

UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN ILLINOIS:

A Look at Who Graduates College and
Why It Matters — A Meta-Analysis

September 2017

**PARTNERSHIP FOR
COLLEGE COMPLETION**

Accelerating action to close the graduation gap

This report was co-authored by Monica Martinez of EduDream and the Partnership for College Completion (PCC) with additional comments and suggestions from Advance Illinois, the Lumina Foundation, the Education Trust, and numerous individuals who have helped shape the questions raised in this report and their implications for the future of our work.

This report would have not been possible without the guidance of the PCC Board of Directors and the generous support of the PCC Investors Council, whose contributions exemplify their deep commitment to our young people and their futures.

Letter from the Board Chair & Executive Director

September 2017

The Partnership for College Completion is a new organization with a charge to advance system level change to improve college graduation rates for low-income and first generation students in the Chicago metro area. Since being launched by the foundation community in and around Chicago, PCC has listened to leaders in higher education, K-12, philanthropy, business, local and state government, nationally focused higher education organizations, and others to understand the unique challenges facing low-income students in Illinois, as well as the innovative approaches to meeting those challenges.

Illinois is the 6th most populous state in the country with the 5th largest economy. Maintaining or even improving these data requires that Illinois build a dynamic and diverse workforce and civic culture capable of producing a state in which opportunities are equal and pathways to progress numerous. Recently, with the passage of Senate Bill 1, Illinois finally recognized that the K-12 schools serving low-income students have greater and more complex needs. This basic recognition has not, however, extended to higher education. The bitter irony is that at a time in Illinois when the population of low-income students is increasing, funding to the state's higher education system has continued to diminish.

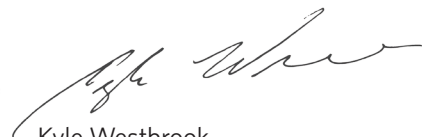
In this report, we synthesize previously published reports and data from state agencies like the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, the Illinois Board of Higher Education as well as national researchers such as the Education Trust, Complete College America, and others to shed light on the complex challenges facing low-income and first generation students in Illinois. These data and reports paint a sobering picture of the current trajectory of low-income students and students of color as they attempt to earn the degrees and credentials necessary for full participation in the state's economic and civic life.

The Partnership will use this and subsequent publications to both raise public awareness on issues related to improving completion rates for low-income students, as well as inform our work alongside institutions of higher education and elected officials.

While the challenges that students face in graduating on time and with as little debt as possible are growing, so is the commitment by leaders in higher education, philanthropy, and local government to collaborate in support of our students. Innovative approaches and initiatives are being implemented across the nation and within the state of Illinois to urgently address the challenges that our students are facing. We look forward to working in partnership with these leaders and others in the state to reverse the current direction of the state and instead chart a path for Illinois to become a leader equity in attainment.



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Chair, Partnership for College Completion



Kyle Westbrook
Executive Director, Partnership for College Completion

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Executive Summary

Postsecondary educational attainment is now more important to the state and nation's economic success than ever before. College completion leads to economic mobility and increased social capital that benefits all Illinois communities. However, low-income students and students of color are disproportionately impacted by inequities in our education system. While college enrollment rates of Black and Latino high school graduates have increased, they are still lower than those of their White peers. Far more worrisome are the college completion gaps. While 58 percent of college students from Illinois graduate in six years, wide disparities exist between low-income and wealthier students. In a state where nearly half of high school graduates are low-income and over 40 percent are Black or Latino, increasing the college persistence and completion rates for low-income, first generation, and students of color is not only a moral imperative, but critical to Illinois' workforce and economic health.

In this report, we discuss what recent literature and data tell us about college affordability and accessibility in Illinois and draw attention to how low-income, first generation, and students of color fare in our higher education system. We also highlight key opportunities to increase college access and success for low-income students and students of color. Finally, we call on college administration, faculty and staff, state agencies, legislators, nonprofits, advocates, and others to join us to urgently address these issues. This executive summary outlines some of the high-level findings from this analysis.

Affordability and Financial Aid: A postsecondary education is no longer affordable for many low-income students and their families in Illinois.

College affordability is about more than tuition and fees. It reflects students' and their families' ability to meet higher education expenses and maintain a reasonable standard of living. Traditional financial aid such as grants and loans are often inadequate to cover the true cost of attending college. In Illinois, low-income families face greater financial burdens as the cost of college rises. The statistics below highlight the significant costs of college in Illinois:

- Illinois ranks 32nd in college affordability for median-income families.¹ While median income families need to set aside 25 percent of their total income for a student to a

¹ Advance Illinois. "Every Student Counts: The State We're In 2016-2017. A Report on Public Education in Illinois." 2016. Retrieved July 7, 2017

attend public four-year institution, low-income families require 63 percent of family income.²

- In fiscal year 2016, Illinois' average public university in-state tuition and fees were the fifth highest in the nation.³
- Among Illinois students who graduate from public and private four-year institutions, two-thirds have debt with an average of nearly \$30,000.⁴

Furthermore, the Illinois state budget challenges have led to reductions in funding for the state's community colleges and public universities. These higher education cuts disproportionately impact low-income students and students of color who are more likely to receive need-based aid and attend public institutions. Rising tuition and decreased purchasing power of financial aid has likely contributed to a mass exodus of college students from Illinois. Given the state's demographics, addressing college affordability to retain college-bound students will be critical to Illinois' short and long-term viability.

- Illinois is one of only four states that cut funding of higher education over the last two fiscal years, a year to year difference of 68 percent.⁵
- The cost of attending college in Illinois has far outpaced the amount of Monetary Award Program (MAP) grants available, which help make college possible, especially for students of color. Over half of MAP recipients are first generation students and more than half of Black and Latino undergraduates at public universities receive a MAP grant.⁶
- In fiscal year 2016, over 160,000 students (50 percent of those eligible) could not claim awards due to insufficient funding.⁷
- In 2014, Illinois was 49th in the nation in net migration of college freshmen to other states' public colleges, a 70 percent increase over a decade.⁸

Access: College access has improved, but gaps persist for low-income students and students of color in Illinois.

As a state, Illinois has made great gains in on-time high school graduation rates leading to increased college access. But low-income students and students of color are still not enrolling in college at the same rates as their wealthier peers. Moreover, they attend less selective institutions that have lower completion rates. As a result, students of color are less likely to earn college degrees.

- Undergraduate enrollment of Illinois students of color has steadily increased in the

2 Midwest Higher Education Compact. Higher Education in Focus: Selected Performance Indicators, 2014-2015.

3 The College Board, "Trends in College Pricing 2016," 2016, 20.

4 Cochrane, D. & Chang, D. "Student Debt and the Class of 2015: 11th Annual Report." Project on Student Debt (2016).

5 Center for Tax Budget Accountability. "Illinois' Significant Disinvestment in Higher Education." (2017).

6 Illinois Student Assistance Commission. "Monetary Award Program (MAP) Evaluation," 2015.

7 Illinois Student Assistance Commission. "2016 Data Book," 2016.

8 Illinois Board of Higher Education. (January 2017). Outmigration Context: Residence and Migration Patterns of Freshmen Students into and from Illinois (IBHE DataPoints 2017-1). Springfield, IL.

last ten years, from 37 percent in 2006 to 46 percent of total enrollment in 2016.⁹

- Black and Latino students in the state tend to be more highly concentrated in community colleges and for-profit institutions than their peers; 46 percent of Black and 55 percent of Latino student were enrolled in public two-year institutions compared to 23 percent in public four-year institutions.¹⁰
- From 2011 to 2015, Illinois saw a drastic decrease in African-American undergraduate enrollment in public institutions (25% total decrease).¹¹

Completion and Success: College completion rates in Illinois remain unequal along racial and ethnic lines

While national college completion rates for Latinos and African-Americans have been climbing upward, gaps persist between these groups and their White peers. Stark disparities exist across racial lines, particularly for community college students.

- In Illinois, the average college completion rate in 2015 was 61.7 percent at a four-year public institution and 25.5 percent at a two-year public institution.¹²
- In contrast, only 33.7 percent of Black students who start at four-year institutions earn bachelor's degrees within six years—a rate 32.7 percentage points below that of their White peers.¹³
- The completion gap between low-income and wealthier students is alarming: only 37 percent of low-income students graduate in six years while 75 percent of wealthier students do.¹⁴

Implications for Policy and Practice

Recent trends in college affordability, access and attainment have clear implications for state policy leaders, practitioners, and community leaders committed to improving post-secondary success. There is a real opportunity to champion targeted strategies and innovative models, replicate successful approaches, and thereby increase college access and completion for Illinois students, particularly low-income students and students of color.

- Ensuring an affordable and efficient path for those who aspire to college degrees needs to be a goal for state higher education policy. Increasing state investments in need-based aid and raising awareness of grants and other means of financial assistance will be critical in ensuring access and affordability for low-income students.

⁹ Illinois Board of Higher Education, 2016 Illinois Board of Higher Education, *Underrepresented Groups in Illinois Higher Education*, 2016 Annual Report, 2017.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics 2015*.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ *Advance Illinois*, 2016.

- Greater research and analysis is needed on the factors contributing to the steep decline in African-American student enrollment in state public institutions.
- Championing and scaling evidence-based models that already exist across the nation and state and that have proven successful in increasing graduation rates and reducing time to degree.
- Reorient campus cultures, systems, and practices to prioritize student success in order to significantly boost graduation rates among underrepresented students.

Introduction and Overview

Not since the 1960s has the United States and the state of Illinois faced such a defining moment as currently exists today. In an era of increased global competition, growing income and wealth inequality, and limited and decreasing public investments, pathways into the middle class for low-income Americans are shrinking. Nowhere is this dilemma more visible than in higher education in Illinois. While students in Illinois are graduating from high school in greater numbers and better prepared than ever, college graduation rates for low-income students remain unacceptably low. In 2015, low-income students in Illinois graduated from college at a rate of 37 percent compared to 75 percent for their higher income peers. Today, as students in Illinois are becoming increasingly low-income and increasingly minority, their chances of actually graduating from college are only marginally better than they were 30 years ago. If there has ever been a need for innovation in higher education, it is now. If there has ever been a need for elevating student success as the single highest priority for all of institutions of higher education, it is now. In order to truly realize the promise of equal opportunity that was fought for in the civil rights era, Illinois must commit to its students for the sake of equity and its own long term economic health.

Postsecondary educational attainment is now more important to the state and nation's economic success than ever before. As more jobs require higher levels of education, workers with only a high school diploma are finding it increasingly difficult to enter the middle class. A study by Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce suggests that "by 2020, 65 percent of all jobs in the United States (U.S.) economy will require post-secondary education and training beyond high school." Despite recent reports questioning the value of a college degree,¹⁵ the benefits of higher education are clear. Today, those with higher levels of education earn more, are more likely to be employed, are more civically engaged, and more likely to move up the socioeconomic ladder.¹⁶ Currently, only about 45 percent of adults in the U.S. have earned a degree or credential of economic value.¹⁷ In Illinois, 50 percent of residents between the ages of 25–64 hold a postsecondary degree or high-quality credential beyond high school.¹⁸ In a state that has seen a dramatic increase in the number of low-income students in the past ten years, expanding access to post-secondary education and closing stagnant completion gaps, particularly for low-income students and students of color, is a moral imperative. This reality has mobilized Illinois

¹⁵ Goldman Sachs. *What if I Told You...* The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc., 2015.

¹⁶ Ma, J., Pender, M., Welch, M. *Education Pays 2016: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society.* The College Board, December 2016

¹⁷ Lumina Foundation. *A Stronger Nation. Full Report 2017,* May 2017.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

leaders and policymakers to set an ambitious target for college completion: 60 percent of working adults will hold a degree or credential by 2025.¹⁹

College completion leads to economic mobility and improved social capital that benefit all Illinois communities. However, low-income students and students of color are disproportionately impacted by inequities in our education system. We have made some progress, with many more Black and Latino students graduating from high school today than ten years ago.²⁰ But, the graduation gaps between these students and their middle and upper-income and White peers persist.²¹ The increasing high school graduation rates among low-income students and students of color suggests that more underrepresented students are prepared to pursue a postsecondary education. Certainly, the rates with which Black and Latino high school graduates enroll in postsecondary institutions has increased. In Illinois, college enrollment among underrepresented groups has increased nearly ten percentage points in the last ten years.²² These increasing college enrollment rates for low-income and Black and Latino students are promising, though they are still lower than those of their White peers.²³ The total college enrollment rate for White students, ages 18-to-24, has been higher than the rates for their Black and Latino peers in every year since 2005, with the White-Black gap largest at 9.6 percentage points in 2015.²⁴

More worrisome are the college completion rates for Illinois students of color and low-income students. While 58 percent of college students from Illinois graduate in six years, striking gaps exist between low-income and wealthier students.²⁵ Further, some Illinois counties have postsecondary attainment rates as low as 15 to 20 percent.²⁶ In a state where nearly half of high school graduates are low-income and over 40 percent are Black or Latino, increasing college persistence and completion rates for low-income students and students of color is not only a moral imperative, but critical to Illinois' workforce and economic health.

Postsecondary access and completion challenges and solutions are multifaceted. Due to the growing volume of data and reporting on college access, and completion in recent years, here we synthesize what publicly available data and research tell us about the state of higher education in Illinois and how low-income, first-generation, and students of color fare. In separate sections within this report, we discuss what the literature tells us about college affordability and accessibility, as well as the factors, beyond academic readiness that create bottlenecks for students to enroll and graduate college.

19 Illinois Board of Higher Education. *The 60 x 2025 Goal for Illinois*. IBHE DataPoints 2017-4. Springfield, IL, February 2017.

20 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, Table 219.32. Public high school graduates, by sex, race/ethnicity, and state or jurisdiction: 2012-13 and 2003-04

21 Illinois State Board of Education. *Illinois School Report Card 2015-16*.

22 Illinois Board of Higher Education. *Underrepresented Groups in Illinois Higher Education*, 2015 Annual Report. Illinois: The Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success, June 2016. Underrepresented groups are defined by the Illinois Board of Higher Education Act as African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian-American, Pacific Islander, American Indian, Alaska Native, or an individual with a disability.

23 Snyder, Thomas D., Cristobal de Brey, and Sally A. Dillow. "Digest of Education Statistics 2015, NCES 2016-014." National Center for Education Statistics, 2016.

24 *Ibid.* Table 302.60. Percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level of institution and sex and race/ethnicity of student: 1970 through 2014.

25 Advance Illinois. "Every Student Counts: The State We're In 2016-2017. A Report on Public Education in Illinois." 2016. Retrieved July 7, 2017

26 Lumina Foundation, *A Stronger Nation*.

A postsecondary education is no longer affordable for many low-income students and their families.

Even before enrolling in college, the biggest barrier, especially for first generation students, is college affordability.

While one of the top reasons students choose a particular college continues to be the institution's reputation and academic program, cost and financial aid are increasingly weighing on students' decisions. According to the annual Freshmen Survey conducted by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute, 47 percent of students report that a financial aid offer was a "very important" factor in their decision to attend an institution. These decisions are even more complex for first generation college students who are more likely to consider the cost of the institution and the amount of financial aid being offered as very important factors in selecting their college (56.1 percent and 58.2 percent, respectively). Students are also making important trade-offs due to costs: in 2016, a record 15 percent of freshmen felt they could not afford their first-choice institution, a 60 percent increase from 2004.²⁷ Further, many academically qualified students from low-income families choose not to apply to selective colleges, often termed as "undermatching."²⁸ Although other factors contribute to undermatching, such as awareness of postsecondary options, access to college counseling, and family constraints, college costs and financial limitations pose significant barriers that often constrain their post-secondary options.

Financial aid does not always lower the cost of attending college. While spending on financial aid has increased for decades, the "sticker prices" of college and universities (i.e. the published cost of attendance) has increased faster. Thus, the purchasing power of dollars for critical programs for low-income students like the Pell Grant has declined. Forty years ago, the Pell Grant covered more than 75 percent of the costs of attending a public four-year college or university. Today, it covers just 30 percent.²⁹

Low-income families face greater burdens as the cost of college rises.

Unfortunately, recent trends in college costs and financial aid will make it harder for students to afford college. Nationally, the cost of higher education has outpaced increases in median family income.³⁰ In fact, college costs have risen more than 400 percent in the last 25 years, but median family income has increased less than 150 percent.³¹ Even after considering

27 Eagan, K., E. Stolzenberg, J. Ramirez, M. C. Aragon, R. S. Suchard, and S. Hurtado. *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2016*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA, 2017.

28 Hoxby, Caroline M., and Christopher Avery. "The missing 'one-offs': The hidden supply of high-achieving, low income students." *National Bureau of Economic Research*, (2012).

29 Goldrick-Rab, Sara, and Nancy Kendall. "Redefining college affordability: Securing America's future with a free two year college option." *The Education Optimists*, (2014).

30 Complete College America. "Four-Year Myth," 2014.

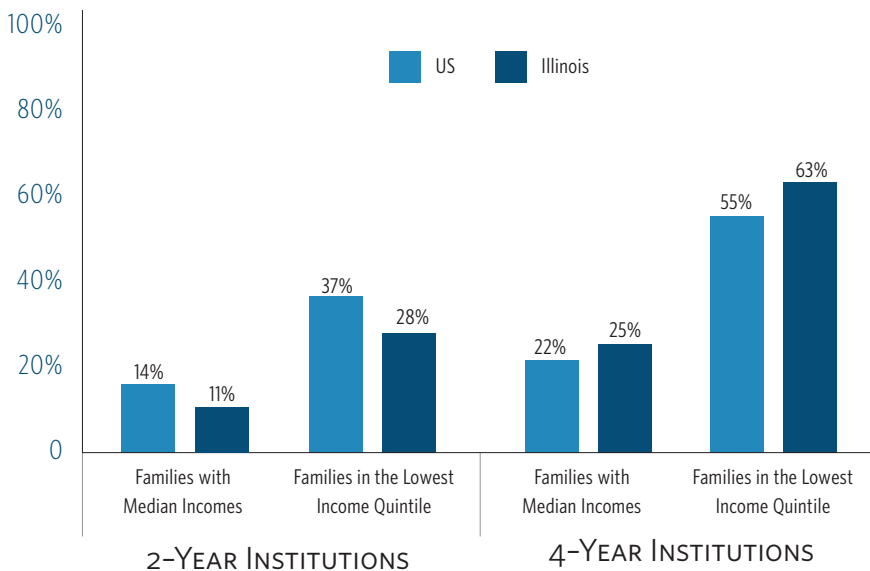
31 The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, "Measure Up 2008: The National Report Card on Higher Education," 2008.

grant aid, the average net tuition and fees paid by full-time in-state students at public four-year institutions increased 22 percent from 2011 to 2016, compared to 7 percent over the preceding five years.³² In Illinois, the cost of college attendance relative to family income has increased more than almost all other states. The state ranks 32nd in college affordability for median-income families.³³ While families with median incomes need to set aside 25 percent of their incomes to attend a public four-year institution, low-income families require 63 percent of family income (Figure 1).³⁴

In fiscal year 2016, Illinois' average public university in-state tuition and fees were the fifth highest in the nation.³⁵ Moreover, just as college costs are rising, so too have poverty rates, especially for children and people of color. Today, one in five Illinois children live in poverty.³⁶ Among Black children, approximately 39 percent live in poverty. These troubling trends have serious implications, particularly for low-income students and students of color. Because the price of college has skyrocketed in recent years, and the amount of financial aid and Pell grants for economically disadvantaged students remained the same, college has become unaffordable at best and out of reach for many low-income

families. As a result, obtaining the education necessary for social mobility and success has become much more difficult and costly. In Illinois, of those students who graduate from public and private four-year institutions, two-thirds have debt with an average of nearly \$30,000.³⁷ Attending college is becoming a growing burden for many students and families in the state. Improving college access and completion rates requires both lowering the real price of attending college to better align with students' and families' ability to pay, and providing accurate information to help plan for the true costs of college.

FIGURE 1. PERCENTAGE OF FAMILY INCOME NEEDED TO PAY FOR FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS, 2014



Source: Midwestern Higher Education Compact 2015

³² The College Board, "Trends in College Pricing 2016," 2016, 20.

³³ Advance Illinois, 2016.

³⁴ Midwest Higher Education Compact. Higher Education in Focus: Selected Performance Indicators, 2014-2015.

³⁵ The College Board, "Trends in College Pricing 2016," 2016, 17.

³⁶ U.S. Census Bureau 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

³⁷ Cochrane, D. & Chang, D. "Student Debt and the Class of 2015: 11th Annual Report." Project on Student Debt (2016).

State budget challenges have led to reductions in need-based aid, less funding for public universities, and a mass exodus of young adults from Illinois.

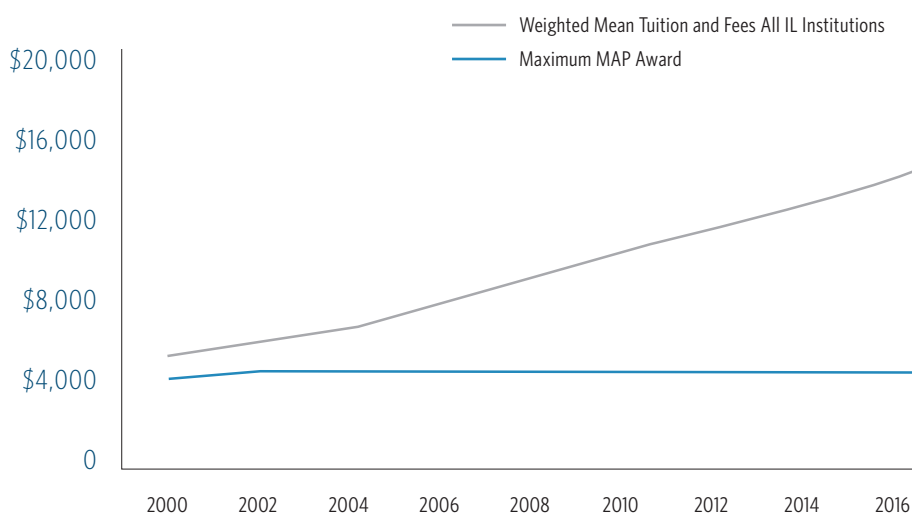
The full extent of the consequences of Illinois' fiscal year 2016 and fiscal year 2017 state budget crisis are unknown at present. While the state has historically been one of the largest providers of state need-based aid in the nation,³⁸ budget cuts in the last decade have significantly reduced the availability of state aid to help pay for tuition and fees.³⁹ In 2016, more than 300,000 students were eligible for the Illinois Student Assistance program Monetary Assistance Program (MAP) award.

Over half of the MAP recipients are first generation students and more than half of Black and Latino undergraduates at public universities receive a MAP grant.⁴⁰ But as Figure 2. shows, the cost of attending college in Illinois has far outpaced the amount of MAP grants available. In fiscal year 2016, over 160,000 students (50 percent of those eligible) could not claim awards due to insufficient funding.⁴¹ Reductions in MAP grants coupled with cuts to the state's public universities have a disproportionate impact on low-income students and students of color who receive this assistance and are more likely to attend public institutions. Encouragingly, the fiscal year 2018 state budget included a ten percent increase in funding for the MAP program which is an important first step toward making higher education more affordable for low-income students.

Illinois is one of only four states that cut funding institutional aid for higher education over

the last two fiscal years, a year to year difference of 68 percent.⁴² State funding typically makes up one-third of a postsecondary institution's budget, and these cuts have led Illinois' public universities to eliminate programs and raise tuition. Chicago State University (CSU) was hit the hardest, losing 65 percent of its budget from 2015. CSU serves the largest proportion of low-income and students of color (81 percent Black and Latino) and has suffered the largest budget cuts. Less funding for higher education has also resulted in reduced enrollment across Illinois' universities than previous years, with the largest declines at CSU and Eastern Illinois

FIGURE 2. TUITION AND FEES OUTPACE NEED-BASED AID



Source: Illinois Student Assistance Commission, DataBook 2016

38 National Association of State Student Grant & Aid Programs (NASSGAP) Annual Survey Report, 2003-4 to 2013-14.

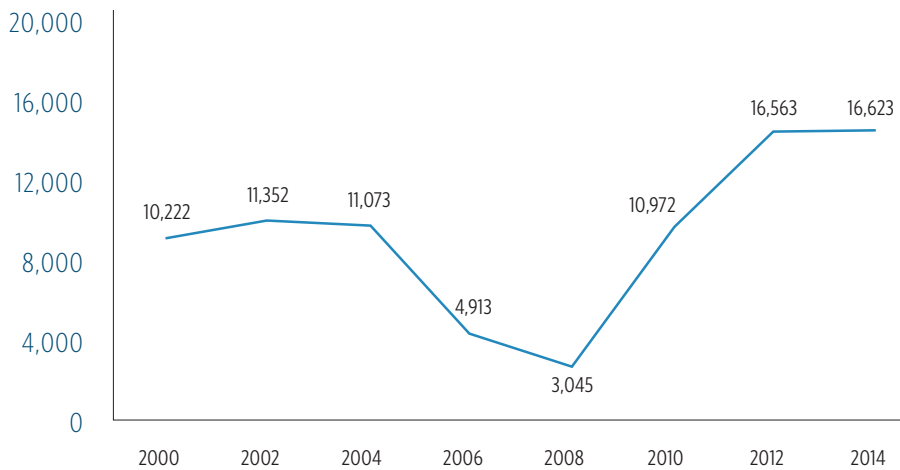
39 Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, "Illinois Significant Disinvestment in Higher Education," 2017

40 Illinois Student Assistance Commission. "Monetary Award Program (MAP) Evaluation," 2015.

41 Illinois Student Assistance Commission. "2016 Data Book," 2016.

42 Center for Tax Budget Accountability. "Illinois' Significant Disinvestment in Higher Education." (2017).

FIGURE 3. NET LOSS OF FRESHMEN STUDENTS FROM ILLINOIS (2000–2014)



Source: Illinois Board of Higher Education 2017

University (24 percent and 14 percent, respectively).⁴³ As precipitous as recent enrollment declines in state public universities have been, they are part of a larger decline in enrollment at most of the state’s public universities and community colleges.

In addition to decreased funding for higher education, there has been a steady exodus of high school graduates who are choosing to leave the state to attend colleges in nearby states. Illinois is suffering from an out-migration crisis that has worsened in recent years. In 2014, Illinois was second worst in the nation with the second

highest net migration of college freshmen to other states’ public schools, a 63 percent increase over a decade.⁴⁴ While this is not unique to Illinois, it is less pronounced in other states that have seen a larger influx of students.⁴⁵ For Illinois college-going students, rising tuition and declining financial assistance have made other states more attractive.

Further, Illinois’ out-migration problem threatens the state’s long-term financial stability and economic vitality. Research shows that once students migrate to another state to attend college, they are less likely to return to work in their home state.⁴⁶ This results in a phenomenon known as “brain drain”, the loss of a highly educated and skilled workforce.⁴⁷ This, combined with a loss of projected income tax revenues, means that Illinois faces a serious challenge in retaining younger people if it wants to ensure its economic prospects.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Illinois Board of Higher Education. (January 2017). Outmigration Context: Residence and Migration Patterns of Freshmen Students into and from Illinois (IBHE DataPoints 2017-1). Springfield, IL.

⁴⁵ Strayer, N. “The Great Out-of-State Migration: Where Students Go.” *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/08/26/us/college-student-migration.html?_r=0

⁴⁶ Kodrzycki, Y. K. “Migration of recent college graduates: evidence from the national longitudinal survey of youth.” *New England Economic Review*, 2001.

⁴⁷ World Bank. *World Development Report*, 2000/01. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2000

College access has improved, but gaps persist for low-income students and students of color in Illinois.

As a state, Illinois has made great gains in on-time high school graduation rates leading to improved college access. But low-income students and students of color are not enrolling in college at the same rates as their wealthier peers and attend institutions with lower completion rates.

Illinois has made notable gains in young adults earning high school credentials. On-time high school graduation rates have steadily increased and reached a high of 86 percent in 2016.⁴⁸ In Chicago, graduation rates have increased by 22 percentage points over the last 16 years with students more academically prepared to pursue postsecondary education.⁴⁹ Beyond Chicago, in 2015, over 40 percent of school districts in the state served predominantly low-income students, up from 13 percent ten years ago.⁵⁰ These districts have also seen improvements in high school graduation rates.⁵¹

Improved high school graduation rates, however, have led to only small increases in college enrollment. From 2005 to 2015, the immediate college enrollment rate⁵² of high school graduates increased by 4 percentage points and is currently at 60 percent.⁵³ In general, undergraduate enrollment of students of color has steadily increased in the last ten years, from 37 percent in 2006 to 46 percent of total enrollment in 2016.⁵⁴ Latino student enrollment has accounted for these changes over time, with an increase of 11.8 percent. While it's true that college accessibility has improved in many places across the board for all student populations, troubling disparities exist across racial and economic lines. From 2011 to 2015, Illinois saw a drastic decrease in African-American undergraduate enrollment in public institutions (25 percent total decrease).⁵⁵

Along with enrollment disparities, the level and selectivity of the institutions that students access also segregates along racial lines.⁵⁶ Nationally, African-American students attend for-profit institutions at double the rate of all students.⁵⁷ In Illinois, Black students comprise 13 percent of all undergraduate enrollment but 21.5 percent of enrollment in for-profit

48 Illinois State Board of Education. Illinois School Report Card 2015-16.

49 Allensworth, E.M., Healey, K., Gwynne, J.A., & Crespín, R. (2016). *High school graduation rates through two decades of district change: The influence of policies, data records, and demographic shifts*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

50 Advance Illinois, 2016.

51 Illinois State Board of Education. Illinois School Report Card 2015-16.

52 The annual percentage of high school completers who enroll in 2- or 4-year colleges in the fall immediately following high school.

53 Advance Illinois, 2016.

54 Illinois Board of Higher Education, Data Tables

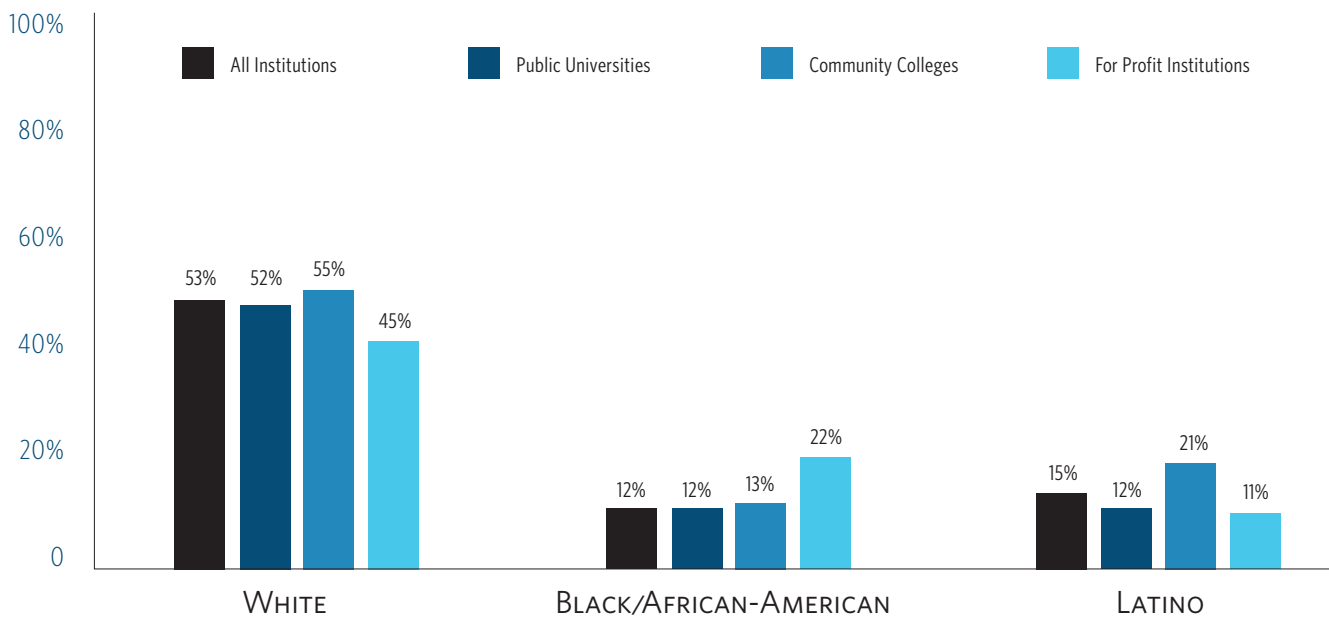
55 Illinois Board of Higher Education, Underrepresented Groups in Illinois Higher Education, 2016 Annual Report, 2017.

56 Young Invincibles. "Race & Ethnicity as a Barrier to Opportunity: A Blueprint for Higher Education Equity." 2017.

57 Snyder, Thomas D., Cristobal de Brey, and Sally A. Dillow. "Digest of Education Statistics 2015, NCES 2016-014." National Center for Education Statistics, 2016.

institutions.⁵⁸ Likewise, while Latino students make up 15 percent of undergraduate enrollment in the state, they constitute 21 percent of community college enrollment. Figure 4. illustrates these enrollment disparities by institution type for fall 2016. In Illinois, almost 50 percent of undergraduate students are enrolled at two-year institutions and the majority of them are students of color.⁵⁹ As a proportion of enrollment in postsecondary institutions, Black and Latino students in the state tend to be more highly concentrated in community colleges and for-profit institutions than their White peers. In fact, 46 percent of Black and 55 percent of Latino student were enrolled in public two-year institutions compared to 23 percent in public four-year institutions.⁶⁰ Almost universally, these institutions have lower graduation rates, which means that Black and Latino students are less likely to earn their degrees.

FIGURE 4. STUDENTS OF COLOR DISPROPORTIONATELY ENROLL IN FOR-PROFIT AND 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS



Source: Illinois Board of Higher Education's Databook

⁵⁸ Illinois Board of Higher Education, Databook Table I-3, Race and National Origin of Students Enrolled in Illinois Colleges and Universities by Type of Institution, Fall 2016

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Illinois Board of Higher Education, Databook Table I-3, Race and National Origin of Students Enrolled in Illinois Colleges and Universities by Type of Institution, Fall 2016

College Completion Rates in Illinois Unequal Along Racial Lines

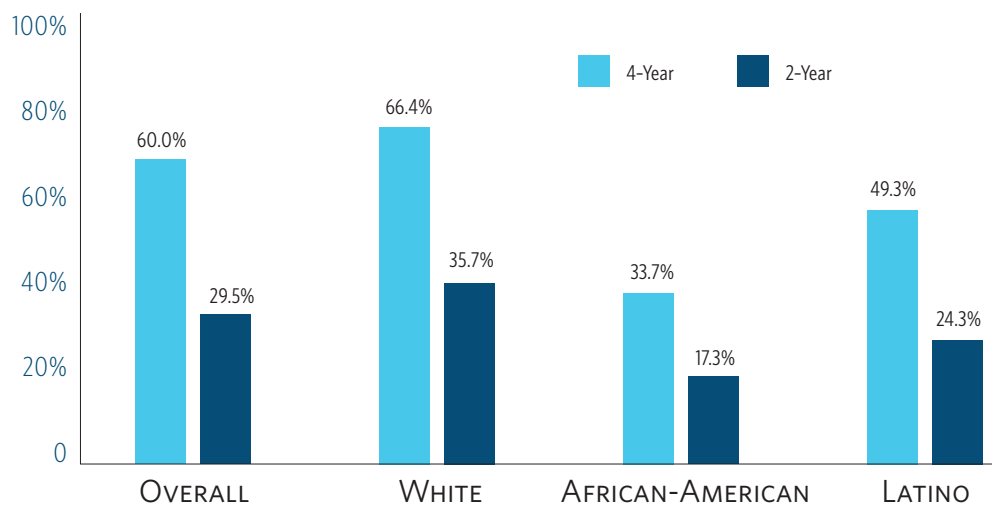
Alarming disparities exist in college completion rates between White and non-White students across Illinois.

Rising college enrollment rates have produced more college degrees among American students. Nationally, the college graduation rate within 150% of normal time (i.e. six years) is 59 percent for bachelor's or equivalent degree and 32 percent for a two-year degree. While national college completion rates for Latinos and African-Americans have been climbing upward, gaps persist between these groups and their White peers.⁶¹ In Illinois, the college completion rate in 2015 was 61.7 percent at a four-year public institution and 25.5 percent at a two-year public institution.⁶² The college completion rate gap is most pronounced between African-American students at four-year institutions and their White peers, with White students graduating at almost double the rate (33.7 percent and 66.4 percent, respectively) of African-American students.⁶³ Figure 5. highlights the stark disparities across racial and ethnic lines, particularly for community college students. While accepted standards for measuring graduation rates in American higher education are now six-year time frames for four-year colleges and three-year time frames for two-year colleges, these do

not reflect on-time graduation. This measurement standard masks two significant problems: on-time graduation rates are, in fact, much lower than statistics that reflect 150% time-to-graduation, and extra time on campus results in even more debt and financial burden.

College completion gaps are not only susceptible to trends by race, but also socio-economic status. Today, the biggest predictor of whether a student will graduate from college is family income. Students from lower-income families (students receiving Pell Grants or

FIGURE 5. ILLINOIS GRADUATION RATE WITHIN 150% OF NORMAL TIME BY LEVEL OF INSTITUTION AND RACE/ETHNICITY, 2015



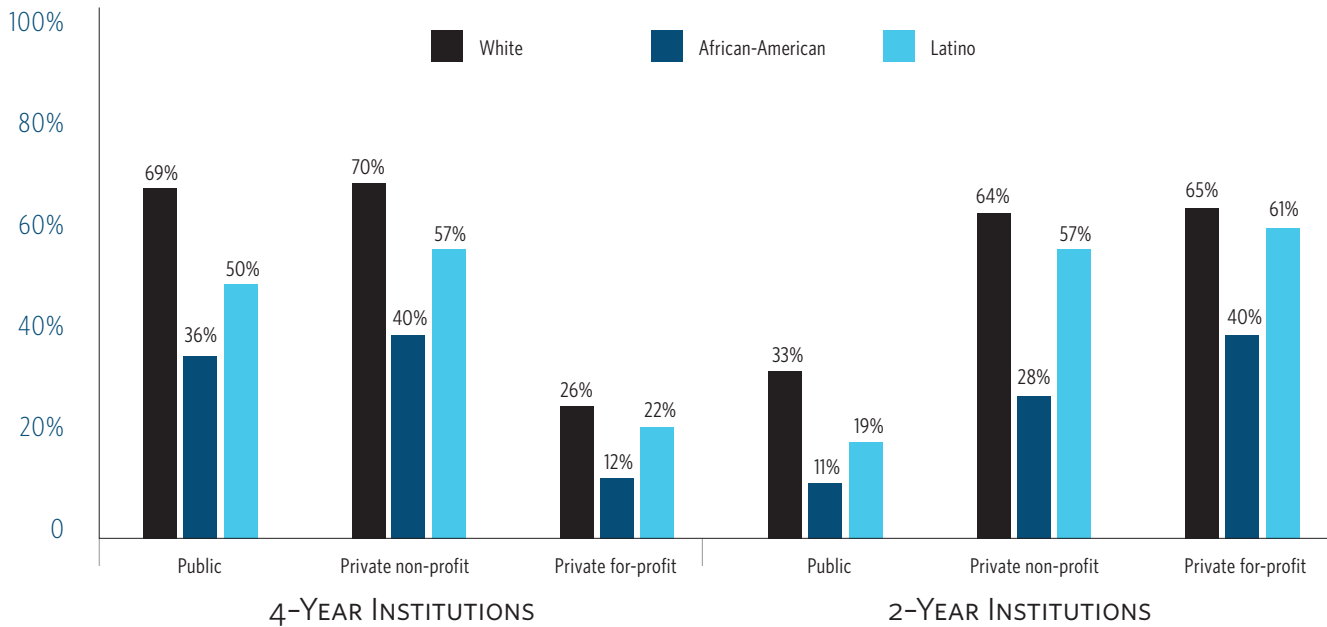
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS, Graduation Rates 2015

⁶¹ Snyder, Thomas D., Cristobal de Brey, and Sally A. Dillow. "Digest of Education Statistics 2015, NCES 2016-014." National Center for Education Statistics, 2016.

⁶² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2015. Graduation rate within 150% of normal time at 4-year and 2-year postsecondary institutions. Results include the cohort of students who were full-time, first-time undergraduates intending to earn any degree or certificate and started their program six years and three years before the data were reported.

⁶³ Ibid.

FIGURE 6. ILLINOIS GRADUATION RATE WITHIN 150% OF NORMAL TIME, BY SECTOR OF INSTITUTIONS AND RACE/ETHNICITY, 2015



other federal means tested grants) are much more likely to attend institutions with lower graduation rates (i.e., two-year colleges and for-profit institutions) and far less likely to attend institutions where most of the students graduate (i.e., four-year public and private not-for-profit institutions). In Illinois institutions while almost 65 percent of non-Pell eligible students graduated in six years, only half of Pell recipients did, a 14 percentage-point gap in 2013.⁶⁴ Further, completion rates are lower at the institutions where low-income students are concentrated: two-year colleges and for-profit institutions. Nationally, the proportion of students who had no credentials and were no longer enrolled six years later was higher at two-year public institutions (45 percent), two-year non-profit institutions (40 percent) and two-year for-profit institutions (35 percent).⁶⁵ In Illinois, the completion gap between low-income and wealthier students is striking: only 37 percent of low-income students graduate in six years while 75 percent of wealthier students do.⁶⁶ Examining further by institution type, the college completion rate varies drastically among public institutions, private nonprofits and private for-profits as shown in Figure 6.

Although the state of Illinois reported overall gains in college completion for underrepresented groups in 2014,⁶⁷ compared to similar institutions across the nation, most Illinois public universities are not faring as well in graduating underrepresented students.

64 Nichols, A. *The Pell Partnership: Ensuring a Shared Responsibility for Low-Income Student Success*. The Education Trust, 2015.

65 Shapiro, D., Dunder, A., Wakhungu, P.K., Yuan, X., Nathan, A. & Hwang, Y. *Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates - Fall 2009 Cohort* (Signature Report No. 10). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015.

66 Advance IL, 2016.

67 Underrepresented groups are defined by the Illinois Board of Higher Education Act as African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian-American, Pacific Islander, American Indian, Alaska Native, or an individual with a disability.

Similar completion gaps between underrepresented groups (URG) and non-URGs are visible across other Illinois public universities. At some institutions serving predominantly URGs, completion rates are below 20 percent.

Obstacles when students transfer from community college aggravate the already slow progress of underrepresented students to degrees.

Students who begin their higher education in community colleges are much more likely to be low-income or first generation than those who start at four-year institutions. Most community college students report that they intend to earn at least a bachelor's degree. However, only about a quarter end up transferring and only 17 percent complete a bachelor's degree.⁶⁸ When students transfer, several obstacles reduce their likelihood of degree completion. Because there is not a state-wide or even nation-wide standardized course system that exists between two and four-year institutions, credits are often lost in the transfer process. The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics finds that 35 percent of students who began college in the 2003–2004 academic year changed schools at least once and nearly 40 percent got no transfer credit, losing an average of 27 credits, nearly one year of full-time coursework. Also at issue is whether or not a student obtains an associate degree before transferring, which generally results in less lost credits and an increased likelihood of bachelor's degree completion; most students do not, which leads to excess time at the four-year college,⁶⁹ and excess costs at four-year institutions.⁷⁰

In Illinois, nearly one-third of full-time students in fall 2010 transferred from a two-year to a four-year college within four years of enrolling.⁷¹ Almost 40 percent of students who transferred completed an associate degree prior to transferring, an increase of nearly 200 percent compared with the fall 2005 cohort.⁷² This is important since transfers from community colleges to four-year institutions offer a critical avenue for upward mobility for many underserved students. For example, previous studies show that 62 percent of students who transfer from two-year to four-year institutions go on to earn bachelor's degrees within six years of transferring.⁷³ The rate is even higher for students who complete a credential at the two-year college before transferring—at 72 percent.⁷⁴ Thus, improving the transfer process and ensuring efficient credit transfer has the potential to substantially raise college attainment.

68 Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Ziskin, M., Chiang, Y.-C., Chen, J., Harrell, A., & Torres, V. (2013). *Baccalaureate attainment: A national view of the postsecondary outcomes of students who transfer from two-year to four-year institutions* (Signature Report No. 5). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

69 Deane, K., Fink, F., Jenkins, D., Wyner, J. *The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-year Colleges*. The Aspen Institute & Community College Research Center, May 2016.

70 Belfield, C. *The Economic Benefits of Attaining an Associate Degree Before Transfer: Evidence From North Carolina*. New York: Community College Research Center, July 2013.

71 Illinois Community College Board, *Complete College America, Outcome Metric 3: Transfer Out*, 2014

72 Illinois Community College Board, *Complete College America, Outcome Metric 3: Transfer Out*, 2014.

73 Shapiro, D., 2013

74 Ibid.

Conclusion: A Way Forward

This report summarizes much of the recent literature on college attainment in Illinois and points to the substantial challenges facing postsecondary institutions, low-income students, and students of color in Illinois. While college access has improved in general, significant enrollment disparities exist across income and race. Declining college affordability is disproportionately impacting low-income students and students of color, who have fewer resources than their wealthier peers. Further, alarming disparities in completion rates for low-income college students and students of color attending Illinois public universities are unacceptable, have persisted over time, and require concerted efforts to strengthen student participation and encourage success. In short, we are faced with a crisis in higher education in our state that threatens to jeopardize our long-term economic viability.

This meta-analysis contains important context for consumers and those working in, and in support of, higher education to better understand the urgency of the current situation and join forces to aggressively change the tide. The PCC, as it begins its work in Northeastern Illinois and across the state, is committed to not only raise awareness about these issues, but also to partner with colleges, policymakers, nonprofits, K-12 districts, community leaders, civil rights organizations, philanthropy, the private sector, and others to leverage existing strengths to shift policy and practice, implement new approaches, and scale what works.

To create meaningful postsecondary options and address inequities that disproportionately affect low-income students and students of color, we need commitment from multiple stakeholders and a comprehensive approach that addresses the many forces that limit opportunity and outcomes for disadvantaged students - both before and after they arrive on campus. Collaborative efforts across communities can bring greater awareness to these challenges, as well as highlight effective, scalable solutions. The PCC will work with colleges who are similarly committed to addressing these inequities and will make public commitments to doing so. Through these efforts, we will aggressively embrace evidence-based practices that have proven successful in multiple contexts. These practices can help us rethink our approach to, among other things, streamlining transfer between two and four-year institutions. Working with colleges and universities, along with other diverse stakeholders, we will create a comprehensive plan to address ongoing systemic forces that contribute to entrenched and unacceptably low college completion rates.

Our higher education system as it currently exists reinforces and increases inequity in our state. Making college affordable and removing unnecessary barriers to completion is essential to the economic, social, and civic health of our state. The livelihood of generations of Illinois residents is at stake. We must fix our postsecondary system in Illinois to ensure that we can meet the growing demands of our future workforce and the promise of a just and equal society. If we truly want to ensure Illinois is on track to achieving goals and becoming a destination for people to live, work, and attend college, we will need broad-based, comprehensive, and coordinated efforts to this end. The time is now to develop a bold plan for higher educational equity in Illinois.

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