

Illinois Equity in Attainment Initiative

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 Initiative (ILEA)** marks a major step forward for 25 two 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 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, first generation, African-American and Latino 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 24 colleges and universities who have embraced the Equity Initiative. 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 pilot programs and policy and practice change efforts with the explicit goal of increasing institutional college completion rates overall, while eliminating achievement gaps between groups. PCC will also provide some resources for other colleges and universities who have not signed on to ILEA, but seek to eliminate gaps on their campuses.

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 supports.
- Achievement gaps between low-income, first generation, African-American and Latino students and their higher-income and white peers are unacceptable and should be eliminated.

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 cultural, navigational, and academic barriers to college graduation. The ILEA colleges will ensure the road to each degree path is clearly mapped out and communicated, guaranteeing that students can access courses when they need them to maintain momentum in pursuit of their degree.

The initiative follows a galvanizing 2017 PCC report, "[Unequal Opportunity in Illinois: A Look at Who Graduates College and Why It Matters](#)," which found that only 33.7 percent of African American 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. For Latinos, 49.3 percent are earning degrees, a still-wide gap of 17.1 percentage points. The completion gap between low-income and wealthier students is also alarming: according to Advance Illinois, only 37 percent of low-income students graduate in six years while 75 percent 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 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 best practices that the Partnership will document and share with other schools in Illinois, regionally and nationally, establishing a path forward that will promote equity in college achievement.

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