

INTRODUCTION

Illinois' young adults are being asked to do more with less. Young adults today earn 20 percent less when adjusted for inflation than Baby Boomers did at their age.¹ A college education is more critical than ever with 65 percent of jobs requiring some postsecondary training by 2020.² Yet, Illinois' neglect of its higher education system during a two-year budget impasse led to tuition and fees rising by an average of \$900 per year at public colleges, colleges laying off approximately 2,300 postsecondary educators, and public university and college enrollment shrinking by 72,196 students.³ Young adults are paying attention and voting with their feet, by leaving Illinois at a faster rate than any other age group.⁴ Illinois must invest in the next generation by connecting young adults with opportunities to pursue their career goals, to gain applied workplace experience, and to 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 in crisis. After over a decade of state funding cuts, the state has the fifth highest tuition for public universities in the country,⁵ and a wide and growing equity-based completion gap.⁶ African-American student enrollment dropped by over 25 percent between 2013 and 2017,⁷ and the higher education attainment gap between Latinx students and whites is 27 percentage points.⁸ Despite this startling inclusion crisis, Illinois failed to expand Illinois' underfunded need-based aid this legislative session, instead creating a new merit-aid program. Illinois must reverse this trend in order to meet its goal of 60 percent of Illinois' adults holding a postsecondary degree or credential by 2025.⁹

Expanding need-based aid and stopping state disinvestment

The cost of attending college is one of the top reasons students do not attend college,¹⁰ a disconcerting trend in Illinois where tuition has risen by 18 percent at public universities and 23 percent at community colleges since the recession.¹¹ Illinois has historically offset this high tuition with a strong need-based aid program (MAP grants) that ensured low-income families had access. The MAP program serves high-need, underrepresented populations: 56 percent are first-generation college students and the average annual family income is \$34,673.¹² MAP Grants are effective with MAP recipients graduating college at about the same rate as their peers at the same institutions.¹³ Yet the biggest challenge facing MAP is the program is underfunded, only serving 43 percent of those who are eligible¹⁴ and covering 31 percent of the cost at public universities.¹⁵ Last session, Illinois did not raise funding for MAP grants and instead created a merit aid program called AIM HIGH. This is counter to Illinois' college attainment goals as research has found that need-based aid is the most effective mechanism for boosting low-income students' enrollment rates.¹⁶ Illinois should 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 25 percent.

Build a College Success Innovation Grant

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-Latinx and whites.¹⁷ Yet, Illinois lacks a binding plan to close this college success gap. Illinois should begin closing the college completion gap by creating student success programs like at Georgia State University and City University of New York's (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP). Georgia State University increased graduation rates by 22 percentage points in ten years while cutting overall spending per student through a suite of supports for students,¹⁸ and CUNY nearly doubled the college graduation rate for participants of the ASAP program.¹⁹ Elements of both initiatives include providing not only financial support but also providing the wide range of personal, academic, and financial resources students need to complete school.²⁰ Georgia State also created a tracking system to ensure student advisors are reaching students just as they are they are starting to struggle.²¹ Illinois should create a pilot program that reaches 10,000 students in its first year.

Equitable, Binding College Attainment Targets

Illinois is updating the state's attainment targets, creating targets disaggregated by race that align to the state's goal of 60 percent of residents holding a postsecondary certificate by 2025. This shift is commendable as it creates targets for student body populations who may otherwise go overlooked. It is also timely, given Illinois' large and growing race-based college completion gap. Illinois' new attainment targets should require full equity, creating a target for fully closing the college completion gap between whites and people of color. Furthermore, Illinois should create a binding action plan for closing the college attainment gap, with milestones that build up to fully achieving an equitable attainment target. While Illinois has created an action agenda, the Public Agenda for Illinois Higher Education, this plan is non-binding. Illinois higher education boards should annually release a report tracking the state's progress on reaching the state's attainment targets as well as each campus' success. The legislature should align funding to enable all colleges to fully support and align with Illinois' attainment targets.

WORKFORCE & FINANCES

Young adults are continuing to suffer economically in Illinois with youth unemployment (ages 16-24) remaining above pre-recession levels (more than 10 percent are unemployed).²² This trend is hitting young African American males particularly hard: Illinois has the highest African American unemployment rate in the nation.²³ Illinois should expand opportunities for young adults to gain workplace experience necessary to succeed in careers.

Apprenticeship Navigators

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.²⁴ Expanding apprenticeships, a work-based learning model that combines on-the-job and classroom training, is one of the few evidenced-based strategies for closing the middle skills gap. Individuals who participate in registered apprenticeships make \$300,000 more over the course of their lifetimes, including employer benefits, than those who are similarly situated and do not participate in apprenticeships.²⁵ Additionally, 91 percent of apprentices are retained on the job after the apprenticeship ends.²⁶ At YI and our partners' recommendation, the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board Apprenticeship Committee created in 2018 a pilot program of apprenticeship navigators. Navigators conduct outreach to employers and walk employers through the process of designing and launching apprenticeship programs. This model enabled states like South Carolina to drastically expand the number of apprenticeships. Illinois must not only fully support this pilot program, but look to address challenges, build from strengths and commit to expand the program statewide.

Articulation Agreements

Illinois has adopted a comprehensive framework for apprenticeships, which includes youth apprenticeships (targeting young adults between the ages of 16 and 24), pre-apprenticeships (training for apprenticeship programs), and registered apprenticeship (RA) programs (apprenticeships administered by the U.S. Department of Labor).²⁷ This multi-prong approach creates several entry points, with opportunities designed for young adults, people requiring training before a RA program, and people ready for a registered apprenticeship. Yet, Illinois lacks a method for facilitating a seamless transition from one apprenticeship program into another apprenticeship. This means that as youth apprentices or pre-apprentices transition into registered apprenticeship, they may take classes or receive training that is unnecessary because they are relearning skills they have already mastered in earlier coursework. Wisconsin addressed this by creating articulation agreements between youth apprenticeship programs and registered apprenticeships. Articulation agreements allow apprentices to test out of some instruction or receive credit for on-the-job training.²⁸ With registered apprenticeship programs typically lasting between one and three years,²⁹ this puts the apprentice significantly closer to completing the registered apprenticeship program, and recognizes the skills they have already mastered. Articulation agreements will encourage young adults to transfer into related programming that results in employment, and will help young adults get to the full-employment phase as quickly as possible.

Study Bill to Create a Roadmap for Expansion

Thanks to the leadership of the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board and the Governor's Cabinet on Children and Youth, Illinois has momentum around apprenticeship expansion. These bodies have leveraged their agency members' capacity to support expansion by creating shared definitions for strategies like youth apprenticeships for young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 as well as using allocating current funding for apprenticeships. Yet, Illinois still lacks a clear sense of the status of apprenticeships in Illinois and where to go next. The Illinois legislature should run a study bill that examines how pervasive apprenticeships (including youth apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships) are across the state and key fields for expansion. The report should determine key sectors and occupations that are well-positioned to support apprenticeship expansion that benefit

underrepresented populations and communities across the state. The study should also identify existing funding streams that could support apprenticeship expansion and determine if there is a funding deficit Illinois needs to address. The study will result in a state vision on critical fields for diverse and equitable growth, which will not only send a clear message to those sectors that apprenticeships are an effective strategy for them, but will also allow Illinois to target resources effectively.

HEALTH

Mental health issues are a pervasive and growing concern for young adults. In fact one third of college students are diagnosed with a mental health condition, a 14 percent increase over the last decade.³⁰ Yet, young adults ages 18-25 are less likely to receive mental health support than any other age group.³¹ 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,³² and a national survey found only 31 percent of students rated their campus as “supportive” with mental health issues.³³

Campus-Based Mental Health

With many mental health illnesses, including depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia, first hitting people in their early 20s, Illinois should expand students’ access to campus-based mental health supports.³⁴ 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 mental health screening tests, the warning signs of mental health issues, and the resources available on campus and in the community. Schools should require annual trainings for professors, resident advisors, campus security, and administrators on how to identify issues and talk to students in a culturally competent manner. The legislation should also require the creation of standardized, robust peer support programs that provide more universal access to vital mental health services. Finally, the legislation should require the Illinois Community College Board, Illinois Board of Higher Education, and Illinois Department of Public Health create best practices around campus and academic policies regarding mental health, ensuring students have the accommodations they need to excel even when facing mental health challenges.

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