

YOUNG INVINCIBLES

2018 Illinois Policy Agenda

Introduction

In the wake of soaring tuition, high youth unemployment and health care failing to meet young adults' needs, millennials have begun voting with their feet and leaving Illinois for other states at a faster rate than any other age group.¹ This brain drain is immediately reducing our college enrollment rates and will ultimately harm Illinois' economic competitiveness.² Illinois must invest in the next generation by connecting young adults with opportunities to pursue their career goals, to gain applied workplace experience, and secure critical health supports. In doing so, Illinois will become a place young adults continue invest in and call home.

Higher Education

Illinois' higher education system is still recovering from a two-year budget impasse that forced our colleges and universities to operate on shoestring budgets.³ Freshman enrollment at Illinois universities dropped by as much as 21 percent as students opted for more stable options outside of the state.⁴ Illinois is now the second largest exporter of students to out-of-state schools.⁵ While the Fiscal Year 2018 budget expanded need-based aid for students and provided critical relief that stabilizes our higher education system, the budget also cut higher education spending by 10 percent. Illinois must invest rather than cut to meaningfully and sustainably support young adults' access to postsecondary education.⁶

Reverse Illinois' Disinvestment in Higher Education

In-state tuition at Illinois' four-year universities has skyrocketed by 57 percent during the last decade, making it the fifth-highest nationally and unaffordable for young Illinoisans.⁷ As a result of state disinvestment, MAP grants went from covering 100 percent of the costs of public schools in 2002 to today only covering 46 and 32 percent of community college and public four-year university costs today.⁸ For many students, this grant is the difference between finishing a degree or abandoning higher education altogether.⁹ This is especially troubling in an economy where 65 percent of jobs will require postsecondary education by 2020.¹⁰ Illinois must move towards restoring spending to pre-recession levels by passing a budget at or above Fiscal Year 2015 levels. Illinois should also commit to restoring MAP grants purchasing power (100 percent of tuition and fees costs at community college and public universities) and reach (all who are eligible receive an award) within 10 years. In the next year, Illinois should make incremental progress towards this goal by increasing funding by 10 percent.

Increase Access for Immigrants and Those With Non-Violent Offenses

Through a revenue neutral measure, Illinois could boost access to college for undocumented young adults and young adults' with a criminal history. Admissions and financial aid policies put higher education out of reach for most undocumented young adults and young adults with a record, preventing them from completing the schooling they need to access high-quality jobs. Undocumented students cannot access financial aid.¹¹ Some colleges in Illinois consider criminal history in the college admissions process, which is unnecessary as research reveals there is no connection between campus safety and admitting students with a criminal history.¹² Furthermore, greater educational attainment reduces recidivism, by boosting employability.¹³ Illinois should allow four-year universities to provide undocumented students financial aid, like the Student ACCESS Bill which passed through the Senate in 2016, and ban the box in the college admissions process for students without violent offenses.¹⁴ This revenue-neutral bill would allow more young adults to further contribute to our economy by helping them earn the degrees necessary to succeed in today's economy.

Hold a Hearing on Illinois' Longitudinal Data System

Illinois students lack critical information they need to make educated decisions about where to attend school and what to study. That includes information about tuition, costs, student loan default and repayment rates, degree completion rates, job placement information, admission standards and criteria, and overall career outcomes, building on a framework created by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association.¹⁵ As a result of Senate Bill 182, effective in 2009, Illinois has begun collecting longitudinal data at a few colleges and universities and will release a pilot report card in the spring of 2018.¹⁶ Young Invincibles recommends Illinois hold hearings to provide the public an opportunity to comment on the pilot report card, including weighing in on the data points, the report card layout, and the state's process for distributing the information.

Action Plan for Closing Illinois' College Completion Gap

Illinois has a wide and worsening college completion gap: the attainment gap between African Americans and whites is 18 percent and 27 percent between Hispanic-Latino and whites.¹⁷ Yet, Illinois lacks critical information and a binding plan to close this college success gap. Illinois should firstly track underrepresented populations success in higher education, expanding the Illinois Board of Higher Education's Underrepresented Groups Report to track underrepresented populations' outcomes (including those who are low-income and first generation students) at all university and community colleges (including community colleges and private universities). Illinois should also set a time frame for closing the attainment gap outlined in the Underrepresented Groups Report and set mid-point targets for all colleges and universities to track success. While Illinois has created an action agenda, the Public Agenda for Illinois Higher Education, this plan is non-binding. These targets must be matched with a binding action plan that uses an equity-based approach, or a one that avoids the unintended consequences of penalizing schools that serve large numbers of disadvantaged populations, to drive improvement.

Workforce & Finances

Illinois is facing a middle-skills gap that hurts our economy and workforce. Fifty-three percent of positions require more training than a high school degree, but less than a four year college degree, yet only 42 percent of Illinois' workforce is trained to that level.¹⁸ Apprenticeships, or work-based learning that combines on-the-job and classroom training, are one of the few evidenced-based strategies for closing the middle skills gap. Individuals who participate in registered apprenticeships make \$300,000 more than those who do not over the course of their lifetimes, including employer benefits,¹⁹ and 91 percent are retained on the job after the apprenticeship ends.²⁰ Furthermore, 97 percent of American employers sponsoring apprenticeship programs would recommend hiring apprentices to other employers.²¹

Expand Apprenticeships

Illinois recently began developing a comprehensive vision for apprenticeships for the first time with the creation of the Apprenticeship Plus framework. The state also launched youth apprenticeship pilot programs. YI recommends we build from this momentum by making it easier for employers to participate. At least 18 states provide employers a tax credit or grant to lower the cost of participating in apprenticeships.²² The legislature should provide businesses a tax credit of up to \$2,000 per apprentice per year of schooling at a college or university, offsetting one major cost that prevents some businesses from participating. The legislature should also hold a hearing to learn about the value of apprenticeships for the employers and young adults and identify strategies for bringing apprenticeships to scale in Illinois.

Health Care

Mental health issues are a pervasive concern for young adults, with one in four people living with a mental illness.²³ Yet, young adults are less likely to receive mental health support than any other age group.²⁴ College campuses can play a big role in addressing this challenge. Over 70 percent of Illinois high school graduates enroll in a postsecondary program shortly after graduation,²⁵ and a national survey found only 31 percent of students rated their campus as "supportive" with mental health issues.²⁶

Expand Access to Campus-Based Mental Health Supports

With many mental health illnesses, including depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder, first hitting people between the ages of 18 and 20, Illinois should expand students' access to campus-based mental health supports.²⁷ Young Invincibles recommends legislation that will reduce stigma and increase awareness of resources available on campuses. Legislation should require campuses post information on their campus website on the warning signs of mental health issues and the resources available on campus and in the community as well as require annual trainings for professors and administrators on how to identify issues and talk to students in a culturally competent manner. Illinois should also have a campus-based mental health awareness day, coordinated by the Illinois Community College Board, Illinois Board of Education, and Illinois Department of Public Health. The mental awareness day should include classroom announcements and events that raise awareness of the prevalence of mental health issues and available resources (e.g. resource fair). While individual campuses should have control over the programming, leading agencies can create sample materials and support campuses with executing events.

Endnotes

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- ¹⁵ Tania Garcia and Hans Peter L’Orange, “Strong Foundations: The State of Postsecondary Data Systems”, State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, November 2012, http://www.sheeo.org/sites/default/files/publications/SHEEO_StrongFoundations2016_FINAL.pdf
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