Illinois and Chicago as well. The state has set a goal, and has been working with many partners, to increase the proportion of Illinoisans with postsecondary credentials to 60% by the year 2025. However, Illinois cannot reach that goal without educating and graduating students of color, and Illinois cannot get there without Chicago State University.

Regarding the sub-priority of workforce development and planning, all employees at CSU should recognize that no matter what position they hold, they are important contributors to student success and enrollment at the institution. The underlying foundational reform that has to occur in regards to workforce development and planning would involve training to affect the culture change of the work environment among all employees. The future vision of CSU would be to have every employee understand their role in supporting student success and enrollment. This would include the reaffirmation of the commitment to the mission and vision of the institution. Altogether, the culture shift in workforce development and planning would induce accountability across the campus for the top priorities of student success and enrollment as part of Chicago State University's future vision.

Chicago State's equity plan and goals for student success will focus primarily on addressing the gap in degree completion between FTFT and transfer students, with particular focus on among Black and Latinx students. In this way, we will be able to accumulate lessons learned from successful transfer students who are also students of color, and apply those lessons to enhance degree completion among FTFT students, who need support in order to graduate on time.

In alignment with the goals of the ILEA Equity Plan but in understanding the demographics and make-up of the student population, CSU is focused on increasing degree completion rates for **all** of our students, across all race and ethnicities, sex and gender spectrums, ages, and socioeconomic groups. To that end, **the benchmark overall goal for CSU is to achieve an increase of 30% in the institution's 6-year undergraduate cohort graduation rates over the next five years, ending in 2025.**

CSU's institutional strategies aiming to meet this benchmark employ a multi-faceted approach designed to provide integrated support that ensures that the needs of both transfer students and students entering as FTFT students are effectively addressed. Our strategies fall into three main categories: academic support programs, financial support programs, and holistic student support programs (detailed in *Institutional Strategies* section). Program evaluation will involve clearly defined metrics and ongoing assessment to enable dynamic adjustments to programs as appropriate in real time (detailed in *Evaluation Plan* section).

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## **Institutional Strategies**

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CSU's equity plan is directly related to our institutional success with transfer students, and will be informed by a data-driven analysis of the 6-year degree completion rates across our student demographic groups. We aim to leverage institutional outcomes with transfer students to continue the growth in their success, while simultaneously implementing student success programs which are intentionally designed to support retention and increase graduation rates for freshmen. These integrated student success strategies, collectively named "Cougar Commitment", are introduced below. As we move forward with the execution of the different programs with Cougar Commitment, it will be critical to include ongoing program assessment, combined with the ability to make appropriate adjustments to challenges and opportunities in real time.

CSU rolled out a set of intentional, coordinated student success initiatives in January 2019, which represents a carefully curated, comprehensive suite of high-quality academic programming, non-cognitive supports, and scholarships intentionally designed to achieve a common goal: increase student enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. That set of integrated academic and holistic programs are now designated as Cougar Commitment. CSU is confident that the successful implementation of Cougar Commitment will drive measurable—and sustainable—strides in closing the black education and resources gap in Chicago and the State of Illinois. Programs are roughly grouped into three categories: academic support, financial support, and holistic support.

### **Academic Support Programs**

#### ***Rise Academy***

*Rise* targets entering FTFT freshmen. Research suggests that the more obstacles which students face on their way to college-level courses, the more likely they are to stop out or drop out. The academic gap between college-level expectations and high school experience can exert an important impact on success in college and early persistence rates. To address this, CSU has revised its summer bridge and support program for conditionally admitted freshman. In the past, the summer bridge and support program was focused on preparing students to pass the university placement examinations in English, math, and reading. The *Rise Academy*, our redesigned summer program, now enrolls students in a five-week credit-bearing course

alongside required tutoring and intensive academic advising. Students enrolled in the *Rise* Academy meet daily with an academic advisor to discuss challenges and goals related to academic success. Along with the daily meetings, students participate in a series of workshops that focus on goal-setting, self-reflection, and career-planning.

CSU's first *Rise* Academy class was admitted during the summer of 2019. Over 97% of *Rise* Academy students passed the English I course with a grade of "C" or better. The program evaluation data highlighted. We learned that an early start to college better prepares students for the rigor and the demands of college. Previous strategies focused on preparing students for placement tests and avoiding remediation. This institutional strategy is designed to foster students' transition into college through a robust summer program that includes exposure to college-level courses and intensive advising on academic goals. In addition, this strategy also helps to establish a learning community, in which students not only participate in daily workshops and tutoring but build social networks with their peers. Furthermore, this institutional strategy helps to socialize students to the campus environment and available resources. Subsequent to completing the program, the students will have a peer network and will continue with their learning communities, tutoring, workshops throughout the entire academic year.

*Rise* Academy was rolled out in Summer 2020 as a program that is now fully integrated into the academic year, and offered to all incoming freshmen. *Rise* students were offered a full-year tuition scholarship upon successful completion of their summer course. In addition, each student was given a laptop and book vouchers to reduce barriers to entry. Because of the pandemic, classes and most events were conducted virtually, although career workshops, study tools and advising sessions were still a central component of the program.

### **Corequisite Support in Math and English**

This program supports both FTFT and transfer freshmen students. Traditional models for developmental course delivery increase students' time to completion by requiring students to take classes that do not count toward graduation and carry a social and/or academic stigma. At CSU, 80% of first-year students place in at least two developmental courses. This has led to decreased retention and increased time to graduation.

To address this concern, CSU has adopted a corequisite support model for English and math courses. The English department changed to this model some years ago, which resulted in demonstrated success in persistence among students. This strategy helps to remove the social and academic stigma of remedial education; embeds the necessary support for students who have limited college readiness skills; and provides a space for students to persist towards completion of degree requirements. Credit-bearing corequisite courses count towards graduation, unlike their remedial counterparts, which added time to degree. In Fall 2019, CSU's Math department followed suit, and eliminated its remedial math courses. These were replaced by two corequisite courses which satisfy the math requirement for general education. One course was developed to meet the gap for students in STEM fields, while the other course addresses the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) for general math. Placement exams help to ensure that students are enrolled in the appropriate course level.

## **Intensive Advising**

This program supports all CSU students. Many CSU students come from backgrounds that have been underserved by a traditional college approach and are identified as a “high-need” population due to circumstances such as socioeconomic challenges, housing or food insecurity, and under-preparation due to previous school of attendance. Therefore, our students require intensive advisor relationships with multiple touches and wraparound services across multiple methods on a wide variety of topics. CSU is training all advisors in a coaching model that focuses on resource planning. Advisors will become more knowledgeable of the services available through the University and University partners as well as what are some of the non-cognitive factors addressing students.

## **Embedded Tutors, Enhanced Tutoring, and Learning Assistants**

This program supports all CSU students. To address student success in courses with high failure rates, CSU recently launched a pilot program involving embedded tutors, strategically targeting courses with high failure and withdrawal rates in the social sciences and humanities. The departments of Psychology, Art and Design, and English and Foreign Languages are hosting the initial phase of embedded tutors.

CSU is also piloting a peer-to-peer support system through a select number of Learning Assistants. Learning Assistants go through training courses in pedagogy and learning theory, and are then able to work with faculty to facilitate an active learning environment. The students facilitate during class and also hold office hours outside of class to assist other students.

CSU has also increased its use of online tutoring, which enables students to access assistance around the clock. In addition to math, computer science, and chemistry, online tutoring has grown to include subjects with high student demand, such as accounting, finance, and art history.

## **Financial Support Programs**

Given the financial constraints of our students, students have significant financial needs and limited access to external financial resources. These programs are open to all students.

### **Finish Strong Micro Grants**

Micro grants are designed to fill the financial gap for upper division students who may fall short of graduating due to small financial obligations. This institutional strategy will remove small financial impediments that may prevent students close to completing their undergraduate education. According to The Hechinger Report (2018), thousands of college students drop-out of school resulting from the inability to pay hundreds of dollars of small tuition costs or fall short a few credits hours for degree completion. Finish Strong microgrants (maximum of \$1,000 per semester; not to exceed three semesters) are designed to help students cover modest financial shortfalls when there is a gap between what is owed to the University and what is

available to the student through federal, state, and institutional financial aid and scholarship sources. Senior- and junior-level students receive priority for Finish Strong scholarships. Students are informed of the deposit and encouraged to continue on with their educational pursuit.

### **Cougar Returns Debt-Forgiveness**

Cougars Returns is a debt-forgiveness program for students who stopped out of the university. The program is designed to assist students to complete their degrees. Students with less than a \$1500 balance are encouraged to reapply to CSU. Cougar Returns provides a plan for debt forgiveness of \$500 each semester if the student remains enrolled and continues progress towards degree completion over the next four semesters.

Students work closely with their academic advisors to determine a clear plan for completion. The Offices of the Bursar and Financial Aid are integral participants in the program, working directly with students to identify options for financing their education and the process for debt-forgiveness.

### **Campus Housing Scholarships**

Student living arrangements can pose another barrier to stability and success. Unsupportive environments, extensive commuting challenges and unsafe communities create additional obstacles that students must overcome. Students who are able to live in residential housing on campus can avoid many of these environmental obstacles, and instead focus on their studies within a peer network of support.

CSU has committed to funding 50 campus housing scholarships, open to all students seeking to reside on campus. Students can apply for a housing scholarship and submit a short essay on how living in the campus housing will support their education. Students who receive the scholarship will be required to participate in an "U Lead" learning community as well as engage in student service activities and at least one student organization. The students will receive additional support from their academic advisors. In fall 2019, 389 students received housing scholarships and the retention from fall to spring for students in housing was 95%.

### **Holistic Support Programs to Aid College Persistence, Graduation and Career Readiness**

CSU recognizes that a number of non-academic barriers can impact our students' ability to complete college and thus CSU is committed to reducing these barriers by providing appropriate "non-academic" support programs. These programs are open to all students and include the following:

#### **Child Care Center**

CSU is in the process of developing a comprehensive program of support which will provide childcare services to students, faculty, and staff year around. The campus child care center is slated to launch in Fall 2020. The center will give the children of enrolled students preferential acceptance. One of the strategic goals of the center is to provide needed support to student

parents as they balance the demands of their academic studies, family obligations, and work. Child care fees will be based on a sliding scale depending on family income, since the intention is to provide student parents with reliable, on-campus, affordable care.

### **Campus Food Pantry**

In Fall 2019, CSU opened a food pantry in partnership with the Greater Food Depository of Chicago in response to food insecurity amongst our student body. The food pantry is currently open one day a week and is available to students and staff. The pantry has received strong usership, recording 583 unique individual visits, and 1160 repeat visits within six months of its initial launch.

### **Wellness and Health Initiative**

Data shows that students in our socio-economic demographic experience a range of health and wellness challenges that can have a serious impact on their ability to complete and succeed in their programs of study. We are committed to providing students with support in those areas and will be undertaking data analysis to identify areas of opportunity in the following: 1) health education; 2) health screening; 3 ) health promotion and wellness strategies; and 4) access to health resources. At this time, priorities within each area have not yet been identified.

### **Financial Literacy**

CSU recognizes that financial literacy provides valuable long-term knowledge and tools for student success. CSU is committed to developing and implementing a comprehensive financial literacy program. Financial stress is a real obstacle to academic success that Chicago State students face. Part of our Cougar Commitment plan is to provide them with better information, advising, and the tools necessary to tackle financial problems.

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## **Evaluation Plan**

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Evaluation will involve research on understanding transfer students' relatively higher persistence and retention rates at CSU compared to FTFT freshmen students, and assessment of Institutional Strategies centered around our Cougar Commitment. Our evaluation will include on key performance indicators (KPIs) such as:

- Student retention from freshman to sophomore year
- Academic performance (i.e., GPA, course pass/fail rates)
- Degree completion within six years of enrollment

Regarding research on transfer students, our intention is to assess whether they differ in fundamental ways prior to entering CSU by observing whether discrepancies exist in factors

that predict student success, including economic capital (e.g., income bracket), cultural capital (e.g., parental education level), and psychological factors such as growth mindset and resilience in the face of challenges. We are also developing a comprehensive plan to analyze differences and similarities in FTFT freshmen and transfer students after matriculation. The plan aims to evaluate factors such as: major and program choice, college affiliation, career plan, etc.

Evaluation of Institutional Strategies will include both formative (process) and a summative (impact) assessment. The evaluation plan will be designed to ensure that: a) strategies are monitored systematically and on an on-going basis to provide opportunities to make changes as needed; b) metrics will be used to assess KPIs, with particular attention to whether strategies are effective for transfer vs. FTFT freshmen students.

Formative Evaluation. Student surveys will be conducted to capture feedback on the student experience, and whether they feel it is having any effect on their personal and academic wellbeing. Faculty and staff surveys will be conducted to capture feedback on the implementation process and experience. In addition to self-reported survey data, qualitative data will be collected via focus groups/interviews to augment our understanding of whether and to what degree programs are meeting their goals. Finally, we will collect counts of the number of students who are participating in programs in order to assess whether programs are reaching the intended number of students.

Summative Evaluation. Summative outcomes will be retention in college year to year, students' academic success (e.g., GPA), financial data, and six-year completion of their degree programs. These data will be obtained through CSU institutional records on a timeline that aligns with when data are updated. That is, students' course grades are updated each semester, retention from year to year is updated annually, and six-year completion rates are available every six years; analysis will align with these timepoints.

A key aspect of summative evaluation will be assessment of whether interventions are particularly effective for **first-time freshmen versus transfer students**, when appropriate. Such a comparison would not be appropriate for the RISE Academy, given that transfer students are not eligible to participate in this program.

Whenever possible, **program participants' outcomes will be compared against non-participants'** outcomes using statistical matching techniques that cull appropriate comparison groups (e.g., propensity score matching), and that control for any confounding variables that might erroneously explain intervention effects (e.g., high school GPA; socio-economic status). In the case that data for non-participants are insufficient for statistical analysis, data will be aggregated across multiple years/cohorts in order to conduct comparative analysis. Comparative data will either be concurrent with program participants' data (e.g., RISE Academy participants' GPA compared to non-participants' GPA during the same academic year), or will be historic data culled from university records (e.g., current students' GPA compared to past students' GPA, capturing the effect of the Intensive Advising program versus lack of Intensive Advising program during an academic year).



## Budget

Institutional Strategy	Budget Implications	Revenue Source (New/Existing)	Sustainability Plan
<i>E.g. Strategy #2A Professional development for faculty to deploy classroom strategies for improving retention &amp; course performance</i>	<i>E.g. Reallocate existing funding in Y1; leverage PCC faculty supports; additional funding required in Y2 and beyond</i>	<i>E.g. Redirect 50% of existing faculty PD funding to equity-based approaches.</i>	<i>E.g. Target portion of any new base operating funding to PD and solicit grant funding</i>
<b>RISE Academy</b>	Reallocate internal resources in Y1	Existing resources	Philanthropic efforts and grant applications to scale program
<b>Corequisite Support in Math &amp; English</b>	None	Existing resources through curriculum revisions	Maintain existing personnel
<b>Intensive Advising</b>	Philanthropic support for Y1 and beyond	New revenue source from external partners	Retrain existing personnel
<b>Tutoring &amp; LAs</b>	Reallocate internal resources in Y1	Existing resources	Philanthropic efforts and grant

			applications to scale program
<b>Microgrants</b>	Reallocate existing funding for institutional aid	Existing revenue source	Philanthropic efforts to expand grant amounts
<b>Debt forgiveness</b>	None	None	Program has potential to generate revenue
<b>Wellness &amp; health</b>	None	Existing resources	Expand industry and community partnerships to scale programs
<b>Child Care Center</b>	Philanthropic support for Y1	New resources	Grant applications and public support to support operations
<b>Financial literacy</b>	None	Existing resources	Expand program offerings with support from ISAC and other partners
<b>Food pantry</b>	Reallocate internal resources in Y1	New resources	Philanthropic efforts to expand grant amounts

## Timeline

### **Phase One: 2019-2021**

- RISE Academy
- Corequisite support in Math and English
- Intensive advising
- Tutoring and learning assistants
- Microgrants
- Debt forgiveness
- Child care center
- Food pantry
- Financial literacy
- Career services

### **Phase Two: 2022-24**

- Wellness and Health Initiative
- Scale food pantry

### Phase Three: 2025-27

- Scale microgrants
- Scale tutoring and learning assistants
- Scale RISE Academy

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## ILEA Team

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ILEA Core Team	
<i>First name, Last name</i>	<i>Position</i>
Dr. Leslie Roundtree	Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs
Kim H. Tran	Chief of Staff, Office of the President
Dr. Mary Daniels	Associate Provost, Academic Innovation and Strategic Initiatives
William Sanders	Associate Director, Institutional Effectiveness Research
ILEA Leadership Team	
Zaldwaynaka Z Scott, Esq.	President
Dr. Leslie Roundtree	Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs
Mr. Kim H. Tran	Chief of Staff, Office of the President
Dr. Concetta Williams	Professor, Department of English
Dr. April Bernard	Associate Professor, Department of Criminal Justice
Prof. Amzie Moore	Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work / Master of Social Work Program
Dr. Mary Daniels	Associate Provost for Faculty Innovation and Strategic Initiatives
Dr. Jane Stout	Assistant Director of Data Analytics
Ms. Aspen Clemons	Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the President

Dr. Reginald Motley	Dean of Students
Dr. Latrice Eggleston Williams	Director, Institutional Effective and Research
Mr. William Sanders	Associate Director, Institutional Effectiveness and Research
<b>Key Campus Leaders Consulted for Equity Plan Development</b>	
Dr. LeRoy Jones II	Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Prof. Derrick Collins	Dean, College of Business
Dr. Matthew Fete	Dean, College of Pharmacy
Dr. Devi Potluri	Dean, School of Graduate and Professional Studies

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## Glossary

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**Cohort – A way of grouping students to compare across a number of access, performance, persistence, and completion indicators.** In the Excel file that accompanies these documents and is used to set disaggregated early momentum and degree completion targets in service of eliminating gaps among target student groups, cohort refers to when students entered the college/university (e.g. Fall 2019 cohort is the student group that entered the institution in the fall of 2019). Secondly, we also refer to the ILEA cohort as the group of 25 member colleges and universities.

**Completion Gap – The difference in college completion rates between student groups at the same college or university.** ILEA is focused on the completion gap between African American and White students, Latino/a, and White students, and low-income and higher income students (as indicated by Pell receipt).

**Equity – A campus culture and environment in which every student receives the support they need to complete their degree equitably and in a timely manner when compared to their peers in other racial or socioeconomic groups.** PCC is interested in supporting ILEA cohort members as they refine how they support African American, Latino/a, and low-income students on their campuses. This can include redesigning existing supports, creating new supports and eliminating seen and unseen barriers for student success.

**Equity Plan – A roadmap that outlines how each ILEA cohort member plans to close gaps in degree attainment for low-income, African American, and Latino/a students.** The ILEA Equity Plan will describe how each cohort member plans to close gaps in degree attainment for the target student groups.

**Graduation Rate – The percentage of students that complete their degree.** For students enrolled in community college, completing their degree in 2 years is 100% time and completing their degree in 3 years is 150% time. For students enrolled in a four-year institution, completing

their degree in 4 years is 100% time and completing their degree in 6 years is 150% time. There are specific time to degree periods for analysis, goal setting, and reporting within the Equity Plan for different target populations (e.g. entering freshmen, transfer students, part-time students).

**Illinois Equity in Attainment (ILEA) – A Partnership for College Completion (PCC) initiative that aims to close gaps in degree attainment among different racial and socioeconomic groups at 25 two-year and four-year public and private non-profit colleges and universities in the state of Illinois.** We aim to accomplish this goal by supporting, convening, and providing targeted resources, training, and support to the 25 ILEA cohort members, and facilitating the process of developing and executing on a campus-wide equity plan.

**Lagging Indicator – A metric that represents the measurement of a specific output over time.** For ILEA, an example of a lagging indicator is a graduation rate, by time to degree and particular student population. Graduation rates are our ultimate goal

**Leading Indicator – A metric that has evidence of being a predictor of a specific outcome.** A leading indicator is often referred to as an early momentum indicator. We are interested in tracking a set of metrics that have evidence of predicting degree completion and measuring progress toward that goal. For community colleges, these metrics include: credits accumulated first fall, credits accumulated first year, gateway course completion, and fall 1 to fall 2 persistence. For 4-year universities, these metrics include: credits accumulated first fall, credits accumulated first year, gateway course completion in year 1, fall 1 to fall 2 persistence, credits accumulated by end of second year, and fall 2 to fall 3 persistence.

**Institutional Strategy – A reform strategy that affects at least 50% of the total targeted student population that it aims to serve.** For ILEA, we are interested in implementing institutional strategies we believe they have the requisite scale to significantly impact equity in degree completion.

**150% Time – Refers to students' time to degree.** 150% time refers to the percentage of students that complete their degree within three years for associate degree seekers and within six years for bachelor's degree seekers.