

Illinois 2021 Policy Priorities



HEALTH CARE



**HIGHER
EDUCATION**



WORKFORCE

Higher Education

1. MEET STUDENT BASIC NEEDS.

The available supports for students has been inadequate even before the pandemic, but not only are those problems worse, there are also emerging challenges unique to students of color and low-income and first-generation students. Factors like money, jobs, family responsibilities, access to technology and health concerns are compounded with the perennial challenges of balancing work, studies, and life, as we found in our [2020 report on student support services](#).

a. Academic Supports

- Tutoring
 - Tutoring services must be available for all online courses, with a wide availability of tutors and easy scheduling options.
- Office Hours
 - Instructors must provide time for students to come and ask for help, virtually or in-person as health guidance allows. Options must be available for students who are not able to attend office hours due to other work or life commitments.
- Broadband access
 - All students must be allowed reasonable accommodations should they not be able to access a reliable internet connection.

b. Non-academic Supports

- Child care for student parents
 - Institutions should collect data on student parents and analyze the findings to ensure they are meeting those students' needs. There is little to no data on this student population, and it is therefore unclear how child care support services should look like.
- Housing
 - Students facing housing insecurity must be provided resources by institutions or directed to a community based organization for immediate help.
- Mental health
 - Institutions must meet the mental health needs of all students. COVID-19 has drastically increased the need for mental health supports, and institutions must be able to meet those needs.

2. MAINTAIN FINANCIAL AID RESOURCES: ALLOCATE AN ADDITIONAL \$50 MILLION TO FUND MAP.

Students must be able to afford a post-secondary education, but many simply cannot afford it. Lawmakers must appropriate an additional \$50 million to fund the

Monetary Award Program (MAP) grants. As COVID-19 continues to disrupt every aspect of life, financial aid is critically important for young adults starting school or continuing their degrees. For first-generation students and students of color, MAP is even more critical; according to the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, about half of undergraduate students at Illinois' public universities who identify as Black or Hispanic receive a MAP grant, and over half of MAP recipients are first-generation college students.

3. EXAMINE THE ABYSMAL BLACK STUDENT ENROLLMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS.

Black residents are almost 15 percent of the state's population, but in 2017, they were only about 5 percent of University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign's undergraduate and graduate students. Experts and policymakers must invest in research to determine why this is the case. As the state's flagship system, the University of Illinois should be easily accessible to every state resident. This research infrastructure can then be used to examine this issue with other similarly underrepresented communities.

4. ADOPT AN EQUITABLE INSTITUTIONAL FUNDING MODEL.

The state should adopt a funding formula to adequately, equitably, and transparently allocate state appropriations to higher education institutions. This funding formula should, at minimum, center equity by prioritizing adequate funding to currently underfunded institutions that serve large populations of students from low-income households and students who are Black, Latinx, or another underrepresented racial minority.

Employment/Workforce Development

1. ESTABLISH BASELINE PROTECTIONS FOR YOUNG WORKERS.

Young adults have experienced significant setbacks in the wake of the pandemic. To ensure young adults do not simply recover but thrive in the emerging economic reality, Illinois should adopt a Young Workers' Bill of Rights. Protections for gig workers, who are disproportionately young adults, are among several key provisions that lawmakers should advance in worker-centered policies.

2. INCREASE AWARENESS OF CAREER PATHWAY OPTIONS FOR OPPORTUNITY YOUTH AMONG FRONTLINE PROVIDERS.

Training these frontline workers on apprenticeships and other career pathways could improve vulnerable young adults' awareness of and connection to meaningful work. These frontline workers must be able to disseminate information and help connect young adults to resources to enter and thrive in the workforce.

3. ENSURE THE TAX SYSTEM WORKS FOR YOUNG ADULTS.

Tax policies undoubtedly impact young adults' financial health. However, biases against young workers are embedded within the tax system. The current tax system must be modernized and young adults must receive support to improve their tax-related decision-making processes.

4. DESIGNATE BARRIER REDUCTION FUNDING WITH A CARVE OUT FOR YOUNG ADULTS.

Illinois should create a fund or identify existing funding that helps low- and no-income jobseekers afford the transportation, equipment, child care, and other costs that workers encounter when they enter internships, apprenticeships, and other work-based learning programs. Our report released this year, [Pathways to Opportunity](#), highlights this and other policy remedies to support career pathways for young adults at risk of homelessness.

Health Care/Mental Health

1. CREATE A STATEWIDE NETWORK OF POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS ON STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS.

Participants would share and adopt best practices as well as lay the foundation for innovation and targeted investments. Institutions would have an ability to also discuss mental health services in a post-COVID world, and involve student voices in their decision-making process on mental health supports.

2. FULLY FUND THE MENTAL HEALTH ON CAMPUS ACT TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TO STUDENTS STATEWIDE.

With full funding, the Mental Health Early Action on Campus Act would provide a framework for colleges to improve and expand their services through partnerships with community providers, screening tools and online resources, staff training, peer support programs, student-to-clinician ratios, and a technical assistance center. The annual cost is around \$18 million to \$19.2 million annually, but it is a much-needed and critical investment in meeting student mental health needs and boosting college completion rates, as students with mental health problems are twice as likely to drop out of college.